

'Beyond the leaky pipeline' conference: a success of participation discussing gender and science issues

On the 19th-20th October 2010 took place in Brussels the conference 'Beyond the leaky pipeline. Challenges for research on gender and science', co-organised by CIREM Foundation, DULBEA and the Belgian Institute for the Equality of Women and Men.

It was the final conference of the 'Meta-analysis of gender and science research' (www.genderandscience.org), a study commissioned by DG Research under the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP7) of the European Union which involved experts from all the EU member states and the associated countries. The study has collected and analysed research on horizontal and vertical gender segregation in research careers, addressing the underlying causes and effects of these two aspects.

The conference was a success, with more than 150 participants, most of them from Europe but also from other countries such as the Canada, India, Israel, Japan, Morocco, Nepal, Philippines, Tunisia, Turkey and USA. A total of 32 countries were represented at the conference.

It was an international meeting point of experts in gender and science where the results of the study were presented and the possibilities and challenges for European and national research on gender and science and policies towards gender equality in science were discussed with experts and policy-makers. A large representation of the Helsinki Group, the advisory group to the European Commission on issues related to Women in Science was present at the conference.

The conference succeeded to attract policy makers, young researchers and scientists from a variety of settings (university, research institutes and industry) and disciplines (social sciences, sciences and engineering). It is also important to note the positive presence of men among the keynote speakers and the audience, which traditionally is almost exclusively made up by women.

With the overall purpose of facilitating non linear careers and role reversal in couples, some recommendations for research on gender and science arose from the debate at the conference. It was stated that better statistics are needed – longitudinal survey, sex-disaggregated data on research funding, administrative data on scientists' personal and career developments –; a broader scope of research – excellence criteria and assessment practices, non-linear academic careers, non academic research careers –; and finally, a coordinated effort for developing appropriate tools for mainstreaming gender analysis in research.

The overall priority of research should build more consistent linkages between analysis and policy-making: this entails to reinforce evaluation analysis (common conceptual framework and shared standards for institutional impact); as well as the analysis of institutional change (from in-built institutional monitoring to comparative research).

It is important to enhance the political relevance of this event with the presence of policy-makers and stakeholders at the final roundtable, who debated the priorities for research on gender and science and gender equality policies in science.

This project and conference represent an important milestone in the research about gender and science in Europe. Look up the gender and science database and get more details about the conference at www.genderandscience.org