

Discussions by discipline: Astronomy

The Astronomy discussion session was attended by 6 female astronomers spanning the full career range, in terms of seniority (2 junior, 1 mid career, 3 senior).

The session started with a presentation (given by F. Primas) that first introduced the audience to the gender-related actions and numbers within the International Astronomical Union and (overall, 18.5% female vs 81.5% male) and then moved on to the main results from the Joint Global Survey for the field of astronomy.

The key aspects that were touched upon during the presentation can be labelled as follows: fairness (how the respondents to the survey felt they had been or were being treated by their employers), career progression (compared to colleagues from the same year of study and also in terms of parenthood affecting the speed of their career progression), discrimination by gender, salaries (compared to their colleagues and to their partners) and last but not least sexual harassment.

The following discussion mainly focused on fairness, on discrimination and on harassment. Despite the small crowd, each participant shared their experiences and the stumbling blocks they had encountered in their career. In the early years, it emerged that flexibility (in terms of organizational and/or financial support) in travelling with babies or small children to specialised schools or scientific meetings is an important aspect to further develop one's career. Ideally, meeting organizers shall be more sensitive to these issues as sometimes it's not just a matter of money but more of a matter of being understanding and supportive. Discrimination by gender was experienced in different ways by all three senior astronomers, who remarked how often women are left out of important decisions. Finally, it was recognised that sexual harassment is an important issue that is emerging from several STEM fields at many levels, but especially among the young generations. This is damaging the people, it is undermining their curiosity and interest in STEM fields and in turn is affecting the entire field. Awareness campaigns that macho/harassing attitudes are vile behaviours shall be the very first step to start tackling these issues.