



PRAGES

Practising Gender Equality in Science
(Grant Agreement Number 217754)

International Conference
Women's way into science
*Lessons Learned and New Challenges
for Gender Equality*

Rome, December 3-4, 2009

Presentation Note

Foreword

The International Conference “**Women’s Way into Science. Lessons Learned and New Challenges for Gender Equality**”, which will be held in Rome on December 3-4, 2009, is the final step of the Project “**Practising Gender Equality in Science**” (PRAGES), carried out by a consortium made up of 11 research institutions from Europe, Australia and the United States¹.

The project was intended to address **women’s under-representation** in high-profile positions in scientific and technological research in the public sector. More specifically, the aim of the project has been that of **taking stock of the situation** by highlighting strategies and measures which have proven effective in **accelerating the pace** of a progress, which appears to be still **unexpectedly slow** despite women’s growing inclusion in and contribution to scientific and technological disciplines and professional areas.

The Conference’s title intends to reflect this fairly **contradictory state of affairs**. By referring to the “**lessons learned**”, it reminds the **long path covered** by women, mainly in the last decade, both towards higher levels of equality and participation in science and towards the acknowledgment of a gendered view of scientific knowledge which is increasingly gaining importance. However, the title also evokes the equally **long way to go** before attaining full equal conditions between women and men in science; a way which can likely be covered only by identifying and adequately managing the **new challenges and opportunities** for gender equality

¹ The Consortium includes the Equal Opportunities Department of the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers (Italy, project coordinator); Asdo – Assembly of women for the development and the struggle against social exclusion - Italy; TETALAP - Hungarian Science and Technology Foundation – Hungary; Department of Sociology and Social Research, University of Milan – Bicocca; Centre For Study And Research “*Women And Gender Differences*”, University of Milan; Danish Centre for Studies in Research and Research Policy, Aarhus University - Denmark; Center for Equality and Diversity at work, Manchester Business School, United Kingdom; Center for Gender Organization, Simmons College, USA; Department of sociology, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom; Research school of social sciences, University of Queensland, Australia
EUI - European University Institute, Firenze. The project has been co-financed by the European Union Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Innovation and the General Inspectorate for Financial Relations with the European Union (IGRUE) of the Italian Ministry of Economy and Finance.

emerging in the context of the deep transformations currently affecting science and technology sectors.

The project headed in this direction. The effort made was **to learn from past experience** by collecting, classifying and assessing the practices developed by a set of gender equality programmes in science and technology carried out in Europe, North America and Australia, in order to single out the **most successful solutions** and **provide suggestions** regarding their possible adaptation and transfer to different contexts. The results have been collected in a **database** of best practices and in a **set of guidelines** for the promotion and implementation of gender equality programmes in scientific and technological research settings.

All these issues will be put at the centre of the International Conference of Rome. It will be articulated in an **opening session** and in a **working session**, made up of three séances. In the following sections, the contents of each session will be briefly presented.

Opening Session

The enduring relevance of gender equality in science

The Opening Session – which will include a short part devoted to the welcoming speeches – will introduce the **core issues** of the Conference.

After a decade characterised by the launch of many initiatives, programmes and policies at local, national and European levels addressing gender equality in science and technology, it is rather disappointing to recognise that the question is still of “enduring relevance”.

The session is intended to offer the opportunity for an introductory exchange on the reasons behind this situation, progress made and the factors still hindering women’s advancement, also presenting some figures about women’s status in scientific and technological research in Europe and in other OECD countries. International experts, promoters of gender equality programmes and decision makers, from Europe, Australia and the United States will be among the speakers.

Working Session, First Séance

The gender and diversity challenge: practices for a changing society

The focus of the First Séance of the Conference's Working Session will be on the practices developed in this last decade in support of gender equality and, in a broader perspective, in the promotion of diversity in science and technology.

In this regard, useful information can be drawn from the presentation of the PRAGES Database, which includes the description and assessment of 109 programmes carried out in this field. The Database allows a better understanding of the overall objectives and orientations of gender equality programmes, which can be connected to **three overarching strategies**, often combined with each other.

The **first strategy** is that of creating a **friendly environment for women in science** by promoting change in the culture and traditional behaviours of science- and technology-related work environments, supporting work-life balance and flexible work arrangements for all, as well as providing early-stage career-development.

The **second strategy** is that of **inserting the gender dimension in the very process of research and innovation design**, by overcoming stereotypes of science and women scientists and by shaping scientific contents and methods.

The **third strategy** is that of **promoting women's leadership** in all sectors and tasks connected with science and technology (scientific practice, science management, scientific communication, innovation, science-society relationships).

The Séance – also thanks to the contribution of the promoters of gender equality programmes – will provide the possibility to debate on successes and failures, presenting the different approaches devised in Europe, North America and Australia. There will also be room to discuss the paths to follow for fostering the diffusion and the development of the most advanced practices and the enhancement of their impact.

Working Session, Second Séance

Capitalising on experience: from practices to policies

Practices are the building blocks on which national and European policies for gender equality in science and technology are (or should be) grounded.

However, **moving from practices to policies** is difficult. Often, gender equality programmes remain confined to some departments, universities or private labs because of cultural factors, lack of funds, poor communication capacities or scarce mobilisation of policy-makers. The risk is that of producing “islands of excellence” without real systemic effects. The lack of co-ordination between practices and policies can put the enforcement of gender legislation at risk, because it makes it less likely that norms reflect the actual problems and solutions identified in universities and research institutes.

The Second Séance will revolve around these complex set of issues, with the participation as speakers of political scientists, experts in Science and Technology Studies and promoters of programmes in support of women in science. To feed the discussion, the PRAGES **Guidelines for gender equality programmes** will be presented, to be viewed as a contribution aimed, not only at favouring the diffusion of effective practices among research institutions, industries, professional networks, not-for-profit associations and scientific societies, but also, at least indirectly, at capitalising on the experience carried out for developing more comprehensive and strategically oriented policies in this sector.

Working Session, Third Séance

Accelerating the pace of change: future paths for a gender equal science

The experience of gender equality programmes show that change is possible and that it is possible also in a reasonable lapse of time. However, they also show that many **hidden and well-rooted structures of gender discrimination** are still in place and even capable to adapt themselves to the wider changes affecting science and technology. This enduring presence of gender segregation dynamics induces us to guess that the

widespread and often instrumental assumption according to which the end of gender discrimination is “**only a question of time**” is likely false and denied by the facts; or, if it is not so, that the time needed to fully dismantle segregation structures is anyhow too long to be acceptable and not to have heavy consequences on the development of scientific research and on science-society relationships.

Moving from this point, the final Séance is intended to allow the discussion to advance a **step forward**.

Undoubtedly, there has been an increasing effort in this field. The European Commission – through the 6th and 7th Framework Programmes – and different National Governments are developing initiatives and policies destined to have important impacts on gender equality in science. It is also likely that the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers will be largely helpful for struggling against the “glass ceiling” and fostering more equal behavioural patterns. The same can be said for the diffusion of gender equality programmes and diversity promotion in the European universities and research institutions. Widening the view to United States, Canada and Australia, the same trend can be easily observed, as witnessed by the important national and regional programmes which have been launched in the last decade.

Yet, it remains of crucial importance to reflect both on the future development of the policies and measures already in place and on the possible new strategies to devise for accelerating the pace of change, taking into consideration the evolutionary dynamics of science and technology in contemporary societies.