

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

France

COUNTRY: France

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH

Legal framework

The main gender equality laws that apply to higher education institutions (HEIs) and research organisations are either the general laws that apply to everyone or to civil servants specifically, since there are few private universities in France.

Sauvadet Law No. 2012-347 of 12 March 2012 introduced new regulations for public servants. It contains provisions regarding the equal access of women to senior positions within the internal structure of respective ministries, including research. It also introduced a 40 % gender quota for the composition of juries for acceding to academic positions. Law No. 2012-954 of 6 August 2012, on sexual harassment, is the basis for gender-based violence policies. Law No. 2014-873 of 4 August 2014, on the effective equality between women and men, sets the new general framework for achieving parity in all policy areas.

More recent civil service laws have also impacted academia. Law No. 2016-483 of 20 April 2016 reinforced the Le Pors law of 1983 on the rights and obligations of civil servants in respect of sexual harassment. The 9 March 2018 circular on combating sexual and sexist violence in the civil service mandated the setting up of help units.

Law No. 2019-828 of 6 August 2019, on transforming the civil service, obliges all public employers (thus all public universities, research organisations, funding organisations and the Research Ministry) to set up a multiannual action plan for professional equality. It also reconfirmed the outcome of the Sauvadet Law of 2012 in relation to gender-balanced composition of committees.

In the specific area of research and innovation (R&I), Law 2013-660 of 22 July 2013, on higher education and research, imposed gender parity for elections to all governing bodies of research organisations. Parity is similarly required for new research governance and evaluation bodies introduced by the Act. The Law also included the nomination of Gender Officers in all universities and research organisations.

Law No. 2020-1674 of 24 December 2020, outlining research for 2021-2030, does not cover gender equality.

Policy framework

In September 2012, following the first Inter-Ministerial Committee on Gender Equality held by the newly elected socialist government, the Ministry of Research and Innovation was the first to adopt a comprehensive gender action plan in late 2012. This plan contained eight main measures, detailed in 40 actions. The main measures included: 1) coordinating gender equality policies in research and higher education (involving universities, the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), and other research bodies); 2) implementing the Sauvadet Act of 2012; 3) better integrating gender equality in research career management; 4) achieving gender equality in representative bodies, in particular at the National University Centre (CNU), which oversees the governance of academic careers at universities; 5) fighting gender-based violence and harassment in research and HEIs; 6) supporting and disseminating research on gender across all disciplines; 7) coordinating gender equality policies with actions taken at the EU level and participating in EU forums on gender and science. The Ministry of Higher Education and Research also adopted a gender equality training plan, targeting all categories of staff in research organisations.

In 2013, a Charter for Gender Equality in Higher Education was signed by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research, the Ministry of Women's Rights (then a stand-alone Ministry), the Board of University Deans, and the organisations representing "Grandes Écoles" and engineering schools. The Charter encouraged universities and other research institutions to adopt gender equality measures in respect of the general policy of the institution, students and academic staff, teaching and research, and women's recruitment. It also encouraged the appointment of Gender Equality Officers, which was then made compulsory by Article 46 of the Act on Higher Education and Research in July 2013. The Charter was signed by major French universities and became the main basis for developing targeted measures in research organisations. Finally, the National Research Funding Agency (ANR) programme for 2013-2017 gave priority to developing gender research.

The French Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Research published a roadmap for effective equality between women and men generally. In October 2020, it provided universities and research organisations with a template for setting up mandatory equality action plans (deadline 31 December 2021). It has also produced its own Equality Action Plan (including other types of discrimination) for 2021-2023.

In 2015, the French Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Research published a circular on preventing and addressing sexual harassment in higher education and research institutions. The issue of gender-based violence has since received a lot of attention, in compliance with the Law of 20 April 2016. The Ministry issued recommendations on setting up a help unit in 2016, followed by a guide in 2018.

Other stimulatory initiatives

The Irène Joliot Curie prize was created in 2001 by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research, with the financial support of the Airbus Group (previously EADS). The prize seeks to enhance the visibility of outstanding women researchers (both junior and senior). Awarded each year, in the presence of high-level policy representatives and innovation business leaders, it garners substantial publicity.

Key actors

The CNRS is one of the largest research organisations in the world, with over 34,000 researchers. It accounts for a major proportion of public research in France. The CNRS established a Gender Equality Unit in 2001, which has played a significant role in promoting women's access to scientific careers and equal opportunities. The unit actively promotes a gender perspective in research content. The CNRS Ethics Committee (COMETS) produced an opinion on sexual harassment that was approved at the COMETS plenary session on 5 March 2018.

Gender Equality and Diversity Officers have been appointed in all universities and research organisations. The *Conférence Permanente des chargé-e-s de mission Egalité et Diversité* (CPED) network was set up in 2011 to: a) ensure knowledge transfer on gender issues; b) share experiences and practices; and c) ensure that all Gender Equality Officers are integrated into this community of practice. The network has the status of an association and is very active. It was the co-author of an important document on gender-based violence, the *Vademecum* (see below).

Part of higher education falls outside the scope of universities in France. The *Grandes Écoles*, *Grands Établissements* and other engineering schools established the *Conférence des Grandes Ecoles*, which created its own gender equality cluster in order to build a community of practice. The group brings together some of the 150 Gender Equality Officers appointed in the *Grandes Écoles*, professional associations' representatives and gender experts.

The Board of University Presidents (*Conférence des Présidents d'Université*) played an early and significant role by drafting and disseminating its own Charter for gender equality at universities. It then signed up the Charter launched by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research, and the Ministry of Women's Rights in 2013. It still actively supports gender equality measures.

The ANR supports gender in research content and is gradually making discussion of gender mandatory in proposals submitted for its calls.

CLASCHES is a feminist civil society organisation that was established in 2003 by doctoral students. A non-institutional actor, it has played a major role in drawing attention to gender-based violence in universities. Its *Vademecum*^[1], written in collaboration with the network of Gender Policy Officers and the National Association for Feminist Studies, has become a reference for all actors in the field.

INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUALITY BY RESEARCH PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS

Created in 2001, the Gender Equality Unit *Mission pour la place des femmes au CNRS* was the first body dedicated to enhancing women's careers in science. Initially carrying out actions targeted to individual researchers, it later embraced a structural approach and addressed the mainstreaming of gender knowledge across research areas.

Many French research organisations have now taken part in EU-funded structural change projects. This has provided them with strong support in setting up gender policies. The CNRS coordinates a European Research Area (ERA) ERA-NET on the topic. Legislation has made equality action plans and gender-based violence help units mandatory in all research organisations.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES

Using art forms to communicate gender equality

In 2019, the University of New Caledonia set up an exhibition on gender-based violence. Called “Project Crocodile”, it was based on cartoon drawings of situations encountered by young women. It also made and disseminated a film of visitors’ reactions that was widely disseminated, mobilised in a further event, and used for training. The objective was to have the issue widely debated and to improve the worrying gender-based situation locally. The University has since mobilised various art forms to create a reaction every International Women’s Day (8 March).

Discussing parenting

In 2019, the CNRS’s West Occitan sector set up support measures for new parents, both mothers and fathers. An annual information day discusses parenthood (single parents, same-sex parents, evolution relationships within families, stereotypes, etc.). Individual interviews are also available for both mothers and fathers, before and after their parental leave. The objective is to support employees, improve work-life balance, and encourage fathers to take parental leave (which remains under-used in France). The measure is being progressively extended to all of the CNRS.

Footnotes

[1] <http://clasches.fr/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Vade-mecum.pdf>