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18 January 2022

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Event highlights

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# ESAs' all-staff workshop on gender equality

## Where we are and where are we going?

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### Background

On Tuesday 18 January 2022, the three European Supervisory Authorities (EBA, EIOPA and ESMA – ESAs) jointly organised an all-staff workshop, aiming to take stock of the ESAs' current status on gender balance in the workplace against the broader gender equality strategy of the European Parliament. The ESAs discussed their future priorities for closing the gender gap where one exists, and fostering greater diversity in the workplace, mainly through binding targets and clear monitoring tools.

The workshop allowed for a valuable exchange of experiences and effective practices, with the aim to launch additional initiatives on gender equality over the medium-term.

In the workshop ESA staff heard from a distinguished line-up of speakers from the EU sphere, and together with an open dialogue between the three ESAs' Executive Directors and their staff, this led to fruitful discussions and further ideas of how to promote gender equality going forward.

In particular, the workshop benefitted from an impulse by Evelyn Regner, Member of the European Parliament and Chair of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) who spoke of the importance of gender balance from the European Parliament's perspective. The three ESAs' Executive Directors provided an update on the current situation at their respective agencies and shared their own experiences and advice on how to achieve gender balance in the workplace.

The workshop was also joined by high-level external speakers: Carlien Scheele, Director of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), Anne-Sylvie Catherin, formerly Director-General Human Resources at the European Central Bank (ECB) and now Global Head of Human Resources at Munich Re, and Juan Manuel Delgado, HR Director at Banco de España. All three speakers, who have significant expertise in the field of gender balance, shared their views on how to drive changes through effective and measurable practices.

The workshop was moderated by Laura Noonan, Financial Regulation Editor at Financial Times, and saw the active participation of close to 400 participants.

## Introductory remarks

François-Louis Michaud, EBA Executive Director, opened the floor highlighting the ESAs' commitment towards ensuring gender equality and the importance of this gathering to help reflect on the process achieved thus far, and foster meaningful exchanges. The conference was meant as a starting point for further actions to come.

## Panel 1: Where are the ESAs on gender balance?

Laura Noonan, gave the floor to Fausto Parente, EIOPA Executive Director, who shared his experience at EIOPA, highlighting the shifts in gender demographics this Agency went through in the past years and where it stands today. Fausto underlined that gender diversity is a big a priority for him personally and for EIOPA as an organisation and insisted on the ESAs' commitment to tackle inequality.

*“Gender balance is very important across society. Even when we reach a good balance at work, we shouldn’t be complacent, because it takes effort to maintain it.”* Fausto Parente, EIOPA Executive Director

Natasha Cazenave, ESMA Executive Director, underlined the efforts ESMA has done so far to achieve gender balance, and added that despite the encouraging results, the current situation should not be taken for granted and the ESAs will have to make sure they keep this topic high in their agendas and workplans.

*“Promoting diversity and inclusion is a duty to our organisation and core to our values as an EU agency. By supporting gender balance we aim to foster a diversity of views.”* Natasha Cazenave, ESMA Executive Director

François-Louis Michaud then took the floor to share his experience coming to the EBA from an organisation with women in very senior positions, and the lessons he learned around the need to be proactive about gender diversity.

*“Ensuring a better gender balance is possible, even in the short run, especially by creating more opportunities. [...] We should also be careful to maintain the effort in the long term, by nurturing a culture of equal chances and helping people to prepare for responsibilities.”* François-Louis Michaud, EBA Executive Director

## Keynote speech

Between the two panels, Evelyn Regner, Member of the European Parliament and Chair of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, addressed the audience to outline the importance of pushing gender equality. She also stressed the efforts that the European Parliament are doing in this regard. She referred to the recent appointment of a third woman as President of the European Parliament, and to the European Parliament's roadmap on gender equality. Notably, she expressed the value of the ESAs' engagement and support to implement the European Parliament's resolution. Answering questions from the staff members, she encouraged the ESAs to

invest in simple but important initiatives like networking or mentoring, while insisting that organisations should adopt the right indicators and monitor progress over time, as implementation has to be measured systematically. As a women’s rights activist, she acknowledged the valuable input of female leaders, and the work towards investing in equal opportunities across all genders through binding measures. Lastly, the MEP highlighted that strong organisations are further amplified through a wide internal representation, which is the basis of a balanced workstream. “Having a neutral leadership format and the right mentorship can drive more growth in gender equality” she noted.

*“It is of utmost importance that the EU bodies not only implement gender equality in the daily workplace, but also monitor it to build stronger organisations with wider perspectives.”* Evelyn Regner, Member of the European Parliament

## Panel 2: Setting gender equality in motion: exchange of views and ideas for the ESAs

The second panel of the workshop kicked off with Carlien Scheele, who gave a brief presentation on the work that EIGE is doing on gender equality. In particular, EIGE provides analysis and data to policy makers to make decisions, monitor progress on gender equality in the political, economic and social sphere. Their gender equality index (thermometer), which covers aspects such as power, income, work-life balance, type of work, education, has been pointing to a gradual, albeit slow, change over time. The Director expressed that through measurable tools like the gender equality index, companies and organisations can set viable targets and make horizontal commitments. In particular, she highlighted the value of the leadership, who through strategic steps can help prevent, tackle, and measure the work put in place to achieve gender balance.

Juan Manuel Delgado acknowledged the importance of data (the “compass”), as it provides an accurate snapshot of the current state of a company, allowing for an analysis and diagnosis, which are the most important elements in the process. Jumping from data to action without a serious analytical phase is a common mistake, he noted. Following a data-driven approach as a principle would lead to identifying the root causes that may hinder gender balance in the workplace. Finally, organisations can only expect to make progress if they have a clear action plan and are serious about executing it. This requires commitment, endorsement, support and a genuine ambition to progress. The Director also referred to the structure model of the Bank of Spain, that endorses and supports female talent both internally and externally.

For Anne-Sylvie Catherin, equality progress requires a key ingredient: determination. Every action should be data (not sentiment) driven, thus identifying the critical mass for gender representation for different types of jobs and looking into attrition rates and achievable in-take targets. In particular, she referred to the importance of simulation tools when preparing appointment decisions. According to the former ECB Director, peer pressure can be of significant help. Research done at the ECB showed that choosing women in areas where the pipeline of women talent is narrower did not lead to compromise on excellence and the selected women tended to perform better in the end. Lastly, Anne-Sylvie referred to the importance of sponsorship and allyship in the internal structure of an organisation, underlining that HR should not act as a standalone actor, and

that multipliers and sponsorship should be put in place in order to achieve a top to bottom innovation in gender equality. Finally, she mentioned intersectionality as another very important aspect - i.e. the ways in which systems of inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class and other forms of discrimination “intersect” to create unique dynamics and effects.

## Q&A and exchange of views

The final segment of the workshop opened the floor to Q&As with the ESAs staff, who were very eager to ask questions and share their views and ideas with the Executive Directors and panelists. The questions touched on several key topics related to gender balance, including gender pay gaps, promoting gender balance in national authorities, helping women improve their confidence in taking senior positions and training on unconscious bias. Speakers encouraged managers to have regular and open conversations with their staff about these matters, and to reach out internally and externally. Each organisation should reflect on their pools of talents well ahead, proactively encourage staff to apply for certain roles in which their profiles would contribute to a better balance.

François-Louis Michaud thanked the audience for all their remarks, questions and observations and the panellists for their expert input and takeaways.

“Thank you to all for joining us today. There are numerous takeaways from this workshop and we will follow up and come back to you on the elements raised today.” François-Louis Michaud, EBA Executive Director

## Overarching takeaways and recommendations

Overall, the workshop allowed for an open conversation between the Executive Directors of the three ESAs, as well as field experts, who provided insights on setting realistic and ambitious targets to implement gender balance in our working environments. The experts shared the importance of working in a data driven way as it will enable objective target-setting and measuring progress. In addition, they highlighted the importance of linear HR policies that ensure statistical checks in the recruitment process, gender-balanced selection panels and inclusive vacancy notices. In parallel, they also stressed that embedding the gender-neutral mentality in the workplace is key. Targeted trainings on topics including harassment would be vital in ensuring that progress is made in the day-to-day operations of the three ESAs.

The Executive Directors shared their own experiences and personal journeys in navigating gender balance in the workplace. In their interventions, they echoed the continuous drive to push for gender balance, by enhancing equality and encouraging more diversity in decision-making roles, which can help strengthen and bring more value to the workplace. To foster equality in the workplace, the Executive Directors also discussed increasing awareness through the organisation of more workshops of similar nature, intended to keep the staff informed on the work and progress made, as well as answer their questions.

The three ESAs are committed to continuing their efforts to balancing gender representation and to making it a high priority. Even when positive outcomes are reached, it is crucial that they are maintained across all workstream levels, starting from management-level.

*“We have to make sure that [public sector] organisations resemble the society they are embedded in, thus securing that there is no bias, while creating an open space without discrimination, where everyone can feel safe.”*