



Reply

Consultation on the Draft Research Agenda for Theme 8 “Socio-economic Sciences and the Humanities” in the 7th Community RTD Framework Programme (2007-2013)

European Platform of Women Scientists

29 June 2006

Activity 1: Growth, employment and competitiveness in a knowledge society

In its report “Women and Science: Excellence and Innovation – Gender Equality in Science”, DG Research stresses its goal to mainstream gender equality in scientific research and to ensure that the gender dimension is addressed in European research wherever relevant. It is therefore surprising that the majority of Activities proposed under Theme 8 in FP 7 do not explicitly refer to the gender mainstreaming dimension to solicit research in this direction, although gender has an impact for all of them. For instance, growth and competitiveness in Europe are strongly related to the contribution of women in the labour force, as also recently stated by “The Economist” in May 2006. Employment, competitiveness and competition also have a gender dimension: women are generally better educated than men but still receive lower salaries. The internationalisation of markets, networking of European research activities and systems strongly touch upon issues that bring about a gender bias in science and should therefore receive attention under FP 7. Questions of education and training in Europe or the impact of European demographic developments on growth employment and competitiveness or the effect on labour market policies also have a gender dimension which would be important to analyse in order to better target EU and national policies. Gender mainstreaming goals as previously formulated by DG Research should therefore be included across all Activities and Areas of Activities covered under Theme 8.

Activity 2: Combining economic, social and environmental objectives in a European perspective

As already pointed out with regard to Activity 1, explicit attention should be paid to gender mainstreaming. While we welcome that the introductory text takes up gender and the desire to include the gender dimension where appropriate, an explicit mentioning of possible connections in the proposed areas would be needed to adequately address the gender dimension and to solicit respective proposals including gender aspects – minimising the risk of having the gender



dimension even unintentionally neglected. The topic of socio-economic models and the combination of objectives, for instance, is formulated in a very broad way. It is not clear how and if gender mainstreaming is to be addressed. A possibility could be, for instance, to take up feminist critiques of socio-economic models and the consideration of women and work within these models. Such assessments are also important to later on evaluate the question of how well Europe is prepared to confront new challenges.

Similar arguments apply with regard to social policy and social cohesion. The gender dimension is especially vital when looking at the impact and the contents of social policy. It is equally important with regard to the question on how European social policy should be improved to ensure and contribute to competitiveness and growth whilst making sure, for economic as well as social reasons, that Europe remains not only an economic but also a social system. It is even more important to specifically mention the aspect of gender mainstreaming in the context of cross-cutting issues under Activity 2. Gender is a cross-cutting issue and should be treated accordingly, playing a vital role especially in the analysis of labour markets, employment, and the development of economies.

Activity 3: Major trends in society and their implications

We welcome that the issue of gender is taken up in the context of Activity 3. However, gender has a broader context and the analysis should not be reduced to the issue of societal trends and lifestyles. Gender does not only play a role in the development of families and demography but has strong impacts on labour, economy, or the structure of work. An additional example is the issue of intolerance and intercultural relations. Discrimination arising from cultural differences or the treatment of women within different cultures across Europe are issues that should be analysed and their gender dimension be elaborated. The gender dimension should therefore be explicitly taken up across all aspects of Activity 3. The research agenda has to reveal that gender relates to more than to societal trends and lifestyles.

Activity 5: The citizen in the European Union

The perspectives of women regarding the participation and representation of citizens in the context of the European Union are not only important, they are indispensable. Participatory mechanisms should also include gender as a particular issue: participatory opportunities and civil society organisations might attract women differently from men, just to give one example. Studies must assess the impact on representivity and legitimacy through the imbalanced participation of women, or more precisely, due to different conditions and behaviour based on gender, age and ethnicity. Women do not constitute a



minority and, moreover, cover wide proportions of the other two groups mentioned alongside under this Activity: minorities and youth. History and cultural heritage are issues that necessitate specific mentioning of gender, to ensure that the gender perspective is adequately taken into account so that a more comprehensive understanding of historical contexts and developments may be achieved. Similar arguments can be made for each topic, pointing to the the need to include gender as a cross-cutting issue.

Activity 6: Socio-economic and scientific indicators

The use of indicators for assessment is a particular important issue where the gender dimension should be considered. Moreover, there is a need for clear, improved and more appropriate indicators targeting the gender dimension. Current instruments for assessment, such as the notion of 'excellence', bear a strong gender bias. The notion of excellence currently implicit in science and science policy, does not necessarily give the opportunity to excel, but for example discriminates those researchers who voluntarily or involuntarily took a career-break, be it because of caring responsibilities, for practical experience outside academia or other reasons. This creates particular disadvantages for women within the EU member states, for foreign researchers wishing to work in a EU member state other than their own, and even more so for foreign women researchers. Yet, individuals with experience in fields of life outside a streamlined scientific career could very likely produce more socially embedded and socially relevant scientific research. Additionally, especially in the area of research, the success of the individual researcher largely depends on her or his successful placement in networks. Reputation gained due to membership in formal or informal networks, language abilities and the lack of transparency in selection procedures contribute to the notion of excellence, but may contradict the spirit of creating innovation.

Such biases have to be unveiled and eliminated. In this context, gender mainstreaming is an important aspect with regard to the use and the improvement of indicators, for the interpretation of statistics and their establishment up to a final use of these indicators for the evaluation of research programmes.

Activity 7: Foresight activities

In establishing valuable prospective visions of the sustainability of socio-economic developments, the gender dimension, such as, for instance, the development of the gender division of labour plays a significant role. How will demography, but also the social development of labour, impact on employment and on discrimination of women or predominantly female professions? EPWS stresses this issue in particular with regard to Area 3 "Research systems and



research policies in Europe”. Europe needs leading-edge science and scientists in order to achieve its goal, formulated in the Commission Communication “Building the ERA of knowledge for growth” and taken up in the Lisbon Strategy, to become the world’s leading knowledge-based society. European research policy therefore needs to reach out to all potential contributors. This is especially important with regard to women scientists - given the substantial gender imbalance in science where women make up half of the student population, but on average hold only 15% of senior academic positions, with the percentage being much lower in some countries and in some subjects such as engineering and the physical sciences. The European Commission outlined in its Communication “Women and Science – Mobilising women to enrich European research”, endorsed by a European Parliament Resolution, the need of research by, for, and on women as well as the added value of the European dimension of this effort.

Traditionally, research agendas have not taken the specific needs of women into account. However, if society is to develop a better understanding and acceptance of the developments in science and technology, specific measures must be taken to address both the under-representation of women in science, and the lack of attention paid to gender differences in research. Moreover the relevance of the contribution of women in the top panels addressing the science future trends needs to be particularly taken into account.

The European Platform of Women Scientists EPWS is an international non profit association with its administrative seat in Brussels. The Platform seeks to promote women scientists by networking their networks and engage women scientists in the research policy debate, acting as a structural link between women scientists and research policy makers.

EPWS, Rue d’Arlon 38, B-1000 Brussels, +32 2 234 37 50, www.epws.org