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## Organization of gender-balanced events: a case of practice, National Meeting in Optics 2021

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### Organization of gender-balanced events: a case of practice, National Meeting in Optics 2021

Speaker: Martina Delgado-Pinar, Vice Chair of the Women in Optics and Photonics Committee of SEDOPTICA, in representation of the organizing committee of RNO2021  
<https://www.rno2021.es/#comite-organizador>

A clear example of the gender imbalance in STEM fields is the under-representation of women scientists in the most visible events (plenary and invited talks) at conferences and workshops. The phenomenon of all-male panels is not unusual, although it is true that, in recent years, they have been denounced by researchers themselves as a case of misconduct.

To overcome this barrier for women, a collective effort must be made by the entire scientific community. In this respect, the involvement and support of scientific societies and institutions is crucial in order to positively reinforce measures against gender bias in the organization of events. The example that will be presented in this contribution is the organization of the National Meeting in Optics 2021 ([www.rno2021.es](http://www.rno2021.es)), which was carried out by the Women in Optics and Photonics Committee (MOF, for its acronym in Spanish) of the National Optical Society in Spain, SEDOPTICA ([www.sedoptica.es](http://www.sedoptica.es)).

SEDOPTICA approved in 2020 an internal code of conduct for its committees with a series of recommendations for the organization of gender-balanced events. This code of conduct was drafted and promoted by SEDOPTICA-MOF, and included aspects such as the ratio of men/women in invited and non-invited talks, scientific committees and the need to avoid the usual allocation of administrative roles to women while men hold the more visible and science-related positions. This code can be read in [1].

In 2021, the National Meeting in Optics (RNO) 2021 was organised by SEDOPTICA-MOF. It is a triennial congress organized by the SEDOPTICA, which has been held for more than 30 years. Each RNO brings together an average of 200 professionals from the different topics of Optics and Photonics in Spain and is where the latest scientific and technological advances in this field are presented. The 2021 organizing committee placed special emphasis on creating an equal and attractive congress for females and younger researchers.

To this end, the organizing committee wanted to highlight the role of women in Optics and Photonics, with a dedicated topic at the meeting, and a round table to discuss gender issues in scientific careers, with the participation of four leading women in research and industry. The plenary speakers were two world-leading researchers: Professor Jannick Rolland (University of Rochester) in visual science and imaging, and Professor Jelena Vucovick (Stanford University) in quantum and nonlinear optics. It is worth noting that these two women were delighted to participate in this national meeting, even when their schedules were difficult to fit into the meeting's timetable, and we are sure that the nature of the event was a reason for them to collaborate with us. Their talks were recorded and can be viewed at [2].

In addition, special care was taken to ensure a balanced ratio of male and female speakers at every session. Remarkably, it is worth noting that even in areas such as Optoelectronics, a committee that has a proportion of women below 20%, the proportion of female speakers was approximately 50%. Another example of positive action is that the participants in the competition for the best contribution by young researchers, RNO2021 award, showed an approximately 50% ratio between men and women. Even when there were no explicit criteria for including gender aspects in the evaluation of the contribution, there were three women among the five finalists in the context. These last three data indicate that the scientific level of female researchers

is as good as that of their male counterparts. Hence, the usual argument relating the lack of women in representative positions in science to scientific reasons does not apply when women have the right conditions for their participation.

As the code of conduct approved by SEDOPTICA states, the imbalance between men and women in STEM fields is no reason to disregard the possibility of equal and diverse events maintaining a high scientific level. RNO2021 is an example of this. The crucial point is to get out of the usual comfort zone for the selection of speakers and, in the case of not directly knowing women in certain fields, just get out of your personal circle and ask other researchers for suggestions. There are more and more associations and initiatives that can help with this, so: take action!

*References.*

[1]<https://areamujersedoptica.wordpress.com/2020/07/10/documento-de-recomendaciones-a-los-comites-de-sedoptica-para-evitar-el-sesgo-de-genero/> , last visit 15/01/2022

[2] Prof. Jannick Rolland <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MSzqeqh2DS4>

Prof. Jelena Vucovick <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzhiOkpmGlc>

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