

EU Parliament Calls for Gender Parity in Science

Women should now be given comparable opportunities, benefits, and privileges in their scientific professions, says a report to the European Parliament. The report authored by a member of the Danish European Parliament Britta Thomsen revealed that in the European Union (EU), female researchers are a minority, fewer women are in the scientific career ladder, and men are three times more likely than women to obtain professorships and equivalent posts.

The report which will be adopted by the EU Parliament proposed among others the call for the European Commission and Member States to introduce more transparent recruitment processes and ensure gender balance in evaluation panels, selection and other committees, as well as nominated panels and committees. In addition, legislative measures should be considered in increasing the age limit to obtain grants, and universities, research institutes and private businesses should also adopt and enforce equality strategies in their organizations and conduct gender impact evaluation in their decision-making processes.

See details of the report in the press release at http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=EN_NEWS_FP7&ACTION=D&DOC=4&CAT=NEWS&QUERY=011a2e23a33e:17a6:41953b3f&RCN=29463

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Parliament calls for greater gender parity in science

[Date: 2008-05-22]



The European Parliament has adopted a report calling for greater efforts to be made to address the under-representation of women in science. The report specifically criticises the 'unambitious and insufficient EU target' of ensuring that 25% of the top science jobs in the public sector go to women, which is far below the widely accepted 40% gender quota.

Currently female researchers are in a minority within the EU, accounting for on average 35% of researchers working in the government and higher education sectors and only 18% of researchers working in the private sector. Further up the scientific career ladder, even fewer women are present; top grades in academia going to women rarely exceed 20%, while men are three times more likely than women to obtain professorships and equivalent posts.

The situation is critical, given that the EU needs an estimated 700,000 additional researchers to reach the Lisbon goals of economic growth and prosperity.

Drafted by Danish MEP Britta Thomsen, the report calls on the European Commission and Member States to introduce more transparent recruitment processes and ensure gender balance in evaluation panels, selection and other committees, as well as nominated panels and committees.

Specifically the report proposes introducing a non-binding target of at least 40% of women and 40% of men on these committees, thus replacing the previous 25% target.

Women scientists could also be better represented within projects funded under Seventh Framework Programme, suggests the report. Currently, gender action plans are not a mandatory requirement in FP7 project proposals. The report calls on the Commission to make the necessary changes and urges Member States to make similar arrangements in their national and regional research programmes.

It is not only gender parity that is called in to question; the report also highlights problems linked to age. Because it is often women who take time out of the careers to devote to their families, many of them find themselves older than their male colleagues in the same jobs. Age limits for awarding grants, for instance, can adversely affect young scientists looking after children, who are, for the most part, women. To correct this anomaly, legislative measures should be considered, suggests the report, such as adding one year to the deadline for applications for each year that a dependant is looked after.

Universities, research institutes and private businesses should also adopt and enforce equality strategies in their organisations and conduct gender impact evaluation in their decision-making processes, says the report.

Other actions highlighted by the report include the further development of mentoring and coaching schemes for young female researchers, and career guidance to encourage young girls to start a science career.