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## **EPWS Response to the Public Consultation on “Shaping the ICT research and innovation agenda for the next decade”**

### **Responses to the relevant Questions from the online Questionnaire**

The European Platform of Women Scientists EPWS, welcomes the invitation of the European Commission to comment on the Public Consultation “Shaping the ICT research and innovation agenda for the next decade”. However when responding to the Consultation, EPWS was disappointed that the format did not allow for explanation of responses to the questions or for any additional comments.

As EPWS feels it is important to explain and contextualise some of its replies this document outlines those particular questions to which EPWS responded and to which it feels more explanation needs to be added.

#### **T.1 What are the most important societal challenges that will require ICT innovations in the next decade?**

Other - Balancing the need for an increased workforce and the proper infrastructures for a sustainable work life balance

The European Platform of Women Scientists EPWS suggests that a key societal challenge that will require ICT innovation in the next decade will be the necessity to balance the competing needs of greater participation, especially of female workers, in the European workforce with the requirement for the proper infrastructures for a sustainable work life balance. Making the workplace more attractive in terms of it facilitating a work life balance is of key importance not only to attract the best workers to Europe but also to ensure a sustainable solution to Europe’s pending demographic problem.

Moreover in order to retain women in the workplace, jobs will need be secure and of good quality and should not carry a penalty for the inability to be so professionally mobile. The role ICT can have in improving systems of tele-working and flexi-time working for both employer and employee and the part it can play in stimulating communication systems so that mobility is not so essential to one’s job or career growth could have a very positive effect on increasing the European workforce. In order to meet the Lisbon goals and improve European productivity the EU needs to expand its qualified work force and the goal to increase the number of women in the workplace has been articulated in a number of EU policy documents. By making it easier for women and men to work from home, or have more flexibility in their workplace and work time, it would also contribute to addressing the demographic problem Europe is facing with an aging population and a falling birth rate by making parenting and caring roles more attractive and more compatible with professional life.

On a more micro level, in the specific realm of research and academia, which has been especially noted by the Lisbon Agenda as an area that urgently requires both more workers and more diversity of employees in order to stimulate innovation, worker mobility is particularly valued. However in this professional sphere where irregular hours, travelling for work and even relocating a number of times for work experience in different universities or research institutions is considered positive and even beneficial for one’s career, those researchers with caring responsibilities, men as well as women, for whom mobility is not so easy are often disadvantaged if not “penalised”. This might render upward progression less possible, especially for women, and contribute to making a

career in research or academia unattractive. Furthermore recent results from the FP6 funded project "Job Mobilities in Europe" showed how more mobile couples tend to have less children, thus mandatory mobility might not foster a sustainable solution to the demographic questions. It is in dealing with such societal challenges that ICT could play an invaluable role in stimulating communication systems so that geographical mobility is not so essential to one's job or career growth.

### **C.5 What do you see as Europe's major strengths and weaknesses in terms of framework conditions for the development of ICT?**

Other – Better use of the potential of women in ICT

In keeping with the belief that a skilled workforce is one of the major strengths in terms of framework conditions for the development of ICT (as marked in the Questionnaire), EPWS also asserts that retaining and making better use of the women in ICT would further strengthen Europe's ICT capabilities. As outlined in DG Information Society's Report "Best Practices for Even Gender Distribution the 25 Member States in the domain of Information Society" (2006), there is a worrying trend among women to leave ICT professions. Furthermore "*women remain significantly underrepresented in managerial and particularly in executive positions in the ICT sector. Informal progression and promotion systems (old-boys network) sustain discriminatory practices.*"<sup>1</sup> Losing an already-trained, skilled workforce from ICT is clearly going to be detrimental to its development in Europe.

The loss moreover, of the diversity of ideas that comes from having a more varied workforce has the potential to be a big weakness for Europe in terms of framework conditions for the development of ICT. In recent months there have been a number of studies illustrating the positive nature of having better gender balance of teams, one such study from the London Business School showed that teams of workers come up with the most innovative ideas if they are made up of even proportions of men and women. It found that professional teams with an equal gender split were much more likely to experiment, share knowledge and fulfill tasks, regardless of whether the team leader was a man or a woman.<sup>2</sup>

EPWS does therefore contend that by failing to create a framework that retains and makes full use of the potential of women scientists in ICT, Europe runs the risk of weakening its abilities and innovation in ICT as well as significantly reducing the workforce in the field. On the other hand, should it take the necessary measures to reverse and rectify this situation, it has the potential to greatly strengthen and boost framework conditions for the development of ICT in Europe.

### **S.5 What is needed to ensure the excellence of ICT research and innovation clusters in Europe?**

Further to the marked responses in the questionnaire, EPWS feels that in order to ensure the excellence of ICT research and innovation clusters it is important to open up the notions of "excellence" and "innovation" so that less orthodox but potentially more ground-breaking ideas

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<sup>1</sup> Executive Summary "Best Practices for Even Gender Distribution the 25 Member States in the domain of Information Society" DG Information Society and Media, European Commission (2006)

<sup>2</sup> Prof Lynda Gratton, "Innovative Potential: Men and Women in Teams" Lehman Brothers Centre for Women in Business, November 2007

have the opportunity to be heard and explored. Broader, more inclusive conceptions of the terms excellence and innovation, which take into account the diversity of research backgrounds and scientific careers among ICT scientists and practitioners would not only be more just but would also be of great benefit to research and innovation in Europe. A new understanding would recognise the limits the current notion can impose on women researchers and those with less conventional career paths and would accept that a more inclusive definition would encourage more women to stay in research, would advance the call for greater diversity of thought in research and would therefore go a long way towards helping Europe to reach its Lisbon target.

The European Platform of Women Scientists EPWS is an international non-profit association, based in Brussels, which seeks to promote women scientists of all disciplines by networking their networks and through engaging women scientists in the research policy. EPWS does therefore act as a structural link between women scientists and EU research policy makers.

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