Members of science academies are elected on the basis of agreed academic indicators of scientific excellence. The number of women among members of a national academy of sciences can serve as a litmus test of the perception and status of women scientists in a given country.

In October 2015, the Interacademy Partnership published the first comprehensive survey of science academies belonging to its global network, in order to ascertain the extent of inclusion and participation of women scientists. Across 69 national science academies for which data were available, (Figure 3.8) women made up 10% or less of members in almost half (30) of countries. In most European countries (8), only one out of 10 members was a woman. Women were better represented in the governing bodies (20%) of academies than in overall membership (12%).

Among the top 10 academies for the share of female members, six are from Latin America and the Caribbean: Cuba (27%), the Caribbean (26%), Mexico and Nicaragua (23%), Peru (20%) and Uruguay (19%).

That women should remain severely underrepresented in national science academies is a major challenge, since these academies often form the backbone of efforts to strengthen countries’ national innovation systems. The survey also found that women academicians were better represented in the social sciences, humanities and arts (16%), biological sciences (15%) and medical and health sciences (14%). The lowest percentages of women academicians were to be found in mathematical (6%) and engineering sciences (5%).

In the year following the report, the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences took the radical step of accepting only female nominations for membership to reduce the Academy’s perpetual gender imbalance: at the time, men accounted for 87% of its 556 members.

Source: compiled by Tonya Blowers, particularly from ASSAf and IAP (2015) Women for Science: Inclusion and Participation in Academies of Science: Academy of Science of South Africa: Pretoria

Figure 3.8: Share of female members of national science academies, 2013 (%)

By individual academy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21–30%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11–20%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% or less</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data unavailable</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: For each country aside from Switzerland, the data reflect one academy of science; for Switzerland, the data reflect the combined membership of the Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences (17% women) and the Swiss Academy of Engineering Sciences (10% women).


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