



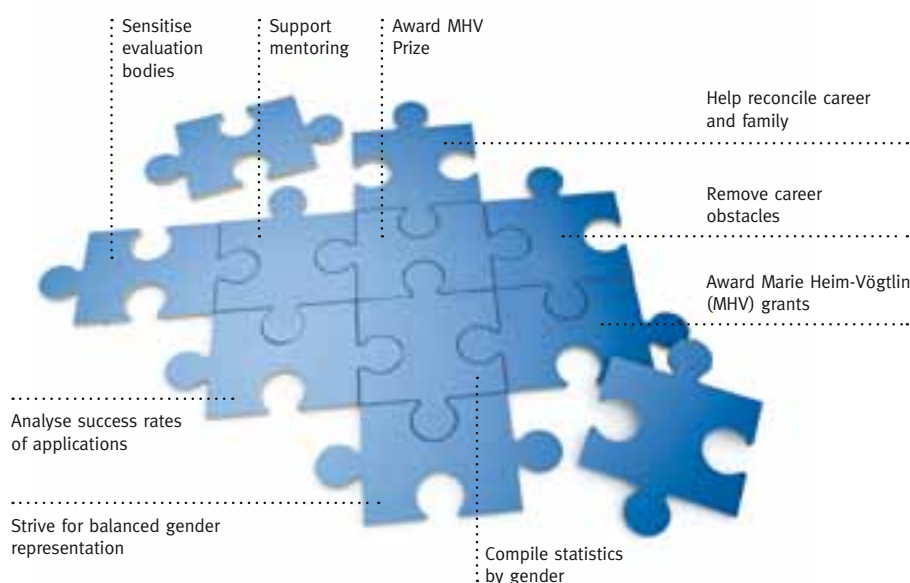
Ten Years of Equal Opportunities in Research Funding

The Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) supports gender equality

Ten years ago, the SNSF set up its Equal Opportunities Commission and created the post of an equal opportunities representative. It wanted to show its dedication to improving conditions in research, in particular for female researchers. With the aim of removing gender-specific obstacles, the SNSF introduced special measures in various funding schemes and tried to ensure an appropriate representation of women in its bodies. Nevertheless, the assessment after a decade of gender equality measures is - as Dieter Imboden, President of the Research Council, puts it - marked by "mixed emotions".

Maya Widmer, Equal Opportunities in Research Funding

What we do...



What we have achieved...



Dieter Imboden
President of the National Research Council and the Equal Opportunities Commission of the SNSF

If we were to look only at the numbers, I would not dare to say that the efforts of the SNSF in improving equal opportunities have been an unqualified success: „She Figures“, statistics published by the European Commission, show that in terms of equal opportunity indicators Switzerland is average at best, sometimes even below average. But numbers do not tell the whole story. Ten years of work by the Equal Opportu-

nities Commission has significantly sensitised everyone involved to all sorts of inequalities, not only between men and women, but also between young and old researchers and those with or without family commitments.

The task of the Equal Opportunities Commission is to reflect its own and other people's work as well as develop new ideas. Therefore, as a complement to the Marie-Heim Vögtlin programme, it proposed the introduction of an MHV Prize so that young and successful female researchers may gain greater recognition and visibility. It also initiated the replacement of the biological age by the

academic age in career funding and suggested relief measures for researchers with child care commitments. This may seem a drop in the ocean to the impatient. However, in career funding interviews I sometimes witness the keenness of young, talented and committed female researchers to take the male stronghold „Science“ by storm, and as a result my confidence continues to grow.

Yes, taking stock of equal opportunities at the SNSF after ten years gives rise to mixed emotions - but that is not all bad: for one thing, it ensures that equal opportunity concerns do not fall prey to daily routine.

How it all started...



Heidi Diggelmann
former President of the National
Research Council and the Equal
Opportunities Commission

When I became President of the National Research Council of the SNSF in 1997, the time seemed ripe for equal

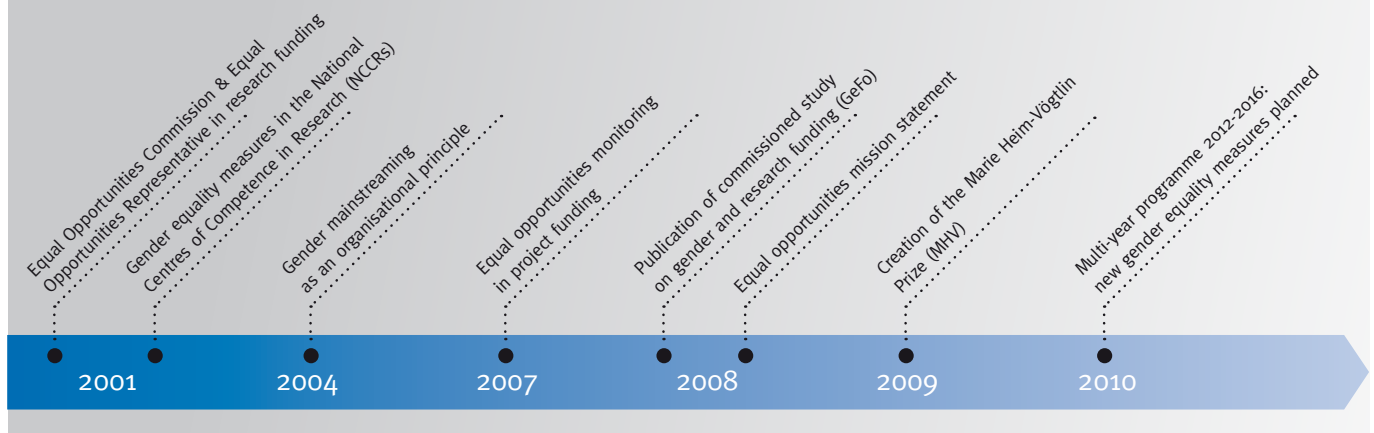
The question of women's position in society and in science has accompanied me throughout my career. The higher I climbed in my profession, the less women were there around me.

When I became President of the National Research Council of the SNSF in 1997, the time seemed ripe for equal

opportunities, both politically and scientifically. Institutions responsible for promoting research and education were asked to submit their targets to the Federal Council for the 2000-2003 period. Equal opportunities for men and women comprised an important and binding element of the dispatch on the Promotion of Education, Research and Technology approved in 1998. To explore the topic in more depth, the National Research Council created a working group (GRIPS Gender), whose recommendations were published in 2001 and

swiftly implemented by the SNSF. By deciding to create the Equal Opportunities Commission and the post of an equal opportunities representative ten years ago, the SNSF institutionalised the topic of equal opportunities. The aim was to ensure that the SNSF did not rest on its laurels, but kept a permanently watchful eye on gender inequalities in research funding.

What milestones has the SNSF reached in the last ten years...



What's still missing...



Caroline Arni
Associate professor
of history,
University of Basel

plenty of good ideas on how to provide relief in this area. The measures planned for the next few years are promising and the first wish is simple: please imple-

This wish list is based on a little survey I conducted among my female colleagues. The survey shows one thing most of all: those who attempt to combine family life with an academic career face all kinds of difficulties. That said, the SNSF has

ment, as much as possible as soon as possible and as consistently as possible - be it the recognition of mobility below postdoc level, measures to lighten the burdens of parents or social security for fellowship holders.

But family also means: a variety of constellations and changing situations. A second wish would therefore be a funding policy and funding schemes that allow more flexibility - for instance, by way of variable child allowances depending on the care situation and conditions on the spot, or the option to use the allocated funds for a purpose

different from the one envisaged. A lot would be gained by signalling clearly: research funding is compatible with different ways of life and, in particular, with life trajectories involving twists and turns. Ambition needs nourishing and, in the case of an academic career, this nourishment is the confidence that something is possible. The aim should be to ensure that those on the threshold (after graduating or doing their doctorate) do not „abandon the cause before they abandon it“ (Sheryl Sandberg) - be it science in the case of women or family commitments in the case of men.