



★ With more than 80 member organisations in over 30 countries, the European Platform of Women Scientists (EPWS) represents more than 10,000 women researchers. **Maren Jochimsen** and **Isabel Beuter** want to make sure women's talents are utilised to the benefit of European research

# Breaking through the scientific glass ceiling

**Europe needs cutting-edge scientists** and researchers if it is to become the world's most competitive knowledge-based society. If Europe is to maximise its potential then we cannot afford to exclude those who could contribute, this means that women scientists need our specific support. Women in the EU make up 50 per cent of the student population but hold only 15 per cent of senior academic positions, a figure that we want to see rise.

The full and equal participation of women in science and research has been a priority of EU research policy for the past decade but the goal of gender equality has yet to be reached. Negative stereotypes persist, decision-making bodies remain male-dominated and there is an overall lack of transparency in recruitment procedures. These are all factors which have discouraged women scientists in Europe from playing an active role and have meant that the talents of some of our finest minds have been severely under-utilised.

The history of the European Platform of Women Scientists (EPWS) dates back to the EU conference Networking the Networks, which brought together more than 150 key networkers in Brussels in 1999. The conference resulted in the adoption of a declaration which emphasised the importance of networking as an essential empowerment and policy tool for women researchers aiming to participate in policy debates and advance professionally. The conference set out the basis for future cooperation and action.

In its action plan of December 2001 on science and society, the European Commission (through the Research Directorate General) announced the setting-up of EPWS to bring together networks of

women scientists and organisations committed to gender equality in scientific research. The goal of real gender balance in science and research is still a long way from being achieved, and the result is that we are all losing out.

The Center of Excellence Women and Science (CEWS) in Bonn won the contract and, with the support of a Board of high-ranking women researchers and network representatives from different disciplines and countries, EPWS was established in November 2005. Under Belgian law (AISBL) EPWS was formed as an international non-profit organisation, receiving its initial grant as Specific Support Action under the Sixth EU RTD Framework Programme.

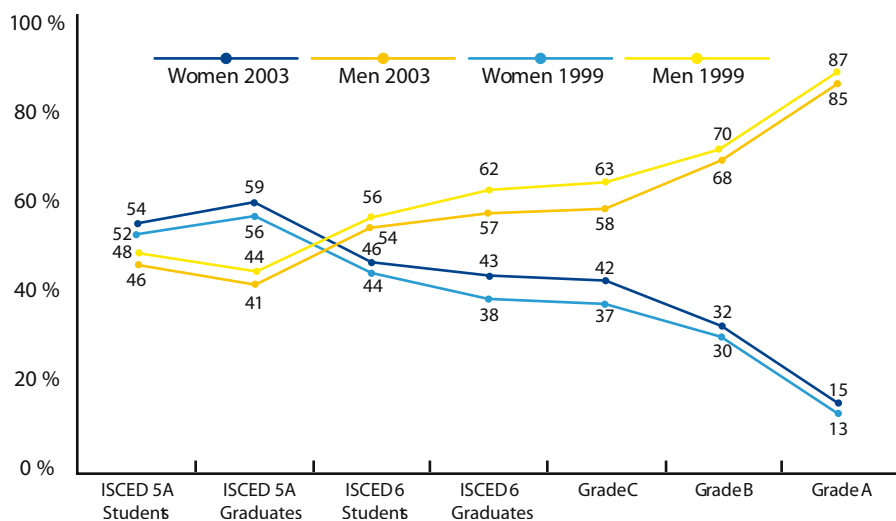
EPWS is an umbrella organisation specifically focused on bringing together

networks of women scientists and organisations committed to gender equality. This encompasses research in all disciplines currently ongoing in Europe, and the countries associated with the European Union's Framework Programmes for Research and Technological Development. EPWS currently has more than 80 member organisations, representing over 10,000 researchers.

One of the core tasks of the European Platform of Women Scientists is the representation of the interests, needs, concerns and aspirations of women scientists in the research debate on the European level. In this task EPWS seeks to influence the decision-making process on European research policy through negotiations with key opinion formers and



EPWS Board of Administration, Staff, Project Coordinator and Project Officer



#### Definition of grades:

A: The single highest grade/post at which research is normally conducted

B: Researchers working in positions not as senior as top position (A) but more senior than newly qualified PhD holders

C: The first grade/post into which a newly qualified PhD graduate would normally be recruited

ISCED 5A: Tertiary programmes to provide sufficient qualifications to enter into advanced research programmes & professions with high skills requirements

ISCED 6: Tertiary programmes which lead to advanced research qualifications (PhD) (Source: European Commission, Women & Science: Latest Statistics and Indicators - She Figures 2006, p. 55)

#### Proportions of men and women in a typical academic career, students and academic staff, EU-25, 1999-2003

stakeholders. The Platform's emphasis on networking and raising the profile of women scientists has been particularly effective in this respect. By drawing attention to major success stories EPWS can help break down negative perceptions and encourage women scientists to actively engage in European research and innovation.

The first step in getting involved in the policy debate is monitoring the decision-making process in the area of research and gender equality, followed by drafting written statements on the Platform's position on policy and legislation to be adopted. The Platform's current research policy activities focus on three interrelated issues: the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development, the EU's Lisbon Agenda and an overall commitment to excellence and innovation. These are all issues of crucial importance to the future of Europe, and their very centrality gives some idea of the determination of EPWS to play a full part in shaping it.

EPWS constitutes a new strategic instrument in European research policy, complementing the various European-level

initiatives aimed at raising the number of women scientists participating in research and the research policy process. It is especially important that this goal be achieved within the EU Framework Programmes for Research and Technological Development.

EPWS calls for special attention to equal opportunities in both research and research policy. It also encourages the maintaining and development of instruments to ensure the consideration of gender balance and gender mainstreaming in European research policy. Through its monthly newsletter and interactive website, position papers on research policy issues and other targeted information material.

EPWS offers information and expertise in European research policy and also find experts on the promotion of gender equality and European research policy for seminars, boards, panels and project partners. Through these wide-ranging activities EPWS hopes to further the cause of European research and innovation while simultaneously encouraging and inspiring the aspirant young scientists of the future to pick up the mantle. ★

## At a glance

### EPWS History

**February 2005:** CEWS signs EU contract for the creation of EPWS

**November 2005:** EPWS legally established in Brussels as an international non-profit association under Belgian law (AISBL)

**March 28, 2006:** official Launch Event for the Brussels community

**October 20, 2006:** first Network Event in Brussels

**April 27-28, 2006:** first General Assembly in Brussels

The Center of Excellence Women and Science CEWS, founded in 2000, has established itself as the national node for the realisation of equal opportunities in science and research in Germany. CEWS serves as a think tank for this field of policy, initiates alteration processes and actively co-organises the required transfer processes between science and politics. The scope of CEWS activities is international. CEWS is a unit within GESIS - German Social Science Infrastructure Services e.V., a member of the Leibniz Association.

[www.epws.org](http://www.epws.org) & [www.cews.org](http://www.cews.org)

Maren Jochimsen & Isabel Beuter



**EPWS Secretary-General & CEWS Project Coordinator**

Maren Jochimsen holds a Doctorate in Ecological Economics and previously worked at Harvard. Isabel Beuter holds an M.A. in Sociology, Political Science and English.

