

EUROPEAN PLATFORM OF WOMEN SCIENTISTS

Vice-President **Claudine Hermann** introduces EPWS, a Platform dedicated to the promotion of equal opportunities for female scientists

Representing more than 12,000 women scientists' concerns, needs, interests and aspirations is no easy feat! How does the European Platform of Women Scientists (EPWS) fulfil this mammoth task?

EPWS' full members are associations and networks, which in turn have individual members. Alongside these, the Platform's individual and supporting members make the complete combination, enabling us to reach Europe's 12,000 women scientists. Indeed, the greatest difficulty comes from the geographical dispersion of our European members, therefore, the role of our board of administration members is very important. We also communicate through our website, which is constantly updated, and via our newsletter and emails.

In what ways has the organisation evolved over the past decade?

The main evolution of EPWS was in 2009, when we shifted from a well-funded EU project to an association running on its members' voluntary work. In this restricted situation, the Platform continued to disseminate its messages at the EU level: we organised a lunch debate at the European Parliament in 2012 and co-organised a fringe session at the 2014 Innovation Convention with the Platform's member association, the European Women Inventors and Innovators Network (EUWIIN); produced several position papers related to the place of gender in Horizon 2020 when this programme was in discussion; and worked in close relationship with the Helsinki group (of national civil servants on Women in Science at the Directorate-General Research and Innovation).

What makes the Platform particularly unique?

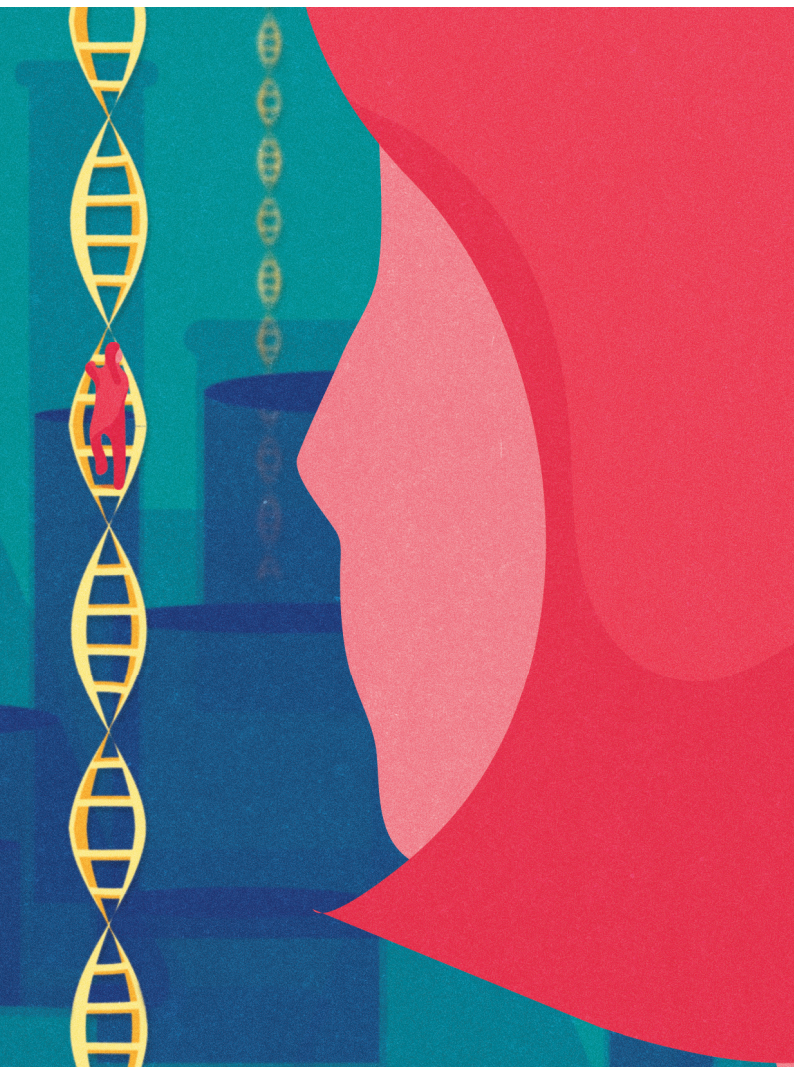
The close collaboration of EPWS' members from the many different EU countries. In spite of cultural and disciplinary differences, they have learned to trust one another and to be efficient together. This is very special and is our greatest strength.

Are you working closely with any organisations or individuals that are specifically focused around addressing the issue of gender inequality in science?

All the EPWS board members represent national associations that are working on the reduction of gender inequality in science. They are facilitating a lengthy and well-recognised discussion on this topic and are frequently asked to contribute their expertise. In France, for example, the Ministry of Higher Education and Research is asking EPWS to produce an annual benchmarking report, taking advantage of our

MARKING A MILESTONE

Incepted in 2005, the Platform has now reached its 10th anniversary. To celebrate this momentous occasion, EPWS has a number of special events on the horizon, including a conference in Germany to coincide with its General Assembly.



knowledge of the best practice in various EU countries. In addition, the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) is a supporting member of EPWS.

What activities is EPWS carrying out to tackle the issues of gender bias and inequality within the European R&D landscape, and to encourage more women to join the scientific community?

Apart from its position papers, EPWS took a very active part in the drafting of the recommendations following the conferences under Lithuanian (the Structural Change Promoting Gender Equality in Research Organisations Conference, Vilnius, in November 2013) and Italian (the Science, Innovation and Society: achieving Responsible Research and Innovation Conference, Rome, in November 2014) EU presidencies, for a proper consideration of gender in EU programmes. We have an important activity of disseminating gender information, which is very useful to our members at the national level.

You work closely with EPWS' President, Dr Brigitte Mühlenbruch. How do both your experiences and skills contribute to the successful running of the Platform?

Brigitte has had a long experience of EU affairs. Personally, as one of the founders of the French association 'Femmes & Sciences' (Women and Science), I know how to efficiently run a national association – a European association is more difficult due to geographic dispersion and initial cultural differences.

Our involvement and experiences have been recognised at the national level: Brigitte was honoured with the Order of Merit 1st Class of the Federal Republic of Germany, by Federal President Joachim Gauck in October 2014 in acknowledgement of her pioneering work in the promotion of women in science at national as well as European levels. As for me, I became commander of the Legion of Honor in 2011.

Are there any relevant upcoming events that you are excited about hosting or attending?

Of course, we are excited by our 2015 anniversary conference. We are also quite eager to see the assessment of the Horizon 2020 regulations regarding gender (Article 16th) – rules are a good thing, their implementation is essential to produce a change in mentalities.

Where would you like to see EPWS developing in the next five to 10 years?

We dream of an EU research area in which gender equality can be achieved and EPWS would no longer be necessary! In the next 10 years, EPWS will still need to bring the voice of EU women scientists to the EU level, making them more visible through awards, initiatives, etc. We would like to gather more associations and networks from Central and Eastern Europe, and from the private sector; and also to link our members more efficiently to help them apply for more EU projects.

CLAUDINE HERMANN DISCUSSES THE CURRENT STATUS OF EUROPEAN WOMEN SCIENTISTS

The best report on the current status of women scientists in Europe is the *She Figures* booklet, issued every third year. *She Figures 2012*, the latest publication, cites:

- In the EU-28 women represented 40 per cent of all researchers in the higher education sector, 40 per cent in the government sector and 19 per cent in the business enterprise sector
- The proportion of women among full professors was highest in the humanities and the social sciences, 28.4 per cent and 19.4 per cent respectively, and lowest in engineering and technology, at 7.9 per cent



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