

Women and science

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The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted the own-initiative report by Britta THOMSEN (PES, DK) on women and science, recalling that research represents a crucial sector for the economic development of the European Union, and that Europe needs to recruit 700 000 additional researchers as part of the fulfilment of the Lisbon strategy for growth and employment. However, in this domain, women are a minority, as female researchers comprise an average of 35% of researchers working in the public sector and an average of only 18% of researchers working in the private sector. In addition, women are less present in the top grades of academia, as even though women make up more than 50% of EU students and achieve 43% of EU doctoral degrees, they hold, on average, only 15% of senior academic posts and thereby have considerably less influence with regard to decision-making positions in research.

Faced with this observation, MEPs call Member States to promote science as an interesting field for both sexes from an early age, particularly amongst women, and to **fight against gender stereotypes, which are still present in the research sector**. They encourage universities and faculties to analyse all forms of implicit gender discrimination and to resolve these issues. In particular, they highlight that the conventional approach to evaluating 'excellence' and 'performance', as regards the number of publications in the field of science, may not be gender neutral and that this approach restricts women.

To encourage a better integration of women in the research sector and in the field of science in general, a series of measures have been put forward by MEPs. These measures can be summarised as follows:

- a revision of publications on the history of science and technology, in order to verify that women play a key role so that they are also seen as role models;
- a revision of the 'good researcher' model by identifying the differences between male and female scientific careers and by stressing that female researchers also contribute to the world of research;
- an improvement to the daily situation of female researchers who experience difficulties in balancing their schedule: some can no longer manage family life and professional life simultaneously; therefore, it is necessary to offer them flexible working hours, improved child-care facilities, as well as social security provision accessibility across borders; they should also be offered more favourable parental leave conditions (MEPs also note that by interrupting their scientific career for family reasons, women generally reduce their career opportunities – therefore, **age must be taken into account together with the family situation** – taking account of the number of the researcher's dependents);
- the establishment of a system for grants for doctoral studies which better respects the national maternity leave provisions (in effect, the age limits for the award of grants adversely affect young women who are mothers or who are looking after dependants; therefore, it is necessary to allow one year to be added to the deadline for applications for each year in which a dependant is looked after);
- a revision of **recruitment procedures** which tend to favour male researchers to the detriment of female researchers, and the implementation of strategies (in universities, research establishments and private businesses) to enforce gender equality in recruitment and decision-making – MEPs suggest, in particular, the application of an indicative and non-binding quota of at least 40% of women in recruitment in each of the scientific domains (public or private);
- raising awareness amongst the scientific community and policy makers of equal opportunities in science and research;
- increased participation of women in scientific research programmes (in this context, the Commission is called to monitor the participation of women in Community research programmes and to ensure a better representation of women in scientific groups which tender for the Seventh Framework Programme for research and technological development – notably, the Commission is

called to better inform the Parliament of progress in the representation of women on assessment boards and selection committees of projects and to provide an interim assessment of the integration tools of the gender aspect in the Seventh Framework Programme);

- encouraging female researchers to follow support and mentoring schemes;
- the promotion of professional careers for women in scientific domains - in this context, MEPs suggest that measures such as obligatory targets for female researchers and professors are essential to achieving gender balance in science;
- a fairer remuneration policy for female scientists and a provision for research funds targeted at women to counter the under funding of women in research;
- the establishment (in universities) of special programmes increasing young girls' and women's interest in starting scientific careers and the implementation of programmes for coaching and supporting young women scientists in participating in research programmes and grant applications;
- the networking among female scientists at national, regional and EU level, in order to strengthen the position of women and to encourage them to participate in the policy debate.

Moreover, MEPs note that an excessively high proportion of female scientists abandon their career at some point along the 'leaking pipeline' model. It is for this reason that MEPs call for this phenomenon to be analysed on the basis of 'push and pull factors' and for the competent authorities to formulate possible solutions to improve the working environment for female scientists and to better take into account family responsibilities. Lastly, they call for measures that better support the mobility of women in order to guarantee them a more advantageous career progression.