



# EPS ACTION PLANS FOR REDUCING THE GENDER GAP

■ **Luc Bergé** – Chair, Equal Opportunity Committee and EPS President elect – <https://doi.org/10.1051/epn/2020306>

**Several new initiatives have been developed by the EPS in order to promote a better inclusion of women in the European physics community, to highlight their pivotal roles in research and teaching, and thereby attract more female researchers among the next generation of scientists. Because a perfect parity has not been reached yet, efforts in guaranteeing fair recognitions and safe careers for women will have to be sustained in the coming years. This is a very challenging task, but this is the pride of the EPS to lead it until its very end.**

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**A**mong the proposals for the ERC grants and other PhD training programmes published in the Open Calls for Horizon2020, at least seven of them are directly or indirectly concerned with gender issues [1]. Today, in the European Union (EU) and beyond, the question of bridging the gender gap not only underlies societal projects, but it also deeply permeates the ethical rules

and good practices of all scientific proposals. The initiatives to fight against the gender gap are numerous with North-American countries and UK as pioneers in the field [2]. A related issue is the respect for women physicists in conferences. A dedicated survey recently reported alarming statistics about gender-based harassment, bullying and discrimination at scientific meetings. About 60% of the respondents claimed having experienced troubles in their career [3]. This justifies the “codes of conduct” edited by learned societies such as OSA and APS and blooming in the conference areas. Fixing a set of rules outlining the best practices for attendees, these codes aim at expelling unprofessional behaviour from meetings that must be places of mutual exchanges



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for the advancement of science. All these actions are accompanied by a solid programme of surveys looking at the increase of women as plenary/invited speakers or their inclusion into the highest ranks in the organisation committees [2]. They are also completed by specific summer schools or training courses for tracking sexual misconduct and reducing unconscious bias in education [4]. Similar initiatives exist in many European institutions, such as the European Platform of Women Scientists (EPWS) and the Gender Equality Network in the European Research Area (GENERA) that act to overcome the under-representation of women in physics [5]. In the trans-national context, the project “Gender Gap in Science”, supported by several learned societies, measures the gender gap over all the continents [6]. In the European context, surveys again emphasise a weak proportion of women in the highest grades of academic institutions: The “She Figures 2018” publication reported about 38% of women PhD against 18% of A-level positions in all countries of the EU.

Against this background, the Equal Opportunity Committee (EOC) of the EPS [7] engaged in various action plans that aim at promoting role models, monitoring gender fairness in physics and spreading a code of conduct to favour the best practices in EPS conferences.

### Promoting Role Models

The Emmy Noether Distinction is the flagship of the EPS gender policy. It was established in February 2013 to enhance the recognition of noteworthy women physicists having a strong connection to Europe through their nationality or work. It brings exceptional women to the wider attention of the scientific community, policy makers and the general public. The distinction is awarded twice per year. The attribution criteria are twofold. On the one hand, they are based on personal achievements in research, education, management and outreach. On the other hand, the Laureate has to be recognised by her peers as a role model in the physics community. Nominations are received from all over the world and are supported by Nobel laureates and past presidents of the most prestigious learned societies. Information about the winners is published through all the EPS media channels.

### The monitoring project for Gender Fairness in physics

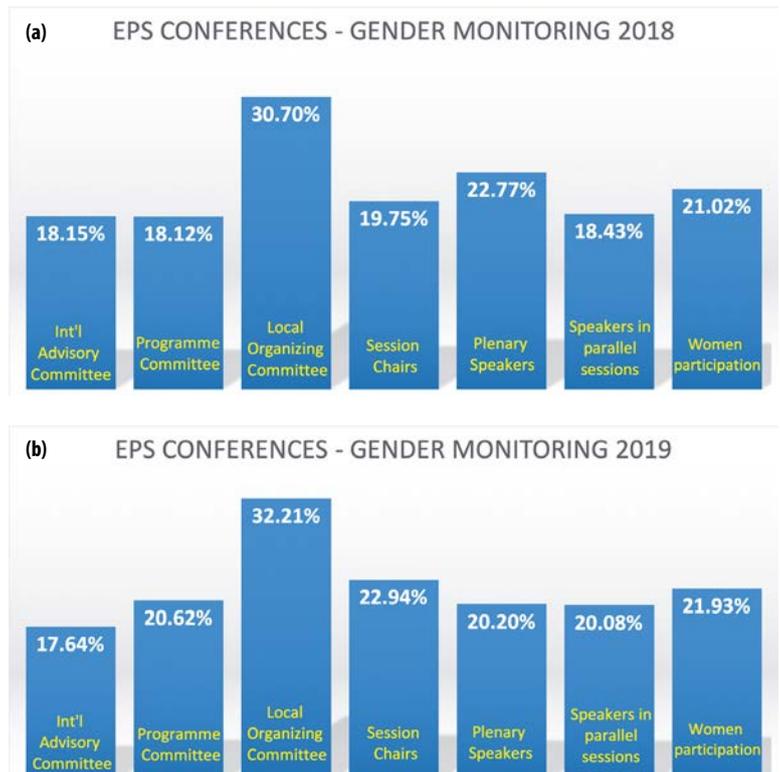
A fair development of our physics community requires the participation of women scientists at conferences, as speaker, committee member and/or organiser. In 2018, a regular survey was put in place on women’s participation in conferences organised by the EPS Divisions and Groups (D/Gs). The EPS invites the organisers to collect information on the fraction of women in the organising committees, such as the programme committee, international advisory committee and local

## ROLE OF DIVISIONS AND GROUPS

To reinforce our internal cooperation on gender fairness, the Chairs of the Divisions and Groups are invited to directly exchange with the EOC by appointing a member of their Board to be in charge of gender issues. Today, this delegation applies to about 1/3 of all the EPS Divisions and Groups. The role of the EOC Delegates is to help their D/G in nominating at least one woman to the EPS awards and to participate in the Emmy Noether Distinction jury. A general recommendation to the D/Gs is to think in priority of women scientists when deciding on plenary speakers for their meetings.

organising committee and the fraction of women among the plenary speakers, invited speakers and chairpersons, together with the total number of attendees and that of women participants. By tracking such statistics over time, the EPS is expected to provide valuable input into policy discussions regarding gender equality in Europe and to take proper corrective actions. The data collected in 2018 from 15 returned surveys already showed that between 18 and 30% of the speakers or organisers were female scientists (see FIG. 1a). About 20% of them were committed at the highest level in the organisation of conferences or invited for plenary or keynote talks. Note that this percentage is close to the rate of participation of women in the conferences probed, which suggests that efforts still have to be maintained to recruit more women in physics. The 2019 statistics based

▼ FIG. 1:  
Statistics extracted from the Monitoring Project for Gender Fairness in Physics in 2018 (a) and 2019 (b).



## INTERVIEW SERIES IN E-EPS

In 2019, e-EPS started a new series of interviews of role-model women physicists with an interview of Donna Strickland, awarded the 2018 Nobel Prize in Physics, followed by portraits of Andrea Blanco-Redondo (Sydney University, Australia) and Ágnes Kóspál (Konkoly Observatory, Hungary). More interviews in the series will follow in the coming months. The idea is that these interviews may inspire young women to pursue an enjoyable career in physics.

on 16 filled-in surveys displayed similar trends, although a marked fall in the number of plenary speakers suggests taking the necessary measures to reverse this tendency in the coming years (see FIG. 1b). On the whole, these numbers are encouraging, but they are far from showing a perfect balance, which invites us to continue the present monitoring and keep a vigilant eye on their evolution. In particular, the higher participation of women in the local organising committee seems to confirm prejudices about the serving role of women.

## A Code of Conduct for the EPS conferences

Recently, in 2020, the EPS endorsed a “Code of Conduct” that aims at prohibiting any act of discrimination and harassment, sexual or moral, during EPS-related events. The Code follows the rules of good practice already posted by several scientific societies overseas. It plans to assist victims and witnesses in reporting all cases of unprofessional behaviour and to act timely either on the conference site or by using a dedicated online portal ([CodeOfConduct@eps.org](mailto:CodeOfConduct@eps.org)).

The EPS policy states that all participants, including attendees, speakers, exhibitors and all other stakeholders at EPS meetings shall conduct themselves in

a professional manner contributing to the advancement of science. This excludes any form of discrimination, harassment or retaliation. Participants will avoid any inappropriate actions or statements based on the ability status, age, educational background, ethnicity, gender identity or expression, marital status, nationality, political affiliation, race, sexual orientation, or any other characteristics protected by anti-discrimination law. Unprofessional or harassing behaviour of any kind will not be tolerated, during the conference sessions as well as outside the session rooms on the conference site. Victims and witnesses will be given the possibility to report all cases in a safe and protected way. Upon receiving a report of misconduct, the EPS will mandate a prompt investigation by competent mediators. Sanctions range from verbal warning, ejection from the meeting without refund of fees, to notifying appropriate authorities. Adhering to this Code will be mandatory for both Europhysics and EPS-Sponsored Conferences, where roll-ups informing participants of this policy will be available. ■

## About the Author



**Luc Bergé** graduated in mathematics and physics from the Universities of Toulouse and Paris-Sud, Orsay, France. He holds a PhD and a Habilitation thesis in theoretical physics. He is director of research, head of laboratory at CEA (French Commission for Atomic Energy and Alternative Energies), member of the Executive Committee of the EPS, Chair of the EPS Equal Opportunity Committee and 2020 President-elect of the EPS.

## REFERENCES

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- [4] M. Erlemann and L. Schiestl, “Diversity in the Cultures of Physics: A European Summer School Curriculum”, Erasmus+ grant program of the European Union – Freie Universität Berlin – September 2019.
- [5] <https://epws.org>; <https://genera-project.com>; <https://gender-gap-in-science.org>.
- [6] [https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/she-figures-2018\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/she-figures-2018_en)
- [7] In 2019 the EOC was composed of 7 members among whom Martine Bosman, Nadia Martucciello, Ana Proykova, Elisabeth Rachlew and a representative of the Young Minds Action Committee.

## inspiring physicists

CALENDAR  
2020



Annelin Emmy Noether  
 Chiara Marletti  
 Barbara Marzetti  
 Maria Stokanovska-Cala  
 Patricia Bakkerau  
 Kazuko Kato  
 Catalina Clara Curran  
 Maria Geopfert-Mayer  
 Nyssa Dekker  
 Barbara Steiner  
 Becci Barrojo-Yuillas  
 Anne Thielert

## INSPIRING PHYSICISTS

Several links with national societies and the European Platform for Women Scientists (EPWS) were reinforced during the past two years. In cooperation with Claudine Hermann (EPWS) and Gina Gunaratnam (EPS), a calendar named “Inspiring Physicists”, displaying the winners of the Emmy Noether Distinction and outstanding women figures in science, was widely disseminated in 2020.