Practices in peer review panels

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JOANNEUM RESEARCH

(credit to: Liisa Husu, Helen Peterson, Örebro University;
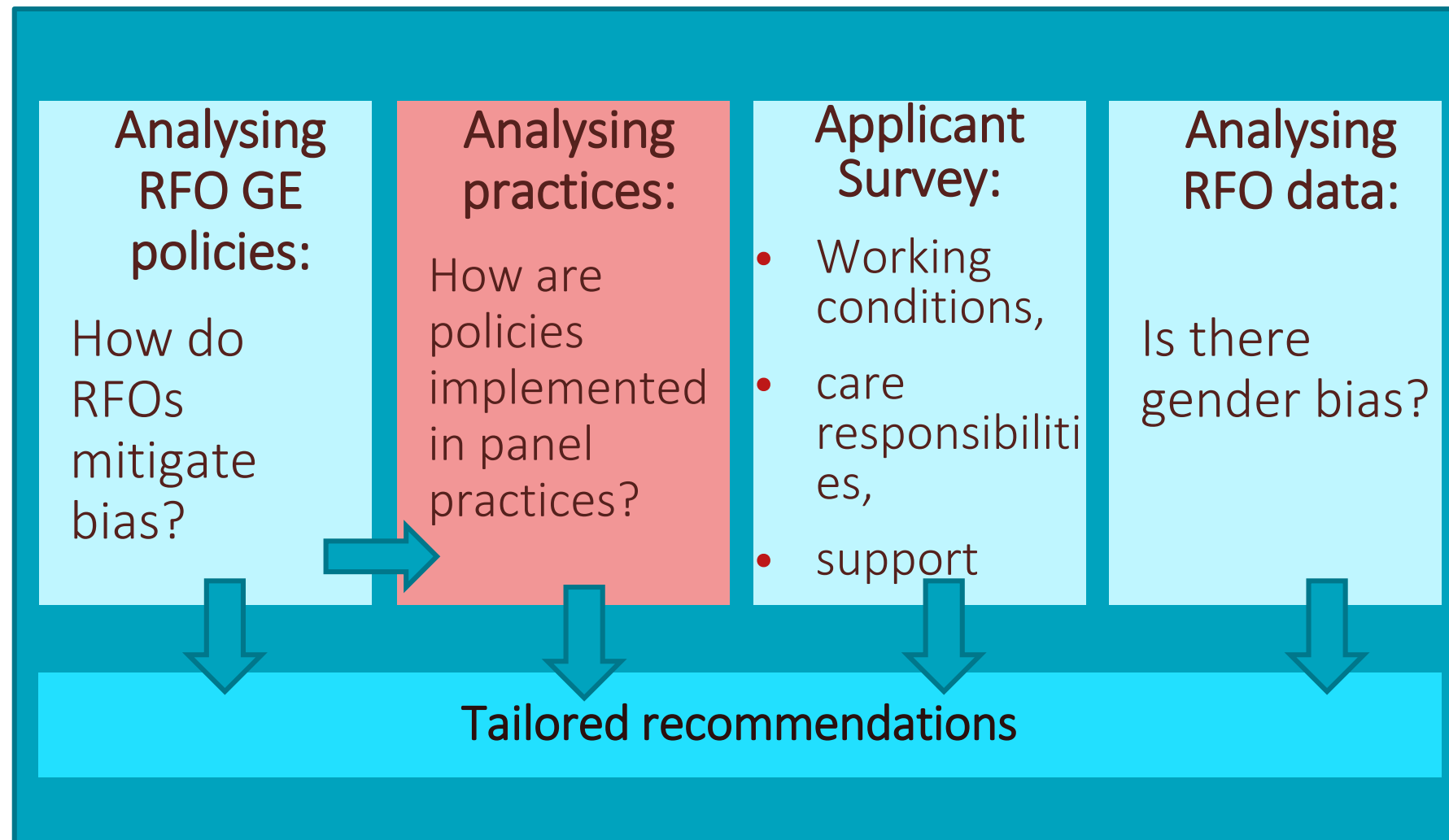Florian Holzinger, JOANNEUM RESEARCH)

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Overview

- Practices in panels

- Implementing innovative gender equality policies in panels

  - Re-ranking

  - Assessing Narrative CVs

  - Gender-in-Research-and-Innovation

- Challenges and Take aways for RFOs

- Ideas for reforming research assessment

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Case study elements (for each RFO)

Analysing RFO GE policies:	Analysing practices:	Applicant Survey:	Analysing RFO data:
How do RFOs mitigate bias?	How are policies implemented in panel practices?	• Working conditions, • care responsibilities, • support	Is there gender bias?

Tailored recommendations

Gender bias risk:

Low

FWF – Austrian Science Fund, Austria

SFI – Science Foundation Ireland, Ireland

SRC – Swedish Research Council, Sweden

High

NCN – National Science Centre, Poland

SRDA – Slovak Research and Development Agency, Slovakia

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Studying practices in panels

- To better understand what is going on in panels in practice
- To gain insights how (innovative) formal policies to mitigate gender bias are implemented in practices and what challenges emerge
- To identify entry points to improve policies and to increase their impact and effectiveness
- To share experiences with other RFOs: avoiding mistakes
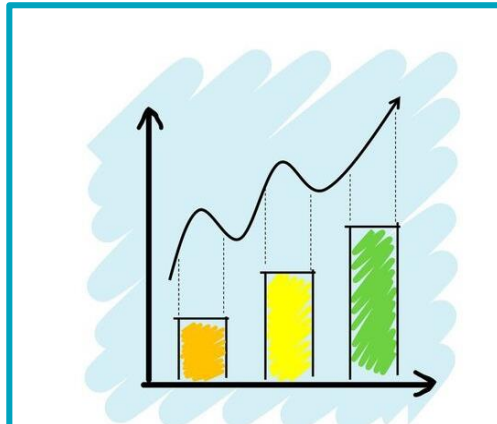
Data collection in 5 RFOs:

104 thematic interviews with panel members and chairs, observers, remote reviewers, RFO staff members (female: 56, male: 48)

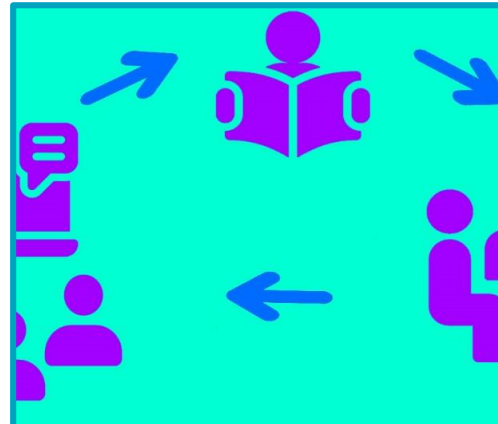**Observing 5 panel meetings** (in 2 RFOs, 4 online, 1 onsite)

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RFOs have innovative gender equality policies on 3 levels

Fixing the numbers

Re-ranking applicants

Fixing the organisation

Assessing Narrative CVs

Fixing the knowledge

Gender-in-Research-and-Innovation (GiRI)

What can RFOs / stakeholders learn from implementing innovative gender policies in practice?

3 RFOs with advanced GE policies

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Re-ranking policies
Context

Gender Bias Risk

Fewer female applicants (in specific fields) => fewer female grantees
Fixed number of female grantees as incentive for **more female applicants**

Formal Policy

Target: **more female grantees**, various target forms:

- Share of female applicants = share of female grantees

- Number of female grantees = number of male grantees (quota)

- Female applicants prioritized within pre-defined sub-groups

Research Interest

How is re-ranking implemented in practice?

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Re-ranking policies
Practices

- RFOs practice various forms of re-ranking :

  - No panel members involved, IT-system re-ranks scores within sub-groups

  - Quota: selecting grantees in two negotiation rounds

  - Re-ranking as borderline condition: in case of same quality, applicants from under-represented sex is upgraded

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Re-ranking policies
Learnings

- Re-ranking to balance the number of female grantees implemented without questioning

- Risk to re-inforcing focus on applicants' sex/ gender when re-ranking is anticipated in panel negotiations: "*Is this a woman?*" while other RFOs request gender-neutral language: no name, no sex, no pronouns, panels only use applicant-ID : "*XE-2079 was ...*"

- Risk to increase horizontal segregation in multi-disciplinary panels: more female grantees in women-dominated fields

- Communicating re-ranking policy more explicitly: stressing signal for female applicants

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Broadening excellence – assessment practices

Context

Gender Bias Risk
Excellence is a merit based concept, yet what counts as merits and how it is measured is often vague and open for individual interpretation; strong focus on publications

Formal Policy
Qualitative narrative formats to report excellence / merit; No h-index

Research Interest
How do reviewers assess scientific excellence without using h-index?

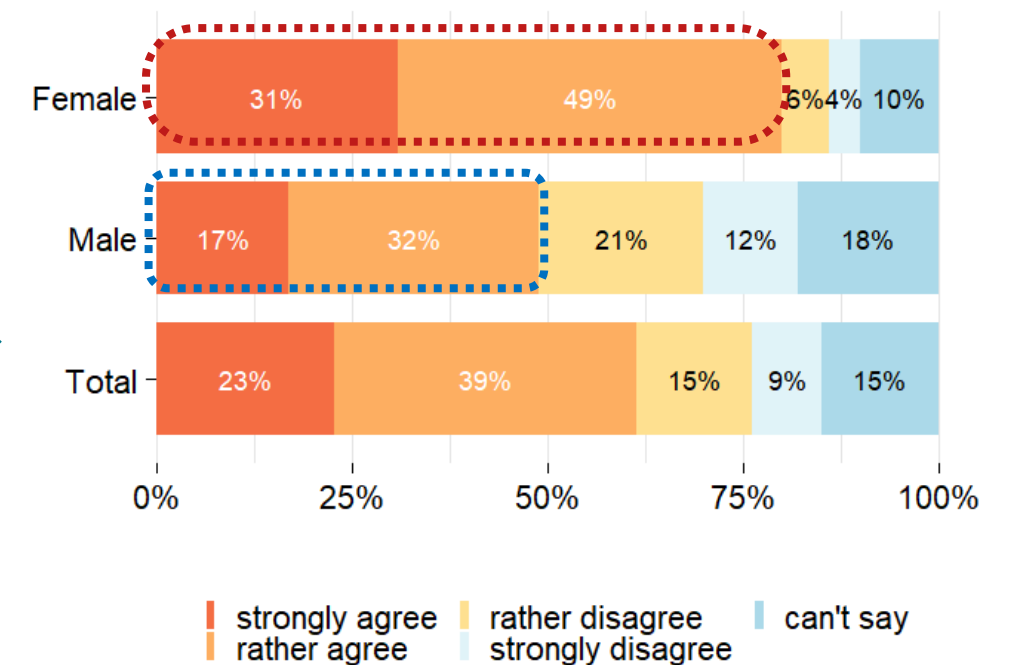@eu_granted | www.granted-project.eu

Broadening excellence – assessment practices
Practices

- Excellence standards differ, specific challenge in multidisciplinary and international panels => **calibrating practices** in panels: explicit calibration session vs. informally during negotiations

- H-index: Reviewers check albeit RFOs ask not to do it: lack of benchmark, trust, alternatives

- Narrative CV: reviewers raise concerns about new gender bias based on self-presentation but female applicants benefit from narrative CV: 80% of female applicants see their achievements better recognized (men: 49%)

"The new CV format / CV assessment recognizes my achievements better"
(SFI FFP 2020 applicants, n=127)

| | strongly agree | rather agree | rather disagree | strongly disagree | can't say |

Source: Holzinger et.al. 2023
(findings applicant survey)

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Broadening excellence – assessment practices
Learnings

- Giving up h-index is partly contested

- Some reviewers are very supportive of Narrative CVs

- Guidelines and room for reflection requested: to calibrate standards how to assess Narrative CVs in different scientific fields

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Broadening excellence - GiRI

Context

Excellence is limited when sex / gender is not included in research and innovation: not all subgroups of society benefit equally from research and innovation outcomes

Gender Bias Risk

Request to take the gender dimension into account in Research and Innovation (GiRI) = new excellence element to be assessed by reviewers

Formal Policy

How is GiRI assessed in practice?
What do reviewers look at?

Research Interest

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Broadening excellence - GiRI Practices

- Reviewers have fuzzy understandings of GiRI

- GiRI is mixed up with other gender issues: female team members, female applicants

- When assessing GiRI, reviewers hardly question when applicants deny relevance of GiRI in their proposal

- Panels do not mention GiRI

*"I have never been asked this question anywhere before. They [the RFO] wanted to know whether the research is going to impact gender .... I said **this PI** might be female. They said: no that's not what we want. We want you to comment on the projects' impact on gender equality"* (remote reviewer)

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Broadening excellence - GiRI
Learnings

- GiRI policy is (still) unclear and not yet linked to excellence in assessment practice

- Clear and comprehensive communication of policy aim needed: Why GiRI?

- Awareness and field-specific capacities needed for assessing GiRI appropriately

- Aligning indicators across RFOs facilitates assessment of GiRI

- RFO could specify if / how panels address GiRI: awareness raising

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Gender equality policies in practice
Challenges for RFO policy design

- Having formal gender equality policies in place does not mean they are necessarily implemented in practice

- Reviewers show lack of capacities to adequately implement innovative policies in practice
  - difficulties to understanding policy aims: lacking awareness on gender
  - limited resources to get used to innovative policies: time, space for practice
  - lack of time and awareness to adopt to different standards per RFO

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Take away for RFOs
1 Reforming policy design

Studying panel practices shows potential for adopting policy design:

- Better communicate innovative policies and policy aims: to enable reviewers to better understand and support these policies

- RFOs are encouraged to align standards and indicators for innovative policies (GiRI, narrative CVs etc.) across RFOs: easier to implement, better comparability of impacts

- RFOs should be aware of intersecting inequality dimensions beyond gender: ethical and social-cultural background, disability, age etc in research assessment

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Take away for RFOs
2 Reforming capacity building

RFOs can support 'informed peer reviewing' by...

- offering capacity building for reviewers: enable them to ‚catch-up' with new policy requirements (GiRI, new CV formats, other innovative indicators)

- developing training formats that are attractive and effective for reviewers also for remote reviewers

- providing space for exchanging experiences and mutual learning: between RFOs, reviewers, applicants and crosswise

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Take away for RFOs
3 Reforming chairing

Studying panel practices shows relevance of panel chairs:

- Chairs are a main link between RFO and panel: they transfer RFO policies into panel practices

- Limited awareness of the role and expectations:

  - Chairs are expected to calibrate differences between panel members

  - When implementing a new policy (e.g. GiRI) chairs give support, explain, provide examples; intervene when new requirements are violated

- Formalize accountability of chairs

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Learnings for reforming research assessment

- Advanced RFO policies seem 'spearheads of change': RFOs are **transforming fundamental narratives** of the research ecosystem (GiRI, Narrative CV, re-ranking)

- Learnings from implementing innovative gender equality policies are strongly linked to ongoing **discourses on reforming research assessment**: paper currently in preparation

- Reforming research assessment: **more systematic insights** needed about innovative policies in practice, their impact, new (gender) bias risks etc

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Thank you!

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