

Gender Equality in Academia and Research

France

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN RESEARCH

Legal framework

Although there is no specific regulatory framework promoting gender equality in research, some recent pieces of legislation do include provisions related to women's access to decision-making in the academia and to research governance. While the Act on Effective Equality, enacted in August 2014, sets the new general framework for achieving parity in all policy areas, the Act of July 2013 on Higher Education and Research imposes parity for elections in all governing bodies of research organisations. Parity is also required for new research governance and evaluation bodies introduced by this act. Additionally, the so-called Sauvadet Act of March 2012, introducing new regulations for public servants, contains provisions on the equal access of women to senior positions within the internal structure of respective ministries – including research. It also introduces a 40 % gender quota for the composition of juries for acceding academic positions – such as the aggregation.

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 – and to date, one of the few – to adopt a comprehensive gender action plan by late 2012. This plan contains eight main measures, further detailed in 40 actions. Main measures include: 1) coordinating gender equality policies in research and higher education (by involving both universities and the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), as well as 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 ensures the governance of academic careers at universities; 5) fighting gender-based violence and harassment in research and higher education institutions; 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 fora on gender & science. The Ministry of Higher Education and Research also adopted a fully-fledged 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 gathering «grandes écoles» and engineering schools. This short document encourages universities and other research institutions to adopt measures with regard to the general policy of the institution, to students and academic staff, to teaching and research, to women's recruitment in all disciplines and to appoint gender equality officers. The latter measure was made compulsory by the Act on higher education and research adopted in July 2013 (art. 46). The Charter, signed by major French universities since, has been the main basis for developing targeted measures at the level of research organisations. Finally, the National Research Funding Agency (ANR) programme for 2013-2017 also gives priority to developing gender research.

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.

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 (earlier EADS), to enhance the visibility of female outstanding researchers (both junior and senior). Awarded each year, in the presence of high level policy representatives and innovation business leaders, it has usually been given a large publicity.

Key actors

Gender-related nation-wide policies are being coordinated by the Department for Human Resources, Equality and Anti-discrimination Strategies, established at the Ministry level, which was granted with two full-time equivalent (FTE) staff. Additionally, another non-permanent high-level mechanism, the COMEGAL (Equality Committee), was established in 2012 bringing together key stakeholders, including the Minister in charge, to coordinate gender equality policies in research. This committee has been meeting occasionally. In 2010, the Department for Human Resources, Equality and Anti-discrimination Strategies established the 'EU-group', bringing together high level stakeholders (professional associations of female researchers and engineers, the President of the board of Universities, gender equality policy experts, the French member of the Helsinki Group of Women in Science, etc.), which aimed to provide updated information on: a) EU policy initiatives in the fields of gender equality in research and the academia, and mainstreaming gender in research; b) funding initiatives to adopt gender equality policies at the level of universities and other research institutions. This initiative, in the form of regular meetings and information, considerably enhanced the knowledge of participating stakeholders, leading four major research institutions and universities, including the CNRS, to join/coordinate EU-funded structural change projects.

The National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), one of the largest research organisations in the world with over 34.000 researchers, accounts for the largest part of public research in France. For this reason, CNRS established a gender equality unit back in 2001, which played a significant role in promoting women's access to scientific career and equal opportunities. More recently, this unit also got involved in promoting a gender perspective in research through the launching of a nation-wide registry of gender research (2011), including nearly 3.000 researchers' profiles^[1].

Gender equality and diversity officers had been appointed in 70 out of 85 universities (until September 2015). The network 'Conférence Permanente des chargé-e-s de mission Egalité et Diversité' (CPED) has been established to: a) ensure knowledge transfer on gender issues; b) share experiences and practices and c) ensure that all appointed gender equality officers are integrated into this community of practice. This cluster, which has the status of an association, holds regular meetings. A substantial part of higher education falls out of the scope of universities in France. The 'Grandes Ecoles', 'Grands Etablissements' and engineering schools established the Conférence des Grandes Ecoles which created its own gender equality cluster in order to build a community of practitioners. This group brings together some of the 150 gender equality officers appointed in Grandes Ecoles, professional associations' representatives and gender experts.

The Board of University Deans played a significant role by drafting and disseminating its own Charter for gender equality in universities, before signing up the one launched by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research, and the Ministry of Women's rights in 2013.

[1] This registry includes researchers from the CNRS and other university and non-university research organisations.

INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUALITY BY RESEARCH PERFORMING ORGANISATIONS

Created in 2001, the gender equality unit 'Mission pour la place des femmes au CNRS' (National Centre for Scientific Research) was the first body ever dedicated to enhancing women's careers in science. Initially carrying out actions targeted to individual researchers, it later embraced a structural approach, also addressing the mainstreaming of gender knowledge across research areas.

Several French research organisations have taken part of EU-funded structural change projects. In 2011, the gender equality unit of the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) joined the INTEGER project, eventually assuming its coordination. This project includes the production of guidelines and transferable tools for gender equality and a gender perspective in research. These tools were communicated in June 2015, at the final conference of the project, held at CNRS. The latter and the French Ministry for Education, Higher Education and Research are also involved in an ERA-NET called "GENDER-NET". CNRS is the coordinator this project. CNRS had participated in another EU-funded structural change project in the past (DIVERSITY). Sciences Po Paris, a medium-sized higher education institution with a non-university status became in 2014 the second French research organisation to coordinate an EU-funded project. EGERA, which is aimed at triggering structural changes in research and the academia, entails the implementation of a comprehensive gender equality plan, validated at the highest level of Sciences Po by late 2014 and also supported by a gender training plan and the appointment of a full-time gender equality officer. The participation of Université Paris Diderot (Paris 7), hosting several Nobel prize winners, into the TRIGGER project is also of high relevance for mainstreaming gender policies in research and higher education in France. Paris 7 was among the first universities to create an office for gender equality with one full-time officer and additional staff. This office has been active in commissioning gender training sessions, organising academic events on the issue of women in science and in designing innovative policies at the level of the university. They adopted a gender equality plan in 2014. These policies considerably increased the visibility of such measures and actions. The participation of University Paris Est-Créteil to the EU-funded structural change project GENDERTIME (2013-2016) resulted from the impulse given by the Ministry of Research and Higher Education.

With the exception of universities and research institutions involved in EU-funded structural change projects, a few others have adopted comprehensive measures to tackle gender inequalities.

According to a survey carried out in 2015 by the board of 'Grandes Ecoles'^[2], only 18 % of the organisations falling into this category had adopted Gender Equality Plans or Strategies. For instance, IFREMER, the Research Centre for the use of sea resources, was the first French research organisation (counting 1.600 staff) to adopt a Collective Professional Agreement (signed with social partners) on gender equality in 2008. It included a number of measures concerning equal pay, gender balance in representative bodies, career management (appraisal and promotion), and work-life conciliation. Innovative measures, such as the support for childcare, were consecutively implemented. The University François Rabelais, in Tours, adopted on its own a gender equality plan for 2014-2016. This plan was first submitted to a working group gathering social partners, to a technical committee and finally approved by the board of the university. It explicitly draws upon the policy implemented by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research, and liaises with networks on gender equality in research and the academia both at the national and local level.

Since 2013, a few universities have adopted their own Charter for Gender Equality, which adapts the objectives and scope of the one adopted at the national level. As universities have been encouraged to gather at the level of large cities or regions, initiatives are also taken at this level.

[2] The results of this survey have not been made public.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF PRACTICES

Raising awareness among first-year students on gender inequalities and bias

University Paris 7 Diderot launched a 3-hours compulsory awareness-raising session on gender equality for first grade students as they enter the university (2,700 students / year). Launched in 2011, prior to joining the TRIGGER project, this action is embedded into a broad, comprehensive set of actions and aimed at supporting the development of a shared gender equality culture within the institution. It contributes to make gender (in)equality visible at the earliest stage of the curricula, as this session is the first course given when joining the university. Nearly 10.000 students have been reached so far, and evaluation questionnaires indicate a growing support to the principles stated during the session.

Tackling sexual harassment

Sciences Po Paris is tackling sexual harassment through a detailed protocol, a monitoring unit and training activities. Implemented as one of the first measures of the gender equality plan adopted in 2014 under the EU-funded EGERA project, this set of actions aims at better identifying and reporting about cases, and professionalising their monitoring. A full protocol was developed, first training actions were launched and a monitoring unit created in 2014. Multi-channel communication was also launched towards students and staff, still on-going.

