

Interviews with Research Policy-Makers: Maria da Graça Carvalho (06/2021)

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EPWS interviews a high-level EU research policy-maker in 5 questions.

In this new section EPWS is interviewing **European research policy-makers concerned by gender equality** goals. In this series of interviews we wish to offer women scientists the state of the art about the EU policy agenda on gender equality in research and the gender dimension in science content. On the EPWS website portraits of research policy-makers are now alternating every month with those of distinguished women scientists.

We have the great honour to interview MEP **Maria da Graça Carvalho**, member of the FEMM (Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality), ITRE (Committee on Industry, Research and Energy) and AIDA (Committee on Artificial Intelligence in a Digital Age) Committees of the European Parliament, Member and Vice President of PECH (Committee on Fisheries) of the European Parliament.



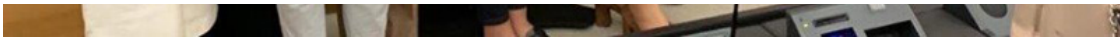
Speaking in the ITRE Committee

Maria da Graça Carvalho is currently a member of the European Parliament. She was a senior advisor of Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation, Carlos Moedas, from November 2014 to December 2015. Previously, she was a member of the European Parliament, between July 2009 and May 2014. In that capacity, she was one of the rapporteurs of Horizon 2020. She was also Principal Adviser to President Barroso in the fields of Science, Higher Education, Innovation, Research Policy, Energy, Environment and Climate Change from 2006 to 2009. She served as a Minister of Science and Higher Education of the XV Constitutional Government of Portugal and Minister of Science, Innovation and Higher Education of the XVI Constitutional Government. She is a Full Professor at Instituto Superior Técnico (University of Lisbon).

What role does your institution play in shaping the European Union's (EU) gender equality policy in research and innovation?

The European Parliament (EP), through the ordinary legislative process, is on an equal footing as co-legislator in all areas in which the EU has competences. Thus, the EP participates directly and influences the drafting of European laws and no text can be adopted without its formal agreement. In particular, through the Commission on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), to which I have the honor of belonging, we have managed to influence and insert the gender dimension in the areas of innovation and research.





The first meeting of the European Peoples Party members in the FEMM Committee, in 2019.

It should be noted that the EP expresses its opinion through other instruments, not strictly binding, such as opinions, recommendations, studies and hearings and parliamentary questions that influence and are important catalysts for change in these areas.

EPWS: Which are the most important gender equality policy decisions in research and innovation that have already been implemented a) by your institution, b) in the science system?

The most relevant are definitely the Gender Equality Strategy for 2020-2025 and The Horizon Europe Programme, as a chapeau.

We must be fair and recognise that the EU with the support of the current Commissioners Gabriel and Dalli has adopted important proposals and legislation and made crucial progress towards achieving gender equality.

The next framework programme for research and innovation, Horizon Europe, will provide insights and solutions on addressing potential gender biases in Artificial Intelligence (AI), as well as on debunking gender stereotypes in all social, economic and cultural domains, supporting the development of unbiased evidence-based policies.

I would also like to highlight my report approved last January by the EP on Closing the Digital Gender Gap: Women's Participation in the Digital Economy.





With C. Mariya Gabriel - Meeting in Strasbourg

EPWS: What new challenges for achieving and ensuring gender equality and the gender dimension in research and innovation will arise given the current rapid changes in society?

In my opinion, the challenges will be ensuring that the EU regulatory framework on AI respects the principles and values of gender equality and non-discrimination. Furthermore, we need to work on gender equality in companies in the ICT and STEM sectors, and to adopt horizontal policies to reduce the gender gap in the digital economy through targeted measures. These include allocating European funds to directly finance female-led projects in the digital sector, the promotion of a minimum number of women researchers participating in ICT projects, improving work/personal life balance and reduce the so-called phenomena of leaky pipeline of women in STEM careers.

With President Ursula von der Leyen In the EPP Meeting in Strasbourg

Which of the latest EU research and innovation policy guidelines address the mentioned challenges? How does your institution react to these challenges? How does your institution ensure that Europe's answers to the grand societal challenges will be gender equitable and sensitive to the gender dimension?

Gender equality in research and innovation is a part of the European Commission Gender Equality Strategy for 2020-2025. There are also

Commission Gender Equality Strategy for 2020-2025. There are also binding directives, which apply widely across the labour market including the research sector. Furthermore, there are several specific measures and, as I mentioned, the possibility of specific funding.

In the Committees that I follow, and in the EP in general, we are very aware of these challenges and we have produced multiple studies, hearings, INI (MEP own-initiative) reports, already anticipating these issues and preparing the proper response of the EU in the long term. This is the case with the Digital Future of Europe strategy, the principles for the framework on AI, the gender pension gap. The gender dimension is also present in several ITRE reports, namely in reports that have been assigned to me, for example in the Strategic Agenda for the European Institute of Innovation and Technology and in the HPC (High Performance Computing), SBA (Single Basic Act, a regulation establishing nine partnerships – or joint undertakings – under Horizon Europe) and Metrology (joint undertakings) reports.

We are already witnessing progress in our road to ensure gender equality, by establishing concrete binding measures and targets in European legislation, on the one hand, and by raising awareness for these causes in the Member States and in the society in general. For example, I am currently involved, along with several colleagues, in battling for a Council configuration on Gender Equality, in order to provide the Ministers and Secretaries of State in charge of gender equality with a dedicated forum for discussion, and to better facilitate gender mainstreaming across all EU policies.

What role do women scientists' associations play in the creation of gender equality policy in research and innovation at European level? What measures does your institution take to actively involve women scientists' organisations in its policy-making processes? With what formats do you think your institution's dialogue with women scientists associations could be enhanced/ rendered more effective?

I believe that women scientists, and associations, such as the European Platform of Women Scientists EPWS, have a very important part to play as role models for girls and young women thinking about pursuing a career in R&I. When I did the report on the Digital Gender Gap, one of the identified causes for the low participation of women in the digital economy was the fact that there was a perception that the tech world was a world of men.

These stereotypes need to be fought and the best way to do it is by presenting the public with examples of women who not only succeeded but also excelled in these fields. We need to do this in schools, in the media – both in the news and in fiction – and, of course, we need to do it in public institutions. As a part of the preparation of that report, we were lucky to hear the testimony of brilliant women scientists, involved in fields such as Artificial Intelligence and Computer Science in general.

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