



Gendering the Academy
and Research: combating
Career Instability and Asymmetries



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Gender practices in the Construction of Excellence

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report of work package 7 of the GARCIA project centers on the revealing of gender practices in the construction of academic excellence in recruitment and selection procedures. Core questions for this report are whether the criteria that have been used play out differently or similarly for male and female candidates, and how constructions of excellence are connected to the reproduction of inequalities in the research system. The construction of excellence is particularly salient for those workers who hold precarious positions, as the label of excellence is the key to their inclusion or exclusion in academia and research. This report presents a comparative analysis across GARCIA beneficiaries in Switzerland, Italy, Iceland, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Slovenia. The analysis is based on national research reports from these countries.

We analysed recruitment and selection procedures in cross-national perspective. We found that only Italy has a formal policy for postdoc recruitment and selection procedures in place. In all countries recruitment and selection procedures for assistant professor positions are more formalised and more elaborate than for postdoc positions. Only in the Slovenian SSH department no formal procedure is in place for assistant professor recruitment and selection.

With regard to gender policies for recruitment and selection, we found that Switzerland, Belgium, and Iceland have considerable gender policies in place that guide recruitment and selection procedures. In Switzerland and Iceland appointed delegates are available during recruitment procedures for assistant professors in order to prevent gender bias in recruitment and selection decisions. In all countries, except for Slovenia, we find that committees have to select a woman candidate or a candidate of the gender that is in the minority in case of equal qualification of two or more candidates. The Swiss, Dutch, and Icelandic reports reveal that this measure is never put in practice because committee members argue that two candidates are never equally qualified. Respondents in Belgium and Slovenia are not aware of a gender policy for recruitment and selection.

In the national reports we distinguished four gender practices that we found throughout the GARCIA institutions: persistent gender stereotypes in the construction of the ideal academic, the gendered construction of the criterion of international mobility, postdoc recruitment and selection via informal networks, and preferring internal candidates for assistant professor positions.

Firstly, respondents in all countries reproduced the masculine norm of the ideal academic and the explicit expectations that come with this norm, such as full commitment in their recruitment practices. Yet, the data reveal implicit expectations that women do not meet this norm. Committee members in all countries automatically link women to motherhood. The cultural expectation of women as the main caregivers is present in all countries. We find that this is problematic because this evokes expectations that women are incompatible with the norm of the ideal academic and incompatible with academic excellence. Respondents argue that women (as mothers) are not able to dedicate sufficient time to their academic career because of their care tasks and / or part time work. Most committee members in all countries have no or little awareness of the gendered construction of the ideal academic and its implicit expectations of women candidates. They put the responsibility of solving gender inequalities on the individual woman academic or the society.

Secondly, we found that in Switzerland and the STEM department of the Netherlands, international work experience is a formal selection criterion. In Italy, Belgium, Slovenia, and Iceland international work experience is not a formal selection criterion, but selection committee members take it into account when selecting early career researchers. The data reveal that international mobility is a multi-interpretable criterion. In all countries, except for Switzerland, respondents expect that women early career researchers are unable to acquire international work experience. We found that it is self-evident for respondents that having a family is problematic for women academics only because of the underlying assumption that women are the care-takers in a family. Exceptions (for example women without children or partners or women going abroad without problems) were not seen. The perception that combining parenthood and an academic career is incompatible for women could not only influence their evaluation of women candidates' academic excellence it could also cause women to self-select out of academia or discourage them from applying for positions.

Thirdly, we find that only in Italy a formal procedure for postdoc recruitment and selection is in place. However, the formal procedure is more a kind of window dressing, because the preferred candidate is often selected through an informal process. We find that also in all other countries postdocs are recruited via informal networks. Because of time pressure, candidates tend to be selected based on suitability and low risk instead of excellence. In all countries, postdocs are selected at the discretion of the project leaders who tend to have a preference for candidates within their network. Therefore, the decision-making power lies with the researchers who acquired funding and who are hardly held accountable for their selection decisions. That this informal hiring decreases the pool of candidates because only early career academics in their network are being considered is not seen as a problematic issue. The implication of informal hiring is that early career academics need to have a network in order to acquire positions. Recruitment of postdocs, particularly in the STEM field, mainly falls to the responsibility of men researchers as they hold the majority of academic positions that enable the acquiring of external grant funding to finance postdoc positions. Therefore, postdoc recruitment more often occurs in 'old boys networks' than in networks with an equal representation of men and women. Chances are small that women candidates are found in these old boys networks and therefore grant holders can easily overlook women candidates. Moreover, informal networks are the breeding ground for micro-political processes, where academics can use their power informally to recruit applicants. Since the postdoc position is the first step in an academic career, this is a crucial stage in which female talent can be lost, particularly by selecting postdocs via informal (male) networks.

Fourthly, and in contrast to postdoc recruitment and selection, the procedures for assistant professors are formalized in all institutions except for the Slovenian SSH department. However, we find in all countries a preference for internal candidates. In the competition between internal and external candidates, the internal candidates are preferred because they are considered to fit best and seen as trustworthy. Moreover, we find in Italy that the scarcity of assistant professor positions leads committee members to prefer internal candidates because they perceive it as their responsibility to develop the careers of early career researchers in their own institute.

At the same the adopted standards, such as international mobility and continuity in publishing and research are not gender neutral. They entail independency, self-promotion, and flexibility in terms of time and space and, from a symbolic point of view, seem to evoke a much more masculine managerial-oriented imaginary, than a feminine one.

In conclusion, the third and fourth gender practice uncover that in reality committee members prefer to hire candidates whom they already know; either candidates from their networks or internal candidates working in their department. These findings are in contrast to the first and second gender practice that assume that excellence is the main criterion in recruitment and selection and international mobility is required from early career researchers. We find that in reality excellence can be compromised for the purpose of hiring a candidate whom committee members trust and therefore consider low risk. The data show that selecting trustworthy and low-risk candidates, found internally or via informal networks, favours men over women early career researchers. Combined with the low accountability for selection decisions, gender practices in recruitment and selection can be maintained.

INTRODUCTION

This report of work package 7 of the GARCIA project centers on the revealing of gender practices in the construction of academic excellence in recruitment and selection procedures. Core questions for this report are whether the criteria that have been used play out differently or similarly for male and female candidates, and how constructions of excellence are connected to the reproduction of inequalities in the research system. The construction of excellence is particularly salient for those workers who hold precarious positions, as the label of excellence is the key to their inclusion or exclusion in academia and research. In work package 7 GARCIA identifies the formal and informal criteria that are widely used to construct scientific excellence in academia and research. The focus on recruitment and selection helps to unpack how the formal criteria of the job description are understood, applied or ignored in committee deliberations. The project zooms in on the entrance to non-permanent academic positions. We study postdoc, researcher and assistant professor positions; positions that are project-based, temporary, or tenure-track. At this stage of an academic career, recruitment and selection processes act as a “bottleneck” in career progression for early career researchers where only a small minority among a pool of candidates is retained. The competition in an already greedy institution may bring along extra risk of producing inequalities. For instance, upward career trajectories may depend not only on the quality and performance of individual researchers based on their merits, but also on the network of connections with prominent academics and committee members. The report will look into the gender practices that constitute the barriers for women to become part of or be eligible for the permanent academic staff.

Data and analysis

This report is based on the research conducted for work package 7 of the GARCIA project. See table 1 for the participating GARCIA beneficiaries. Every GARCIA beneficiary wrote two reports as part of work package 7: one report on constructing excellence: the gap between formal and applied selection criteria for early career academics and one report on gender practices in the construction of academic excellence. The reports on the gap between formal and applied selection criteria were assembled and make up GARCIA working paper 2 (Herschberg, Benschop, & Van den Brink, 2015). Both reports served as input for this comparative report. Furthermore, we used the summaries of the interviews that all beneficiaries have conducted to deepen our analysis.

Both reports have been based on a document analysis, and an analysis of semi-structured interviews and focus groups with selection committee members in social sciences (SSH) and natural sciences (STEM) departments. The document analysis was based on university policy documents, HR documents, job postings, and appointment reports published in the period 2010 – 2013. Interviews and focus groups were conducted in 2014. All beneficiaries have attempted to collect data that is comparable across institutions. Because data on recruitment and selection procedures is sensitive all beneficiaries, except for the Netherlands, encountered resistance during the data collection phase because of confidentiality issues.

The comparative analysis was conducted by reading and re-reading all national reports. We first open coded the materials which resulted in codes such as power, committee decision-making, recruitment, selection, networks, gender, gender practice, criteria, candidates, procedure, policy, excellence, scouting, et cetera. Then, the most relevant and essential findings were compiled in an Excel file under the themes ‘power postdocs STEM’, ‘power assistant professors STEM’, ‘power postdocs SSH’, ‘power assistant professors SSH’, ‘gender postdocs STEM’, ‘gender assistant professors STEM’, ‘gender postdocs SSH’, and ‘gender assistant professors SSH’. From the Excel file we identified four gender practices that were present throughout the GARCIA institutions.

In the report we will use country names instead of the names of the participating beneficiaries to facilitate reading. For example, when we refer to Switzerland, we refer to the University of Lausanne. Also, we will use the terminology “SSH department” and “STEM department” when corresponding to the various departments in the GARCIA beneficiaries (see Table 1 for the participating departments).

Table 1: The participating GARCIA beneficiaries

Country		Institute	SSH department	STEM department
Switzerland	CH	University of Lausanne	Faculty of Social and Political Sciences	Faculty of Biology and Medicine
Italy	IT	University of Trento	Department of Sociology and Social Research	Department of Information Engineering and Computer Science
Iceland	IS	University of Iceland	School of Social Sciences	School of Engineering and Natural Sciences
Belgium	BE	Université Catholique de Louvain	Institute of Analysis for Change in the Contemporary and Historical Society	Earth Life Institute
the Netherlands	NL	Radboud University Nijmegen	Institute for Management Research	Institute for Mathematics, Astrophysics and Particle Physics
Slovenia	SI	Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Science and Arts	Fran Ramovs Institute for the Slovenian Language	
Slovenia	SI	University of Ljubljana		Department of Agronomy

1. RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION PROCEDURES: A CROSS-NATIONAL COMPARISON

In this chapter we will describe the recruitment and selection procedures for postdoc and assistant professor positions in the GARCIA countries. Then, we will give an overview of existing gender policies on recruitment and selection in the various countries and the implementation of these policies in practice.

1.1 Recruitment and selection procedures for postdoc and assistant professor positions: Formal policy or not?

In **Switzerland** the procedures and criteria for hiring postdocs (University Directive 1.34) provide guidelines for the recruitment of doctoral and postdoc assistants and insist on formal recruitment procedures. For the recruitment of positions funded through the main budget of the University, a selection committee is composed of at least two members, including the Director of the Department / Institute. The Dean must approve the recruitment. If the positions are funded through external sources, which is often the case for postdoc positions, the Directive states that: *“No selection committee needs to be established. It is the responsibility of the person in charge of the funding to propose the hiring of a suitable candidate”* (Directive 1.34, p. 2).

In Switzerland, recruitment procedures for tenure-track professor and senior lecturer positions funded by the university are far more standardised than for the fixed-term postdoc positions. Tenure track assistant position recruitment follows almost the same procedure as any other professorial position, while junior lecturer tenure-track recruitment follows a simplified procedure. For the junior lecturer position, there is a committee of three persons (with one external person) and for the assistant professor position the committee is composed of up to six persons (with one or two external persons).

In **Italy**, formally, the recruitment procedure for postdoctoral researchers entails the publication of an open call and then a selection by a committee consisting of three members of the department. The person in charge of the fund that will finance the postdoc position chairs the committee. This person selects two other members among their colleagues. The person in charge of the fund of the project usually takes the final decision. The selection is almost always based on candidates' qualifications, though there may also be a job interview.

The selection procedure for assistant professors in Italy is more complex than that for postdoctoral researchers. The procedure is formalized in the law on Recruitment and Developing of Scientific Careers Committee. It initially involves a public announcement. This is followed by the appointment of a committee composed of three full or associate professors, one selected by the University; one by the Department concerned; one by the University Recruitment Committee. At least one member must be from another university. Several evaluation phases follow: a pre-selection consisting of a comparative evaluation of qualifications, CVs, and three reference letters; the advice of three external referees appointed by the University Recruitment Committee; the consequent admission to the next phase at least six candidates who are subjected to an individual

interview. At the end of this phase the committee makes a ranking list. The Department Council then deliberates on the candidate who will be called for the post. The Council takes account of the committee's evaluation, although this is not binding. The recruitment and selection of assistant professors is a very long process, and is complicated by a series of steps required by the new law and university regulations.

In **Belgium**, for the recruitment of postdoctoral researchers there is no standardized call for job openings: it is the supervisors who make the selection from case to case. The recruitment of assistant professors follows the Rules of Procedure no. 1, appended to the University Statute (2010) and is essentially a four-stage process. The first stage involves advertising vacancies (proposed by the faculties and institutes and approved by the Sector Board) are confirmed by the Executive Board. Then all the applications are collected and submitted to the selection committee appointed by the Executive Board. The second is the selection stage. Each selection committee selects the applicant(s) it would like to short-list, i.e. the applicant(s) it would like to interview before identifying the best candidate for the position advertised. The third stage is when the Executive Board confirms the selection, having met the preferred applicant and read the committee's report, the opinion of the Dean/Head of the Institute and an interview report issued by the Human Resources Department (HR). The fourth and final stage is when the appointment and associated conditions of appointment are confirmed by the Board of Governors and then by the Board of Trustees.

In the SSH department in **Slovenia**, no official selection committee is set up for the recruitment and selection procedures for Research Assistants (equivalent of postdoc) and Research Fellows (equivalent of assistant professor), since these positions fall under the promotion system in which academic staff automatically progress from one position to another according to internal research criteria. Only for the position of Young Researcher an official committee is composed on the level of the institution. The position of Young Researcher (a special position for young people to obtain a PhD financed by the Slovenian Research Agency) is the only one to follow a formal recruitment and selection procedure. The status of Young Researcher is a temporary position, lasting 3.5 years.

In the Slovenian STEM department the procedures for postdocs and assistant professors are more formalized. After candidates have submitted their applications, the secretary of the human resources office and the secretary of the departments review the candidates' CVs. The candidates who do not meet the official criteria are automatically rejected, while others are invited to an interview with the committee members. If there are several suitable candidates (but this is rarely the case), the committee members evaluate different criteria (publications, research work, experience, social skills, personality characteristics, etc.). According to a directive of the Rector of the University, the committee for the recruitment and selection of an Assistant with PhD (equivalent of postdoc) should consist of two members. The committee for the position of assistant professor should have three members, one of them from an institution outside the university. Usually the members from the faculty are the associate dean or/and the head of the departmental chair and a retired professor.

In the STEM department in **the Netherlands**, postdoc positions are often not openly advertised and since then there is no formal selection procedure, there is no selection

committee either. For tenure-track assistant professor positions a selection committee is composed. The compiling of the job posting and the selection committee fall under the responsibility of the faculty board. According to the guidelines for the recruitment and selection of assistant professors, the selection committee should consist of at least one woman who holds at least the same positional level. Also, the committee should include a full professor of the department that has the vacancy, a student, a representative of the education institute, and an expert from the field (working in the own or another university). An HR advisor supports the committee.

Similar to the STEM department, in the SSH department in the Netherlands there is no formal policy for the recruitment of postdocs. Postdoc positions are sometimes recruited via an open call and with the use of a selection committee, but in many cases there is no formal selection procedure and no selection committee. Faculty policy in the SSH department prescribes that assistant professors are openly recruited, however, we find exceptions to this policy. Similar to the STEM department the committee should have a least one woman member with a position comparable to the one in the vacancy. When all letters of application have come in, the committee makes a short list of candidates to interview. Internal candidates have to be invited for an interview in line with faculty rules. At the time the job interviews are scheduled, the committee often meets for the first time in real life. The job interview usually consists of one meeting with the candidates, in which each candidate has an interview with the committee. Based on all interviews, the committee discusses the candidates and decides on the preferred candidate. In both departments appointment reports are written after the selection procedure. These reports function as an advice to the director of the department and the faculty board.

In **Iceland** postdoc positions are not openly advertised because postdocs grants are available. Candidates can apply for such grant when an academic within the university is willing to sign the application form, and when candidates received confirmation from the academic school where they wish to do the research that it will provide the candidate with access to the schools' facilities.

In Iceland the selection procedure for assistant professor positions takes place in two stages as determined by the Rules of the University of Iceland No. 569/2009. First, an evaluation committee evaluates if candidates fulfil the minimum requirements for the position. The evaluation committee consists of three members, two members appointed by the University council and one specialist appointed by the faculty. The evaluation committee evaluates candidates and the applications of qualified candidates are sent to the selection committee. Second, the selection committee receives the applications of qualified candidates and makes the final decision on who is going to be suggested for the position. The selection committee consists of five members: the head of the faculty that is also the chair of the committee, one standing member appointed by the faculty, two specialists appointed by the faculty, and one Rector's representative.

In summary, only in Italy is a formal policy for postdoc recruitment and selection procedures in place. In all countries, recruitment and selection procedures for assistant professor positions are more formalised and more complex than for postdoc positions. Only in the Slovenian SSH department no formal procedure is in place for assistant professor recruitment and selection.

1.2 Gender policy for recruitment and selection

In **Switzerland** hiring procedures are open to scrutiny by the Equality Delegation of the university, organised by the Rector's Office and chaired by the Vice-Rector in charge of early academic careers and diversity. The Vice-Rector is responsible for sending so-called "equality delegates" to observe professorship recruitment procedures (including assistant professorships). The Equality Delegation is:

aimed at sustaining equality in order to: 1) inform Recruitment Board members about the rules regarding gender equality at the University and 2) ensure that the rule of minority preference is applied when there is a need to choose between a male and a female candidate who have identical research and teaching qualifications and who are judged to be equally suited to an academic appointment (Directorate 2006).

In order to facilitate communication between all the bodies involved in academic recruitments, each procedure is summarised in a detailed (10 – 25 pages) written report. These reports provide a brief description of the gender composition of the applicants to the position advertised, give a short summary of each of the applicants (age, nationality, date and topic of PhD, research, publications, teaching and administrative activities) and describe the discussions and decision-making process that led to the ranking of candidates by the recruitment board members. If equality delegates identify problems during a hiring procedure, they have to write a report that goes to the Rectorate of the university. This gives a lot of power to the delegate, as the Rectorate can decide to block a hiring process.

Furthermore, in Switzerland the professorial job posting (tenure-track or not) must include the following footnote: "Concerned to promote women's access to academic careers, the University encourages women to apply" (Directorate 2005, Art. 1.3.1, p. 8). According to the university's '50/50 vision' policy document: "The general objective of the Rector's Office is to tackle the 'leaky pipeline' and ensure that, by 2016, 40% of appointments to a professorial rank are made to women" (UNIL-BEC, 2012). Recognising that it may face particular difficulties, a specific target of 25% of women in all new appointments to professorial positions has been set for the STEM faculty. From the Swiss SSH respondents we learn that the rule of minority preference ("at equal competence, prefer the female candidate") is almost never put into practice.

The report on **Italy** mentions the availability of a university gender policy. We learn that the policy contains the measure to select people belonging to the underrepresented gender. Even though all but one of the SSH respondents were aware of this measure, the report does not reveal whether or not committee members put this policy into practice. The report does not go into further detail about the content of the gender policy.

In **Belgium** the university has a Gender Action Plan that proposes to include in the university's policy the idea of sensitizing recruitment committees and promotion committee members of criteria of selection and promotion, and gender bias. Most, if not all, respondents in both department stated they had not seen any gender policy or implementation in recruitment procedures in both the university and their department. One respondent in the STEM department spoke about how in one job description there was a particular mention of women being favoured in the case of "equally excellent" CVs

and portfolios of candidates. Like in the Italian report, we do not find if Belgian committee members select women candidates in case of equal qualification.

In the **Slovenian** report we do not find if a gender policy is present in the departments. All respondents argued that a gender policy on recruitment and selection does not exist at the level of department or at the faculty in general.

In **the Netherlands** we find that the policy for assistant professor positions regarding inviting a woman committee member on the committee of at least the same positional level as the particular vacancy is respected in both departments. The guidelines for the recruitment and selection of assistant professors in the STEM department emphasize that the selection committee should actively search for possible women candidates. Furthermore, the guidelines state that within the science faculty in case of equal representation women are preferred over men candidates for the positions in which women are underrepresented. Most STEM respondents are aware of this policy but they argue that in practice candidates are never equally qualified. The guidelines also state that in the appointment report that the selection committee has to send to the faculty board, the committee should justify, if this is the case, why no women candidates have been nominated for selection. The data show that committee members do take this up in appointment reports.

In **Iceland** there is an Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men in place. The act states that when it comes to participation in the evaluation and selection committees the participation of women and men has to be approximately equal (minimum 40%). Next to that, article 26 of the Act (no. 10/2008) states that if two or more applicants for a position are equally qualified, an applicant shall be chosen of the gender that is in minority in that area of work. However, the report shows that none of the committee members had applied this article in the selection process to the advantage of women candidates because they argue that two candidates can ever be rated as equally qualified. The interview with a Rectors' representative shows that Rector's representatives have a role in safeguarding the selection process for gender bias:

Our role is first and foremost to make sure that the rules are followed and that there is consistency between appointments but I do not have any professional qualification to say a lot about [the candidates]. There are these specialists that should handle that but I have to make sure that someone isn't favouring [candidates] and the gender perspective, that is of course one of the things I have to keep an eye on and supervise if laws and regulations are followed. (IS, SSH, M)

In summary, from the reports we learn that Switzerland, Belgium, and Iceland have considerable gender policies in place that guide recruitment and selection procedures. In Switzerland and Iceland appointed delegates are available during recruitment procedures for assistant professors in order to prevent gender bias in recruitment and selection decisions. In all countries, except for Slovenia, we find that committees have to select a woman candidate or a candidate of the gender that is in the minority in case of equal qualification of two or more candidates. The Swiss, Dutch, and Icelandic reports reveal that this measure is never put in practice because committee members argue that two candidates are never equally qualified. Respondents in Belgium and Slovenia are not aware of a gender policy for recruitment and selection.

2. GENDER PRACTICES IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE: A CROSS-NATIONAL COMPARISON

In this chapter we will present our findings on gender practices in the construction of academic excellence and in the recruitment and selection of postdocs and assistant professors. There are multiple ways to study gender in organisations. We use the theory of gender practices in order to guide our analysis. Central to the practice approach is the notion that “social life is an on-going production and thus emerges through people’s recurrent actions” (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011, p. 1240). Our definition of gender practices is derived from gendering processes in organizations: “how gender is constantly redefined and negotiated in the everyday practices through which individuals interact; how men and women ‘do gender’ and how they contribute to the construction of gender identities by engaging in a process of reciprocal positioning (Poggio, 2006, p. 225). We looked for such practices in our data and found a number of ways in which selection committees ‘do gender’ unreflexively. We distinguish four gender practices that we found throughout the GARCIA institutions: persistent gender stereotypes in the construction of the ideal academic, the gendered construction of the criterion of international mobility, postdoc recruitment and selection via informal networks, and preferring internal candidates for assistant professor positions. We have analysed these four practices in-depth and made comparisons between the various countries. A comparison between STEM and SSH departments was made where possible.

2.1 Persistent gender stereotypes in the construction of the ideal academic

The first gender practice we derived from the data is the implicit expectations of committee members that women researchers do not meet the norm of the ideal academic. The existing norm within academia reflects the notion of the ideal academic as “someone who gives total priority to work and has no outside interests and responsibilities” (Bailyn, 2003; Bleijenbergh, Van Engen, & Vinkenburch, 2013). The norm of the ideal academic is one of the most influential contributions to gender inequality in academia (Benschop & Brouns, 2003), as it reflects a masculine stereotype and the traditional male breadwinner model (Bailyn, 2003; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012b). Women relative to men suffer from lack of stereotype fit with the ideal academic norm. Our data reveal that in the GARCIA beneficiaries the masculine notion of the ideal academic is pervasive and continuously reproduced.

The report of **Switzerland** shows that in both the STEM and the SSH department respondents argue that assistant professors are hired based on their scientific excellence, which is considered to be gender-neutral. Respondents have little awareness of gender practices in the recruitment and selection of early career researchers. We find numerous examples in both departments of the reproduction of gender stereotypes such as lack of competitive behaviour of women researchers, which is argued to be a reason for their limited survival in the competitive academic world. Only one man respondent related the lack of women in science to the scientific environment:

Science has been made by men for men and it’s a rotten place for women. That’s what needs to be changed: it is the place of science that has to be changed if we want there to be more

women. It's very important that there should be more women, a lot more, and that they should be completely at ease there in the way that I am at ease in science. (CH, STEM, M)

Even though the respondent argues in favour of more women in science, he explains later that he does so because he attributes feminine characteristics such as collaboration to women and masculine characteristics such as aggression to men. This way he reproduces gender stereotypes.

We find that respondents in the Swiss STEM department argue that discrimination against women is not prevalent at the postdoc level. They think it is only at a later stage that prejudices come into play, when women become mothers. STEM respondents addressed the lack of childcare structures and high childcare costs and related this to high numbers of women working 80 per cent. In both departments respondents connect part time work to women because women are automatically linked to motherhood. The report reveals that the stereotype of women as mothers who cannot dedicate sufficient time to their academic career is reinforced by both men and women respondents. Some respondents problematized part time work, arguing that it causes time loss for experiments or the impossibility to succeed in science overall. We see that both motherhood and part time work are considered incompatible with a successful career in science. The Swiss report states:

Women seem to “disappear” clearly at the postdoc stage of the career path but we were unable to find any other explanation than the classical ones, linked to the difficulties of articulating a professional career with a family. Even if we can imagine that this is not the only element, we can suppose that it is the one which arises repeatedly, perhaps maybe because it is the most “politically correct”, as responsibility for it transferred to more structural and societal elements and not cast on the individual or organisation level (p. 35).

The Swiss results show that respondents are mainly link inequalities to family issues, and place the responsibility for equality outside the university.

Like in Switzerland, respondents in **Italy** also argue that scientific quality as well as the selection process are gender neutral. In Italy, similar to Switzerland, respondents argue that discrimination against women happens later in the scientific career:

According to me, the selection is made later, as associate professor. A woman has an objective disadvantage, but not because we men are sexist... in our department there's no-one like that ... but because in any case, if you have a child, you can put it how you like, but you have to do it, and this is intrinsic. So there's this disadvantage ... that if there are no proactive policies, which in Italy are not made (...). In the end, simply because someone has a child and wants to be with that child ... it is clear that in the end she publishes less, travels less, because she has a two or three-year old child ... so the only real disadvantage is structural. (IT, STEM, M)

This quote shows how gender is naturalized (and thus 'neutralized') as a cultural and biological issue. The respondent points towards an "intrinsic" issue, - motherhood – that is an "objective disadvantage". As it is 'obvious' to the respondent that only women can give birth to a child, it is also taken for granted that in that case they will have to take care of the child and renounce part of their academic activities. This way, the respondent puts the responsibility on the individual (woman) academic to deal with this perceived "disadvantage". In contrast to men respondents who perceived motherhood as a possible source of gender discrimination, none of the women respondents made

reference to it, concentrating instead on the gendered professional culture that characterizes Italian academia. This seems to be the prominent locus for the re/production of gendered practices that play a role not just in recruitment and selection but in all stages of the career of a researcher.

The findings in **Belgium** show as well that respondents argue that excellence can be evaluated without discriminating. Moreover, the university requires a significant physical presence of individuals, because decisions are made in meetings, deliberations and through a process of negotiation. We learn from the report that also in Belgium respondents ascribe difficulties to women to meet the norm of the ideal academic, as they equal women with mothers. They do not take into account that young men may face the same obstacles whilst being fathers, or that not every woman is a mother. The Belgium report explains that there seems to be a tension voiced by all respondents of the desire to take into account the family and private life situation of candidates in recruitment and their own frustrations of dealing with what they experience as inconveniences or organizational difficulties arising from these appointments and the adjustments these necessitated. There is a strong implicit and explicit reference to work life balance and the disrespect of career aspects of life in the work ethic and demands on researchers. One man respondent spoke about how the scientific field acts as an elite, who wants “sportspersons of high level”, which is a success model based upon an image of a masculine full professor that in the end serves this elite. Another woman discussant spoke about the danger in this kind of logic for women, as in certain countries such as Italy (place of origin of person) women of a certain generation gave up having kids in order to follow this line of logic in the scientific field. Indeed, the results show that often women who got appointed or had been selected for the short-list often had a certain type of profile and were not in family or motherhood situations. This reinforces the idea that success models are promoted that require a certain type of existence or co-existence with other family spheres that allows work to take the upper hand.

In the **Slovenian** report we find that a respondent in the STEM department explained that more women than men assistant professors left the faculty because “*women themselves take the decision to work only ten hours in the office and spend the other hours with their families*”. Similar to other countries, most Slovenian respondents connected women to parenthood but not fathers. However, a female respondent acknowledged “*there are also fathers who care for family and mothers who pursue a career*”. Next to problematizing motherhood for women academics, respondents in the Slovenian STEM department perceived women as more obedient, patient and hard working but less noticeable, dominant, ambitious, and confident. Thus, respondents reproduced gender stereotypes and by doing so implicitly disconnect women with the notion of the ideal academic. From the report we learn that in the STEM department almost all respondents stressed that the women themselves bear responsibility if they are not sufficiently self-confident and strong to occupy a higher position in the scientific environment. They also put the responsibility of family obligations on women as they argue it is women who did not make arrangements with their partners that facilitate their careers. In the SSH department, the connection between women and motherhood was less expressed by respondents. Respondents stressed that the heads of the institutes or the leaders of the research groups understand the obligations of young

mothers and they allow them to work from home. They did not argue that mothers do not meet the demands of the academic profession.

Only women committee members in the SSH department in **the Netherlands** argued that gender plays a role in selection procedures. They gave examples of situations in which they had encountered gender bias. A respondent reported a situation in which aspiring women academics are made insecure about their abilities to pursue an academic career that is related to the masculine notion of the ideal academic. The following quote illustrates this:

Respondent: [...] And I think that quite more often in this kind of procedures, where insecure or women who are made insecure appear as candidates in front of a committee that consists of just or mainly men, it can go wrong. But I cannot prove this. [...]

Interviewer: And you said that women might be made insecure. Can you tell me a bit more about that?

Respondent: Yes, yes, I have seen it happening in this procedure as well. It is not just about women, but about women who potentially consider like how do I combine an assistant professor position with other aspirations. One of those full professors in that committee, my boss, yes, he, I really like him but he really lives in the 50s constructions. He comes home and the dinner is served and he does not do anything, so he can totally focus on his career. So he thinks that if you for example work part time in the end you cannot meet the written and unwritten criteria to make a career, so become an associate or full professor. And if you are confronted with such a statement, on request or not, during a job interview or a performance appraisal – what happened to me once during a conversation with him – then you think: should I just quit now, so to speak, because I do not have such a situation at home. At home we divide things or try to do that as fair as possible, so I won't be [working] 70, 80 hours, that is just not possible. So at the moment that, yes, that kind of professors with fossil ideas still take part in committees, that kind of messages are still being conveyed. (NL, SSH, F)

This quote shows that senior men (committee members) can make women insecure about a future career in academia because of their opinions on combining a career in academia with other aspirations. The respondent explains how her boss expressed his opinion that a career in academia infers full commitment to the career and no part time work. Women who cannot fulfil these “*unwritten criteria*” because of other obligations outside work can become insecure because of these expectations and discouraged to pursue an academic career. The quote also reflects the notion of the ideal type academic career that entails working 70 to 80 hours per week. The respondent argues that having men on selection committees who hold these “*fossil ideas*” (i.e., old school ideas) can make women candidates insecure. Interestingly, the respondent mentions that unwritten criteria can play a role in the selection process, such as being able to work full time and long hours.

In the STEM department in the Netherlands, respondents link women primarily to motherhood. They hold expectations about career transitions that reflect an uninterrupted masculine career trajectory. A man respondent argues that the time frame in which someone should “*switch from postdoc to assistant professor*” lies between thirty and thirty-seven. He acknowledges that somebody can have a good reason to make the transition to assistant professor at a later age, such as illness, a late PhD, or children; however, his expectations about academic age do not change. This finding reveals an ideal type of an academic career path and signal an intersection of

gender and age. Dutch respondents in both departments imply that expectations about the ideal academic tend to only affect women academics. They, or others in their environment, link women to motherhood and assume that motherhood will create difficulties for them. Our respondents do not reflect on this, neither do they contemplate on the responsibility of others beside women to deal with possible conflicts.

In the STEM department in **Iceland** respondents argue that selection criteria are gender neutral and that men and women have the same opportunities to get selected for a position. However, one respondent put the responsibility for gender equality on women researchers and stressed that they have to be more like men, thereby ignoring systematic gender disparities in academia. Some respondents make gender relevant when they talk about families and child upbringing. A man committee member observed within his faculty that there is unequal distribution of unpaid work within the homes of his colleagues:

I see that family conditions are enormously important when it comes to how [academics] perform [the first years in academia]. I see it is really tough for women with children to enter a competitive academic position. I see that they are under a lot more pressure than the men [...] overall I see that [the women] have to leave at four to pick up the kids, I see the difference how [women] have more responsibilities than the guys and this can be very difficult. (IS, STEM, M).

This respondent argues that women researchers who are mothers cannot meet the norm of the ideal academic. The expected difficulties for mothers but not for fathers are pervasive, despite the Icelandic legislation that each parent gets three months of maternity/paternity leave and they share three months, in total nine months. We find similar results in the SSH department where parenthood is only problematized for women and not for men. Committee members expect mothers to not be “100 per cent active in writing up research” (IS, SSH, F).

In conclusion, in Switzerland, Italy, Belgium, and Iceland we find that committee members perceive academic excellence in recruitment and selection as gender neutral. However, we do find that academic excellence is gendered. Respondents in all countries reproduced the norm of the ideal academic and the explicit expectations that come with this norm, such as full commitment. Yet, the data reveal implicit expectations that women do not meet this norm. Committee members in all countries automatically link women to motherhood. The cultural expectation of women as the main caregivers is present in all countries. We find that this is problematic because this evokes expectations that women are incompatible with the norm of the ideal academic and incompatible with academic excellence. Respondents argue that women (as mothers) are not able to dedicate sufficient time to their academic career because of their care tasks and / or part time work. Committee members in all countries have no or little awareness of the gendered construction of the ideal academic and its implicit expectations of women candidates. They put the responsibility of solving gender inequalities on the individual woman academic or the society at large.

2.2 The gendered construction of the criterion of international mobility

The second gender practice we identified in the data is the gendered construction of the criterion of international mobility. The increasing emphasis on internationalisation in Western universities is reflected in excellence criteria for early career researchers. In most institutions under study, candidates' international mobility is linked to candidate's perceived excellence. We will first discuss the countries that formalized the criterion of international mobility, followed by counties that use this criterion tacitly. Then we will show that international mobility is a multi-interpretable criterion. Finally, we explain how international mobility is constructed as a problem for women early career researchers.

2.2.1. The application of international mobility as a formal selection criterion

In the report we find that in Switzerland and the STEM department of the Netherlands, international work experience is a formal selection criterion. In **Switzerland** it is an institutional obligation for all candidates who received their PhDs from the university to spend at least one year abroad before they can apply for a postdoc position at the university. In order to stimulate international mobility of PhD holders Switzerland does not extend PhD students' contracts after a contract period of five years. They can only be re-employed after a minimum of 12 months. From the report we learn that Switzerland hires its own early career researchers back into the institution after they have been abroad. Selection committee members in Switzerland argue that international mobility is an important criterion for early career researchers. A woman respondent in the Swiss STEM department states that early career researchers have to go abroad to acquire new and different knowledge. Respondents also consider international mobility important because they think it provides young researchers with the opportunity to experience other intellectual contexts that broaden their views.

In contrast with Switzerland, in the STEM department of **the Netherlands** former PhD candidates or postdocs do not tend to return after a period of working abroad. In the Dutch STEM department international postdoc experience is a selection criterion for assistant professor positions. The recruitment protocol articulates this criterion as: *"Some years of postdoc experience, also abroad"*. International experience is valued because of working in a different *"culture"* and to learn something different. Furthermore, a successful leading role in a project abroad causes the committee member to trust an applicant's competencies for the future. Other Dutch STEM respondents consider experience abroad necessary for the creation of an independent and international network and an independent line of research. In addition, respondents argue international experience to be a plus on someone's CV as it can help in acquiring external research funding. In the SSH department of the Netherlands, international mobility and postdoc experience are no formal selection criteria for assistant professor positions. Committee members in the SSH department consider international mobility more an additional benefit than a criterion a candidate can be rejected on. Focus group members in this department relate international mobility to devotion to the profession because to them it signals commitment, passion, and willingness to travel.

2.2.2. The application of international mobility as a tacit selection criterion

Even though internationalisation has become increasingly important in all GARCIA institutions, in most institutions this has not led to formalized criteria with regard to international mobility. In Italy, Belgium, Slovenia, and Iceland international work experience is not a formal selection criterion, but selection committee members do consider it an important criterion in the selection of early career researchers.

In **Italy**, we find that in both departments international mobility is made relevant in selection procedures. We do not find an explanation for why the criterion is applied in the selection of early career researchers.

In **Belgium**, international mobility is considered essential to become a good researcher. In the SSH department in Belgium internationally mobility was argued to be an indispensable criteria in what respondents named as today's context. The reasons given for this importance was that researchers needed *"to have seen and worked in other research environments and established connections with colleagues abroad."* We learn from the quote that international work experience is valued because the committee member links this experience with the exposure to other cultures and to creating an international network. Not having experience abroad was seen to be a weakening point in a candidates' application. At least one year of postdoctoral or other experience abroad was required. Also in the STEM department international mobility is important and taken into account during selection procedures. Respondents consider it valuable to have had some *"fresh air"*, and because having *"changed the context is important in an academic career"*.

In the departments in **Slovenia**, committee members consider international mobility important because to them it reflects a candidate's capability, courage and adaptability to new environments. The application of the criterion of international mobility is most pronounced in the STEM department. Where international mobility is considered important for early career researchers, committee members relate this to the researchers' excellence. In the SSH department international mobility is not so relevant because its field of research is Slovenian language.

A committee member in the STEM department in **Iceland** argues that going abroad is *"sort of an unwritten rule"*. When this requirement remains tacit, as is the case in most countries, applicants can suffer from this lack of transparency by being rejected for not fulfilling the criterion. SSH respondents confirm that international mobility of Icelandic staff is considered important and perceived as a qualifier, however it is not a decisive criterion.

We have in some cases appointed candidates with a PhD from [the University of Iceland] but the majority of the academics graduated from somewhere else and we want to have it that way, it is not good to hire a lot of [candidates] that [the academics] have trained themselves, that is what they say in English 'academic inbreeding' [...]. It is a concern and we would prefer, it is indeed ok to get one and one that is trained at [University of Iceland] but we would prefer [a candidate] that has been at an international university for some time and finished a degree there. (IS, SSH, M)

The quote shows that the committee member considers it bad practice to stay in one university because of the risk of *"academic inbreeding"*. However, he refines this by

saying that they “*would prefer*” someone with international work experience instead of making it a decisive criterion.

2.2.3. International mobility as an ambiguous multi-interpretable criterion

Because in most institutions the criterion of international mobility is not formalized and specified, uncertainties and ambiguities emerge in its application.

Because they're clear but not detailed criteria, it's obvious that there are interpretative sensitivities of different types. I'll give you a banal example. We all agree that international activity is important, but what is meant by international activity? Does it mean having been frequently abroad? Having taught abroad? Having published in foreign journals? Or does it mean staying at home but being part of international networks, and so on and so forth? (IT, STEM, M)

The quote reveals that “*international activity*” can encompass many endeavors and that the **Italian** committee member does not know what can be interpreted as international activity and what does not count as such.

We also find ambiguities in the institutions where international mobility is formalized. In both **Switzerland** and **the Netherlands** (STEM department) the criterion implies that experience throughout the world is valued, as long as it is abroad. However, when talking to selection committee members we find a much narrower interpretation of this criterion. A committee member in the Swiss STEM department pointed out that mobility should be in an English-speaking country to enable postdocs to improve their English. Committee members in this department argue that the standard career path of a well-performing candidate is to obtain a PhD in Switzerland, go to the USA for a two-year postdoc, come back for a second postdoc for two or three years before being hired on a tenure-track position. Committee members in the Dutch STEM department also mainly value postdoc experience in the USA, but mention the UK and Germany as countries that are appreciated too. Committee members’ preferences of certain countries remain hidden in the formalized criterion.

The criterion in the Dutch STEM department does not specify the number of years early career researchers have to go abroad, which leaves room for interpretation. The report shows that even though the number of years is not specified in the Dutch STEM department, committee members do have an opinion on how many years applicants should have been abroad for a postdoc:

At least two postdocs, so two times three years away from here. In the United States, or I don't know. Or in England, but really outside to see what happens there. And then return with experience. (NL, STEM, M)

The respondent states that postdocs should go abroad for quite some years to experience other academic environments. In his opinion postdocs should return after their time abroad so the home country can benefit from the experience.

2.2.4. International mobility constructed as a problem for women early career researchers

In Belgium and Iceland committee members problematized the international mobility criterion for early career researchers. Committee members in **Belgium** argued that in terms of the evaluation of certain types of criteria, international mobility was very hard to fulfil for early career researchers who want to settle down and build families. A committee member from the **Icelandic** STEM department made a similar remark:

Just the fact that you don't want to move your entire family out of the country, then it means that if you want a tenured position at [x] then you have to have been abroad for a minimum two years, and if you haven't done that, well, then you're disqualified, and a lot of people drop out because of these demands. (IS, STEM, F)

This quote implies that the mobility criterion is difficult to meet for all researchers with family demands. However, respondents in Italy, Belgium, Slovenia, the Netherlands, and Iceland argued that the difficulty of going abroad particularly holds for women researchers. They expect that women candidates or researchers have a harder time fulfilling the international mobility criterion because of family or motherhood reasons. Committee members' expectations about women's decreased mobility can influence their evaluation of women candidates' academic excellence and is therefore a gender practice.

In **Italy** in both departments various respondents gave an example in order to explain how the decision of having children may introduce a gender bias (for women), which was particularly that of mobility and going abroad. Respondents argue that as 'natural born mothers' women will probably have to renounce to part of their mobility (and their daily work) in order to care for their child(ren). Men, on the contrary, are never mentioned in relation to family and children, so it is somehow assumed that they will continue with their work and plans regardless of their family status.

In **Belgium**, some respondents voiced concerns that probably female candidates had a harder time fulfilling the mobility criterion because of family or motherhood reasons. Respondents addressed the issue of decreased mobility of women after having children.

In the **Slovenian** SSH department two women respondents noted that living abroad should not be required from young female researchers at the beginning of their career, when they may have small children, because the way of life and mentality in Slovenia do not facilitate women to go abroad and very few husbands would go with their wives. They also expect only women (as mothers) to suffer from decreased mobility.

A STEM committee member in **the Netherlands** considers the required mobility of early career researchers to be one of the reasons for the small number of women in his field and links this to family circumstances:

Respondent: But I think that is the big problem. Yes, the whole system how you get such a job, right? You cannot plan it and say: Now you do a postdoc there. And then I will become full professor there. It is more of a random walk. You get a postdoc position there, then you get your second position in another country. And then finally you get a [permanent] job, but this is maybe in a third country, right? Or at least not in the same city. And if then both, men, women have a job, it is going to be very, very difficult of course. And if you go in such a

random walk through the entire world, or at least Europe. And I think that is one of the reasons why we do not have so many women.

Interviewer: And how do you mean that? Because they can allow that randomness less?

Respondent: Yes, but I think there is no solution. We want candidates who have that international experience. It is expected that they do a postdoc here and there and then this random component is inherent. And yes, that is of course very hard to combine with a family. (NL, STEM, M)

The respondent calls the career system in academia “*a random walk*” which demands multiple moves across positions and countries. He thinks women are less able to deal with this “*randomness*” because of family responsibilities. Other respondents in the Dutch STEM department also argued that it is more difficult for women to fulfil the criterion of international work experience. They make a link between women and motherhood and argue that women can be less internationally mobile because of family duties. Also in the Dutch SSH department respondents consider experience abroad to be important. They too argue that this can be more problematic for women as they are perceived as the main caregivers in a family.

The **Icelandic** report also problematizes international mobility for women because family conditions can prevent opportunities for women to go abroad.

In conclusion, we find that in all countries, except for Switzerland, respondents expect women early career researchers to be unable to acquire international work experience. We find that it is self-evident for respondents that having a family is problematic for women academics only because of the underlying assumption that women are the care-takers in a family. Exceptions (for example women without children or partners or women going abroad without problems) are not seen. The perception that combining parenthood and an academic career is incompatible for women could not only influence their evaluation of women candidates’ academic excellence it could also cause women to self-select out of academia or discourage them from applying for positions.

2.3 Postdoc recruitment and selection via informal networks

The third gender practice we found in the data is the informal recruitment and selection of postdoc researchers. Our data showed that recruitment and selection for postdoc positions occurs via informal networks in all countries. We will first describe the role of informal networks in postdoc recruitment. Then, we will elaborate on informal recruitment and selection as a gender practice.

2.3.1. Postdoc recruitment

The universities in Switzerland, the Netherlands, Italy, and Belgium have postdoc positions available for early career researchers that are financed by external funding. There is no formal position of postdoc in Slovenia, but the selected SSH department has a position that is similar to a postdoc: the Research Assistant. In the STEM department in Slovenia this is an Assistant with a PhD. For the ease of understanding we will call these Slovenian positions “postdoc”. Because Iceland has a grant system and does not openly advertise postdoc positions, the Icelandic report does not elaborate on

recruitment and selection practices for this position. Therefore, we will describe the practices in Italy, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Slovenia, and Belgium in this section. From the reports of the Netherlands and Switzerland we learn that postdoc positions can be separated in two types: project postdocs and fellowship postdocs. External grant funding, acquired by staff members, funds the first type of position (“**project postdocs**”). The second type of position is funded by fellowships, acquired by the postdocs themselves (“**fellowship postdocs**”). Fellowship postdocs can decide, in consultation with a host institution, where they will take their grant. Therefore, fellowship postdocs are not recruited and selected, but they approach research group leaders themselves. Project postdocs are thus the postdoc positions that are being recruited and selected for. We find that in Italy, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Belgium most postdoc positions are funded through external grant funding and therefore postdocs are given temporary employment during the project duration of the grant. The Belgian report reveals that this project-based employment influences the type of candidate that is being searched for:

The nature, structure and time-frame of the postdoctoral project, as well as its formal obligations, put gatekeepers into a lot of pressure as to who they are willing to appoint, who they think would be likely to be less risky and able to meet with these project frames and pressures. (p. 25)

This quote reveals a number of important aspects that play a role in postdoc recruitment, not only in Belgium but in all countries: time pressure, ability to conduct the research, and preference for a non-risky candidate. As projects need to be conducted in a certain time frame, project supervisors often experience pressure to find a candidate who can do the job and who can start at short notice. Because of this, they prefer candidates who they consider risk free. As a result, recruitment for such postdoc positions, even if openly advertised, mainly happens via informal networks. From the reports of all countries we learn that the power to select applicants lies with the person(s) who obtained the project funding.

The **Swiss** report shows that in the STEM department postdocs are recruited via both open and closed hiring. Even though the regulations do not require a selection committee and in theory project leaders can hire whomever they want, most of the respondents in the STEM and SSH department declared that usually they do not hire a person on their own but they set up an informal selection committee. A respondent in the Swiss STEM department argues that postdoc recruitment comes with time constraints. He explains that hiring a postdoc on an externally funded project obliges him to make compromises as the project has its own time agenda. So his strategy is to hire a person “*who can start immediately [on the first day of the project], who will be good for the project but perhaps not super-brilliant, not top class, right, because all the same we are in competition on the market.*”

In the **Italian** report we find that in both the STEM and the SSH department it is formal procedure to set up a selection committee for postdoc selection, however in practice the ‘right’ candidate is identified through an informal selection process before the formal selection procedure begins:

“What can I say? The official procedure requires us to have – I think rightly so – selections and competitions. But in our case it’s a procedure that in many situations is rather bogus, it must

be said. I mean the grant is awarded on the basis of a research project. After winning a project you have to assemble the team, and how do I assemble the team? I do so on the basis of my knowledge about people who are available, meaning that at the moment they have no other commitments, are not involved in other activities, who are interested in participating in the research, and of course who have a certain competence in the research commissioned. A postdoctoral grant is rather demanding and you have to make sure that there is some candidate. So first you talk to these people, you ask about their availability, and so on, and then the call is published. Someone else may apply, and it is interesting to have an interaction with someone you don't know. But this is an exception. In ninety per cent of cases, calls are specific. They're not general or generic. They ask for research experience, particular skills, sometimes also publications in certain areas. So self-selection is very evident." (IT, SSH, M).

The Italian report shows that committee members consider it the most effective way to select a postdoc by ensuring that a candidate is already known and considered suitable and to then construct a call in which the profile is as similar as possible to that candidate. It may happen that other people apply and are included in a short list for an interview, but the likelihood of them obtaining the position is very low. From the report we learn that often the competition is a means to formalize a choice already made, especially on the basis of previous collaborations. The report reveals that committee members in the SSH department prefer candidates who are already known because they have already worked in the department or have already collaborated on projects carried out by members of the department. Committee members in the STEM department prefer known candidates because members of national and international networks bring them forward as good candidates.

The findings in **Belgium** show that there is no standardized call for job postings for postdoc positions, however, in some cases job postings are disseminated via internal mailing lists or other networks, through the university or via associations of the particular field. Nevertheless, in most, if not all, the cases of postdoc recruitment that were mentioned by the respondents they already had somebody in mind for the position in question. From the report we learn that internal and external networks (mailing lists) were considered key in postdoc recruitment as these networks can provide potential candidates.

In the **Slovenian** report we find that in the SSH department the Research Assistant position falls under the promotion system in which academic staff automatically progress from one position to another according to internal research criteria. Therefore, there are no vacant positions and public announcements. In the STEM department temporary positions foreseen for the duration of projects are not selected according to an official job description and requirements. Nevertheless, in the STEM department a committee consisting of two members is responsible for the selection of postdoc positions, but we find that selection occurs based on the “*known candidate*”.

From the report of **the Netherlands** we learn that no formal policy is in place for the recruitment and selection of postdocs in both departments. Also, postdoc supervisors do not have to justify their choice of candidate, as it is not required to write an appointment report. Within the SSH department, the postdoc position is only recently becoming more prevalent with the increase of externally acquired research funding. The report reveals that in both departments a few job postings for postdoc openings have been publicly advertised, however, the majority of the postdocs have been recruited

informally. Project postdocs are funded by external grant funding and one of the respondents in the STEM department explains that the decision-making power therefore lies with the researcher who acquired the funding:

Yes, postdocs almost always go via the internal network. You know, postdocs and PhD students, they are being paid by projects. People apply for those projects. Those projects are in fact sort of the property of those people. And thus they can decide who will be the PhD student or postdoc. (NL, STEM, M)

This quote shows that the respondent considers a project funded through external funding the “property” of the grant holder which provides these grant holders the freedom to hire postdocs via informal networks.

Concluding, we find that only in Italy a formal procedure for postdoc recruitment and selection is in place (see Table 2 on page 27). However, the formal procedure is more a kind of window dressing, because the preferred candidate is selected through an informal process. We find that also in all other countries postdocs are recruited via informal networks. Because of time pressure, candidates tend to be selected based on suitability and low risk instead of excellence. In all countries, postdocs are selected at the discretion of the project leaders who tend to have a preference for candidates within their network. Therefore, the decision-making power lies with the researchers who acquired funding and who are not held accountable for their selection decisions. That this informal hiring decreases the pool of candidates because only early career academics in their network are being considered is not seen as an issue. The implication of informal hiring is that early career academics need to have a network in order to acquire positions.

2.3.2. Informal recruitment and selection as a gender practice

In the reports of the Netherlands and Belgium we found reflections on how recruitment and selection of postdocs via informal networks is a gender practice. In the reports of Switzerland, Italy, Slovenia, and Iceland we did not find such reflections.

In the STEM department of **the Netherlands**, a respondent reveals how gender is practiced via informal recruitment: *PhD students are being recruited. Postdocs not, actually. Assistant professors for example are explicitly openly recruited. So actually the postdoc level is the most, the old boys network and the ‘wheelbarrows’ that you have (NL, STEM, M)*. This respondent explains that the postdoc level is the only level at which the recruitment is primarily closed, which makes candidates dependent on the “old boys network” and the “wheelbarrows” (meaning the support of people in one’s network). The respondent did not reflect on the gendered implications of these networks. Because scientific staff in the STEM department (92% men assistant professors, 100% men associate professors and 93% men full professors in 2014) use their “old boys networks” for recruiting postdocs, the chances are small that women candidates are found in these networks. Moreover, since there are only two women in the department who are in the position to apply for external funding to finance postdoc positions (assistant, associate, and full professors), it is mainly men who have grant capacity to recruit postdocs. Additionally, STEM respondents argued that they know all people in their field and that therefore they can rely on using their network in the recruitment of candidates. This makes

informal recruitment even more problematic, as they might overlook potential candidates outside their (male) networks.

We also find evidence for gender inequalities in social networks in the report of **Belgium**. In the university, selection based on trust is strong and the report states that this could enhance gender inequality, because of networking preferences; men identifying with the similar, already present male researchers, who are their mentees or affiliated researchers or known to them through the internal network.

In conclusion, recruitment of postdocs, particularly in the STEM field, mainly falls to the responsibility of men researchers as they hold the majority of academic positions that enable the acquiring of external grant funding to finance postdoc positions. Therefore, postdoc recruitment more often occurs in 'old boys networks' than in networks with an equal representation of men and women. Chances are small that women candidates are found in these old boys networks and therefore grant holders can easily overlook women candidates. Moreover, informal networks are the breeding ground for micro-political processes, where academics can use their power informally to recruit applicants. Since the postdoc position is the first step in an academic career, this is a crucial stage in which female talent can be lost, particularly by selecting postdocs via informal (male) networks.

Table 2: Postdoc recruitment

Country	Formal procedure?	Informal recruitment?
CH	No	Yes
IT	Yes	Yes
IS	N.A.	N.A.
BE	No	Yes
NL	No	Yes
SI	No	Yes

2.4 Preferring internal candidates for assistant professor positions

The fourth and last gender practice we identified in the data is that selection committee members prefer internal candidates (researchers who are already working in the department) for assistant professor positions. This practice shows similarities with the third practice of informal recruitment and selection of postdoc researchers but we describe this practice separately because recruitment and selection for assistant professor positions is more formalized and does not solely occur via informal networks.

2.4.1. Assistant professor recruitment

We find that in **Switzerland** selection procedures for assistant professor positions are formalized and respondents argue that the guidelines strongly direct the behaviour of selection committee members. It is obligatory to advertise job postings for assistant professorships on the university website. The report does not elaborate on informal recruitment at assistant professor level but it does reveal cases in both the STEM and the SSH department where internal candidates were preferred over candidates from outside the university.

In the report of **Italy** we find that the selection procedure for assistant professorships is formalized. Job postings are published and circulated internationally to provide a large pool of applicants. However, the report reveals that even though assistant professor candidates in the STEM department are searched outside their own group, informal (international) networks play an important role in recruitment for assistant professor positions and the identification of candidates. In the SSH department, informal networks are important in the recruitment process for assistant professors too. In most cases, the persons selected in the SSH department are already known to the department and have worked with some of its members. Respondents explain that the most important reason for hiring internal candidates is the scarcity of assistant professor positions. Committee members feel responsible to develop the careers of their early career colleagues and therefore want to hire them on an assistant professorship in the rare case a position is opened.

The **Belgian** university makes use of a European Charter for Researchers and a Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers. Similar to Switzerland and Italy, the selection procedure is formalized. We find in the report that *“institutional rootedness or engagement”* is considered very important in the selection of assistant professors. Therefore, internal candidates tend to have an advantage in the selection process because respondents consider it easier to evaluate their *“fit”* in the department because they are already there. On the contrary, external candidates, despite their scientific excellence, are considered more risky. Respondents expressed concerns about external candidates whether they will *“fit”*, will *“stay”*, and whether they have *“local interests at heart and mind”*.

In **Slovenia**, we find a difference in organisational policy between the SSH and the STEM department. In the STEM department assistant professor positions are publicly advertised and a committee of three members is composed. Nevertheless, assistant professorships are usually offered to colleagues who have already worked and studied in the department because of reciprocal trust, understanding and compatibility. In contrast, in the SSH department, no selection and recruitment procedure is set up because research staff members already employed in the institution are promoted to assistant professorships via the promotion system, without requiring that a job position became vacant.

In **the Netherlands** policy requires that an assistant professor vacancy is openly advertised. However, two respondents in the STEM department mentioned cases in which an assistant professor was selected without a formal procedure. Exceptions to the rule can thus be made. In one case the procedure was informal because the assistant professor hire was part of a dual hire. The other case (in another research department in

the Science faculty) was a closed procedure because of an “*extraordinary candidate*”, according to the respondent: “*Well, that is just someone who we really want to get back here. And um, that is a procedure, that has not even been advertised.*” Somewhat later he explains: “*So yes, it is often the case that we provide a tailor made solution in cases that we really want to have a certain person*” (NL, STEM, M). Although this was not an internal candidate, it was someone who had been working in the department and therefore was known to the institute. The exceptions show that when people on power positions want to hire a particular researcher, special arrangements can be made and one can diverge from the formal policy. This seems to happen without sanctions, which can encourage maintaining this practice. Furthermore, committee members explained that it is common to informally ask potential candidates in their network to apply for a position.

A respondent in the Dutch SSH department stated that faculty policy changed a couple of years ago demanding that vacancies are externally advertised. However, the report shows cases where assistant professors have been appointed via closed hiring, i.e., hiring without a formal procedure. In these cases, early career researchers have been recruited via informal networks or internal candidates have been appointed as assistant professor. A respondent argued that starting a formal procedure for temporary positions (for example a one year assistant professor position) is a time-consuming and costly exercise, which is not worth the effort. Another respondent explained that she hired an assistant professor informally because she needed a candidate in due time who could cover a certain part of the curriculum. We also find that in case of an open procedure internal candidates are often considered or even preferred for assistant professor positions because internal candidates are considered less risky than external candidates.

In **Iceland** job postings for assistant professorships are publicly advertised and the selection procedure occurs according to the university regulation. Similar to the findings in Belgium respondents in the Icelandic STEM department argue that a “*fit*” in the faculty or being a “*team member*” are important in the selection of assistant professors. One committee member is very critical of these criteria and points out that the criterion of “*fit*” increases the likelihood of nepotism in the selection process. Furthermore, the report reveals that the hiring process is influenced both by language preferences, cultural preferences and personal relationships. Committee members prefer candidates from Iceland or candidates who speak Icelandic. Also in the Icelandic SSH department respondents argue that nepotism can influence recruitment and selection procedures:

The advertisement, if you are thinking about designing it [around a candidate] and people are trying to hire some candidates beforehand then the advertisement is the place for that. [...] There have been many occasions where the advertisement has basically been designed for someone, and that only one candidate can apply for [that position], there have been many occasions, I have often seen that, maybe not recently but I remember that. [...] [The advertisement] is definitely the place for all kinds of discrimination. (IS, SSH, M)

In the Icelandic STEM department as well as the SSH department respondents argue that being part of a small society and academic community is one of the difficulties the committee members have to face because they have to evaluate “*applications from someone that has been working within the university for some time or is in someway connected to [the member], maybe ex students, even sessional teachers or someone that has had connections to the faculty for some time*” (IS, SSH, M).

To summarize, in contrast to postdoc recruitment and selection, the procedures for assistant professors are formalized in all institutions except for the Slovenian SSH department. However, we find in all countries a preference for internal candidates and some informal recruitment. In the competition between internal and external candidates, the internal candidates are preferred because they seem to fit best and they are trustworthy. Moreover, we find in Italy that the scarcity of assistant professor positions leads committee members to prefer internal candidates because they perceive it as their responsibility to develop the careers of early career researchers.

2.4.2. Preferring internal candidates as a gender practice

Previous section showed the importance of perceived fit in the department and low risk of candidates for assistant professor positions. We found that this facilitates the hiring of internal candidates. However, it raises the question which internal candidates are perceived to fit and to be low risk? And who are the selection decision makers? Our data show that, despite gender policies on the formation of selection committees, the majority of selection committee members as well as the committee members on powerful positions (e.g., the chair of the committee) are men. As a result, decision-making power often lies in the hands of men researchers. Furthermore, scouting and recruitment for assistant professor positions often occur via male networks.

In the report of **Iceland** we find that recruiting and selecting assistant professors via networks can be problematic for women candidates. The authors of the Icelandic report argue:

Van den Brink & Benschop (2012) point out that women are less likely than men to benefit from networks, that could be one of the explanations for why there is not more equal representation of women and men in that [SSH] faculty. (p. 23-24)

From this excerpt we learn that using networks in recruitment and selection of assistant professors can put women at a disadvantage. Furthermore, in the Icelandic report we find that a STEM respondent explains that nepotistic practices¹ play a role in recruitment and selection. He reflects on the possible effect of nepotism on gender equality:

I wonder if nepotism or something like that [impacts gender equality], because there is this bias in the field, and [nepotism] can of course lead to the bias not correcting itself. It is a possibility, but otherwise no [gender does not matter], not at all. (IS, STEM, M)

The respondent argues that there is a gender bias in the field (in favour of men) and that nepotism can intensify this bias. This implies that women candidates for assistant professor positions are at a disadvantage.

Moreover, we have seen in section 2.1 that women academics are perceived to fit the norm of the ideal academic less than men academics. This could influence decisions of committee members when evaluating the perceived fit and riskiness of (internal)

¹ Practice of appointing relatives and friends in one's organization to positions for which outsiders might be better qualified (<http://www.businessdictionary.com/>)

women candidates for assistant professor positions. The **Belgian** report reveals that a respondent in the SSH department explained the importance of recommendation letters in determining the “*potential*” of candidates for an assistant professor position. The authors of the report argue that this shows the significance of gatekeepers’ previous knowledge of candidates or of recommendations from their network connections. The authors of the Belgian report argue that candidates who have access to networks of gatekeepers in recruitment processes are at an advantage compared to those who do not. The data shows that female researchers are disadvantaged in building social networks and can therefore rely less on support from internal and external colleagues.

Also the results in the STEM department in **the Netherlands** show that the networks and relationships with (former) colleagues of a candidate are important to become shortlisted for an assistant professor position. Informal networks are used for getting access to possible candidates but also for acquiring additional information on candidates. Furthermore, informal networks are used for scouting: the process in which “*applicants are actively invited to apply through the formal or informal networks which occur in closed – but also in some open – recruitment*” (Van den Brink, 2010, p. 115). Similar to Belgium, in the Dutch STEM department recommendation letters play an important role in the selection of candidates. Thus, network ties are very important in getting access to an assistant professor position and as we have seen in section 2.3.2. Women tend to fall outside of networks, particularly in the STEM department.

In conclusion, the power to select assistant professors mainly lies with men committee members. The results show that they use their male networks to recruit candidates with the risk of neglecting potential women candidates outside these networks. Furthermore, as committee members prefer internal candidates they look for candidates whom they perceive to fit in the department and to be low risk. Because committee members expect that women are incompatible with the norm of the ideal academic and incompatible with academic excellence (see section 2.1) the chances that women are among the candidates who they consider low risk are slim. Instead, men candidates, who are more similar to men decision-makers, are preferred based on fit and trust.

CONCLUSION

When looking at the four gender practices we identified, an interesting reality emerges. The first gender practice revealed that committee members argue that they are looking for the ideal academic when recruiting and selecting postdocs and assistant professors. The findings show that the construction of the ideal academic is gendered. We found that committee members often perceive women to be incompatible with the ideal academic and incompatible with excellence because women are automatically linked to mothers and in turn, mothers are assumed to be unable to dedicate sufficient time to their academic careers. This gender practice arises outside the awareness of committee members. Most, if not all, respondents argue that academic excellence is a gender-neutral criterion and can therefore be applied during recruitment and selection procedures without discriminating women candidates.

The second gender practice showed that international mobility is connected to academic excellence and applied as a formal or tacit criterion in recruitment and selection procedures for early career researchers. We revealed the gendered construction of the criterion of international mobility. Because committee members link women to motherhood and assume that motherhood will create difficulties for women to be internationally mobile, committee members expect women to be unable to meet this selection criterion. These implicit expectations held by committee members of women as immobile impacts committee members' perceptions of women as suitable candidates for early career positions.

The third and fourth gender practice uncover that in reality committee members prefer to hire candidates whom they already know; either candidates from their networks or internal candidates working in their department. These findings are in contrast to the first and second gender practice that assume that excellence is the main criterion in recruitment and selection and international mobility is required from early career researchers. We find that in reality excellence can be compromised for the purpose of hiring a candidate whom committee members trust and therefore consider low risk. The data show that selecting trustworthy and low-risk candidates, found internally or via informal networks, favours men over women early career researchers. Combined with the low accountability for selection decisions, gender practices in recruitment and selection can be maintained.

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