

## **GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE EVALUATION OF SUBMISSIONS TO ECONOMICS CONFERENCES: Evidence that male referees favour papers by men**

Economic research papers written by women are less likely to be accepted for presentation at top academic conferences than those written by men, according to a study by **Laura Hospido** and **Carlos Sanz**, to be presented at the annual congress of the European Economic Association (EEA) in Manchester in August 2019.

Their analysis indicates that the gender gap is entirely driven by male referees: female referees evaluate male and female-authored papers similarly, but male referees are more favourable towards papers written by men.

Using unique data from the submissions to three general interest academic conferences – the EEA annual congress in 2015-2017, the annual meeting of the Spanish Economic Association in 2012-2017, and the spring meeting of Young Economists in 2017 – the researchers find that all-female-authored papers are 3.2 percentage points (6.8%) less likely to be accepted than all-male-authored papers.

This gap is present after controlling for several factors that correlate with gender and acceptance rates: number of authors, referee fixed effects, field, citations of the paper in the submission year, previous publication record of the authors, and the quality of the affiliations of the authors.

These findings have direct policy implications for the design of systems to evaluate research and, more specifically, to select papers for conferences. In particular, they imply that a more gender-balanced pool of referees would lead to more gender-neutral acceptance decisions.

### **More...**

Economics remains a male-dominated field. For example, in the United States, women account for 33% of new PhDs, 29% of assistant professors at PhD-granting departments, and only 14% of full professors (Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession, 2017). Although the share of women in economics has grown, it is currently lower than in STEM fields. This persistent underrepresentation of women is attracting much attention in academic research.

Conferences are an essential part of academic life. They are useful to receive feedback, improve presentation and communication skills, get to know fellow economists in the field, hear about the latest research, gain visibility, and develop networking and future collaborations. Hence, the presence of gender gaps in the evaluation process may have a substantial impact on the professional careers of economists.

This study begins by showing that a 1 percentage point rise in the share of male authors is associated with a 0.05 percentage point rise in the probability that the paper is accepted. Switching from an all-female-authored to an all-male-authored paper increases the probability of acceptance by 5.4 percentage points. Given the baseline rate of acceptance for papers with all male authors (47.1%), this amounts to an 11.5% effect.

The researchers then study whether this gap can be explained by factors that correlate with gender and acceptance rates: (i) given that women are more likely to be single authors, they include number of authors indicators, (ii) to account for the possible non-random assignment of papers to referees, they add referee fixed effects, (iii) to control for differences across fields, they include several field dummies, (iv) to account for possible gender differences in the quality of papers, they control for the citations of the paper, (v) to account for the prominence of the authors, they control for their previous publication record (number of publications in a set of top journals in the years before the submission), and (vi) to account for the institutions of the authors, they control for the ranking of the affiliations of the authors.

After taking these factors into account, the gender gap is reduced but still sizable (3.2 percentage points, or 6.8%) and statistically significant.

The researchers also find that the gap is entirely driven by male referees: female referees evaluate male and female-authored papers similarly, but male referees are more favourable towards papers written by men.

Finally, they discuss possible mechanisms behind their results and conclude that connections can easily account for the heterogeneity results. In particular, connections can create the gender gap if, as suggested by previous studies (such as [Sandström and Hällsten, 2007](#); or [Zinovyeva and Bagues, 2015](#)), connections play a role in evaluations – that is, referees are more likely to evaluate positively a paper written by someone they have a personal bond with.

Connections can also create the gender gap if male economists are better connected than female economists (as found, for example, by [Ductor, Goyal, and Prummer, 2018](#); and [Hilmer and Hilmer, 2007](#)).

Consistent with this mechanism, the researchers find that there is no gender gap in the job market sessions of the annual meeting of the Spanish Economic Association. This type of submission is intended for candidates to present their job market papers, representing a context in which connections between authors and referees are arguably low, as job market candidates are entering the academic environment and have not had much time to develop networks.

These findings have direct policy implications for the design of systems to evaluate research and, more specifically, to select papers for conferences. In particular, they imply that a more gender-balanced pool of referees would lead to more gender-neutral acceptance decisions.

ENDS

**Contact:**

Laura Hospido, Bank of Spain and IZA, [laura.hospido@bde.es](mailto:laura.hospido@bde.es)  
Carlos Sanz, Bank of Spain, [carlossanz@bde.es](mailto:carlossanz@bde.es)