

75inQ Public Comment:

Communication on small modular reactors

Introduction

75inQ welcomes the Commission's initiative in pooling resources and coordination to increase the efficacy of the European Industrial Alliance on Small Modular Reactors. The working document highlights the various challenges the alliance may face in its next phases of action. Our opinion is that the European Commission's communication could help curb those by encouraging gender equality in the development of these projects.

On maintaining European leadership

Great concern is expressed in the document regarding the persistence of European leadership in nuclear energy. Several industry groups, and the Commission itself,¹ express the need, in the nuclear field, for an increasing number of trained professionals in order to maintain this position. An easy fix to this issue is to promote the orientation of women, as young professionals but also as students, towards these fields. Industry data is clear: they are underrepresented within the workforce. In terms of new hires in the nuclear industry, 28.8% of them are women. However, only 20.6% of the new hires of STEM professionals and workers in the nuclear sector are women². These statistics show that the industry is diversifying at a much slower pace than displayed, and that many of the new hires counted in the first statistic work in administration, HR, and fields generally unrelated to nuclear engineering. At the university level, women consistently outperform men, even in engineering fields³.

¹ COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION Nuclear Illustrative Programme presented under Article 40 of the Euratom Treaty for the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee
OM/2025/315 final

² OECD/NEA (2023), *Gender Balance in the Nuclear Sector*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/f11a652d-en>.

³ Lee, W. C., & Matusovich, H. M. (2016). A Model Of Co-Curricular Support For Undergraduate Engineering Students. *Journal Of Engineering Education*, 105(3), 406-430. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jee.20123>

If one seeks to maintain European dominance in nuclear R&D, an easy fix is thus to bring the share of women to that of men. This means, not to reduce the current workforce nor reduce the number of men hired each year, but to hire the same number of women. This will ensure highly skilled graduates enter the workforce, and that the expected shortage in staff is filled.

This solution cannot be pursued if the share of women pursuing STEM education does not rise. As shown before, women outperform men at the university level. However, in parallel, they are more likely to abandon these programmes along the way. Research shows these rates are explained by social factors such as the unfriendliness of the STEM professional fields towards women and the lack of professional role models.⁴

In any case, as the Alliance's activities are going to expand the size of the workforce, it is important that these new areas do not perpetuate ongoing and self-reinforcing gender inequalities. Instead of letting those ingrain themselves any further, they should be tackled ex-ante by setting clear intentions, which sends a clear message both to recruiters and potential new female hires.

In such a sense, the EU Commission communication should include a mention of gender mainstreaming.

On increasing trust in SMRs and nuclear power

The working document makes mention of another challenge: that of public distrust in nuclear energy. The public distrust in nuclear facilities is present in both female and male populations, but is highly overrepresented in women.⁵ In women, this distrust is carried by doubts on the safety of the installations.⁶ Where the communication promotes a better integration of the female population in the field, as well as awareness campaigns targeting women's concerns with the energy source, it may significantly decrease public distrust in SMRs.

Suggestions

To cater to these concerns, we thus suggest that the communication include the following;

1. That it advises partners of the Alliance to ensure gender parity in employment;
2. That it encourages national action promoting nuclear engineering as career and education paths for women;
3. That it encourages national awareness campaigns on the safety of nuclear SMEs targeted towards women;

⁴ Lee, W. C., & Matusovich, H. M. (2016). A Model Of Co-Curricular Support For Undergraduate Engineering Students. *Journal Of Engineering Education*, 105(3), 406-430. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jee.20123>

⁵ <https://www.radiantenergygroup.com/reports/analysis-of-the-gender-gap-in-nuclear-support>

⁶ <https://www.radiantenergygroup.com/reports/analysis-of-the-gender-gap-in-nuclear-support>

4. That it encourages overall gender mainstreaming in the activities of the alliance to ensure the sustainable expansion of the field.

About 75InQ:

The 75inQ foundation works to accelerate the transition to sustainable energy by promoting gender equality in line with the Sustainable Development Goals developed by the United Nations. The Dutch foundation conducts research, awareness campaigns, community outreach and facilitation to pursue these objectives. 75inQ focuses on SDG7 and SDG5 by accelerating diversity in the energy sector towards a more inclusive and sustainable energy transition. 75inQ has an active community of 1400 female professionals in the energy sector.

