iDiv Funding Review 2012 - 2024

January 2025

1. Background

iDiv has established various mechanisms to produce cutting-edge integrative biodiversity science and to facilitate our research programme, including the iDiv Flexpool, Strategic Projects and Support Units. The Flexpool has been established to stimulate integrative and innovative research and to strengthen links between iDiv members and with global networks and initiatives. Support Units provide scientific support to enable integrative biodiversity research at consortium level and contribute specialised expertise, e.g. in bioinformatics, high performance computing, etc. Strategic Projects focus on approaches, networks or platforms of particular strategic importance for iDiv to advance basic research and solutions for society.

Here, we take a look at the funding decisions of these mechanisms over the entire DFG funding period (2012-2024) and give an overview of how the funds were distributed across iDiv, with a particular focus on the approval rates for the different institutions and by gender. Some funding mechanisms were open to full members (usually Professors, Heads of Departments, Senior Researchers), such as the Regular Flexpool or Strategic Projects and Support Units, while others (Flexpool Support Fund) were specifically aimed at associate members (typically early-career researchers). Therefore, we also assess these mechanisms individually to see if there was any gender bias in funding between early-career and senior researchers.

While details may vary from call to call, proposals have generally been evaluated against the following criteria: Scientific quality, supporting iDiv's research program and missions, integration among iDiv members and/or between research areas.

2. Results

We included a total of 20 calls with 325 proposals submitted and 208 approved projects (171 regular Flexpool proposals (55 PhD, 116 Postdoc), 62 Flexpool Support Fund proposals, 41 Flexpool Fast-Track proposals, 12 Flexpool Strategic Initiatives, 20 Support Unit proposals and 26 Strategic Project proposals). In a few cases, projects had to be excluded because documentation on rejected proposals was no longer available (9 proposals between 2013 and 2015) or because the PIs were affiliated with research institutions outside the current iDiv consortium (9 proposals between 2016 and 2018).

2.1 Funding rate by institution

Our data suggest no systematic bias in the distribution of funding across the iDiv consortium (Figure 1). On average, proposals from any of the participating institutions have a 60-70%

chance of being funded. iDiv has never set a quota for the distribution of funds within the consortium, so these figures should be expected to vary over time with some institutions having either very few or almost all proposals funded in individual years (Appendix: Table 1). However, approval rates are very balanced over longer periods of time.

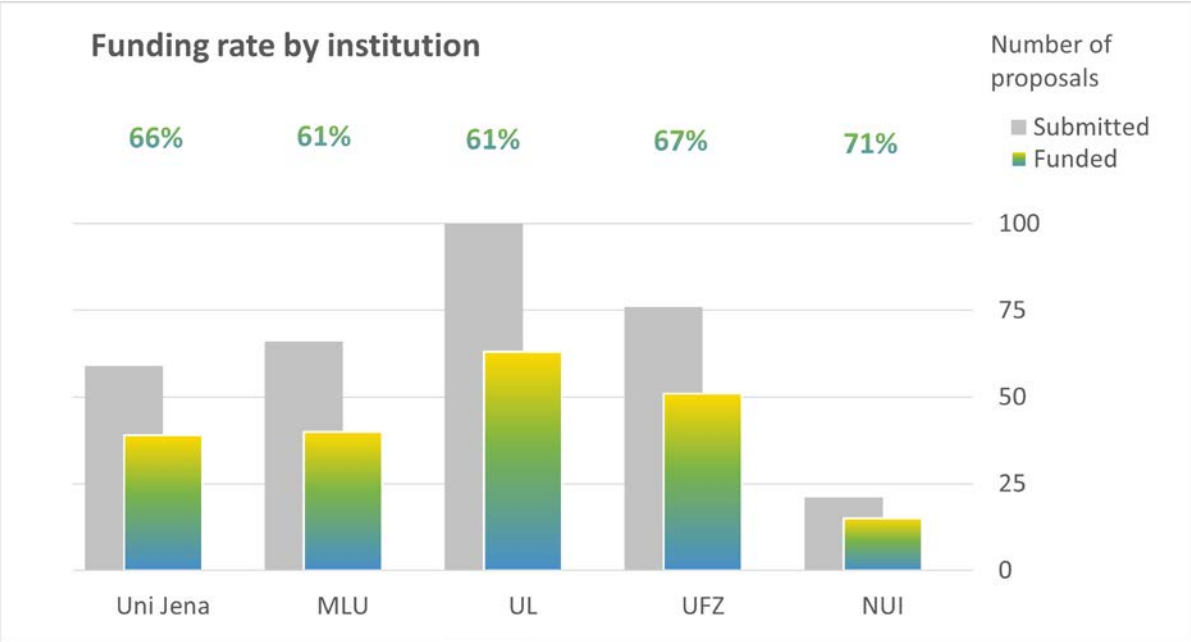

Figure 1: Funding rate through time for each host institution and the partner institutions (merged). Bars show the total number of proposals submitted (grey) and funded projects (coloured) for each institution. Percentages above the bars show the proportion of proposals that were approved. FSU: Friedrich Schiller University Jena, MLU: Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, UL: Leipzig University, UFZ: Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research, NUI: non-university partner institutions

Furthermore, while the absolute number of projects funded varies between institutions, this is highly dependent on the active participation of iDiv members (i.e. the submission of proposals) rather than uneven approval rates. Whenever it became apparent that members of an institution were submitting very few (or no) proposals, members were encouraged to submit proposals through the respective local committees (including repeated announcements of available calls, provision of helpdesk services to guide members through the application process, etc.). These efforts always resulted in an increase in the number of proposals for the following call(s).

Of course, the absolute number of proposals also depends on the number of members in each institution. However, the number of members (by far) exceeds the number of proposals submitted, so that it seems to be more a question of member participation than of the absolute number of members. Moreover, even the non-university partner institutions

(with 24 members in 2024 the smallest group by far) have submitted proposals to 12 of the 20 iDiv calls evaluated here.

2.2 Funding rate by gender

Over 12 years of iDiv funding, no gender-specific differences can be observed in the overall success rates (Figure 2) with 64% of proposals being funded for proposals with either female of male main PIs. As with the participating institutions, iDiv has never operated with a quota to distribute available funds between female and male PIs. Thus, similar to the allocation of funds within the iDiv consortium, these numbers should be expected to vary for individual calls (Appendix: Table 2).

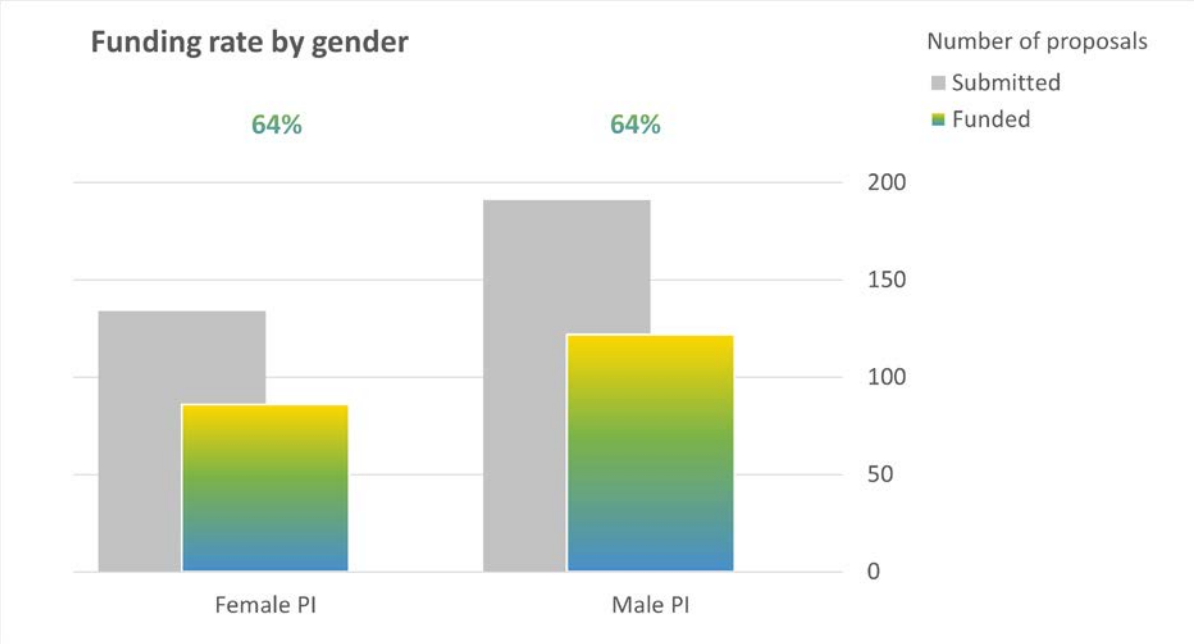

Figure 2: Funding rate by gender of the lead PI (inferred from first names). Bars show the total number of proposals submitted (grey) and projects funded (coloured). Percentages above the bars show the proportion of funded proposals.

It should be noted that iDiv did not ask members to identify their gender. Therefore, although it may oversimplify the diversity of iDiv's membership, for the purposes of this evaluation, gender (female/male) has been inferred from first names.

2.3 Funding rate by gender and funding mechanism

The data show slight variation in funding rates between genders among the different funding mechanisms (Figure 3). Female PIs had a higher success rate than male PIs in the Strategic

Projects & Support Units calls (F 71%, M 55%) as well as in the Flexpool Support Fund (F 63%, M 59%), while the opposite is true for the other calls (F 63%, M 67%).

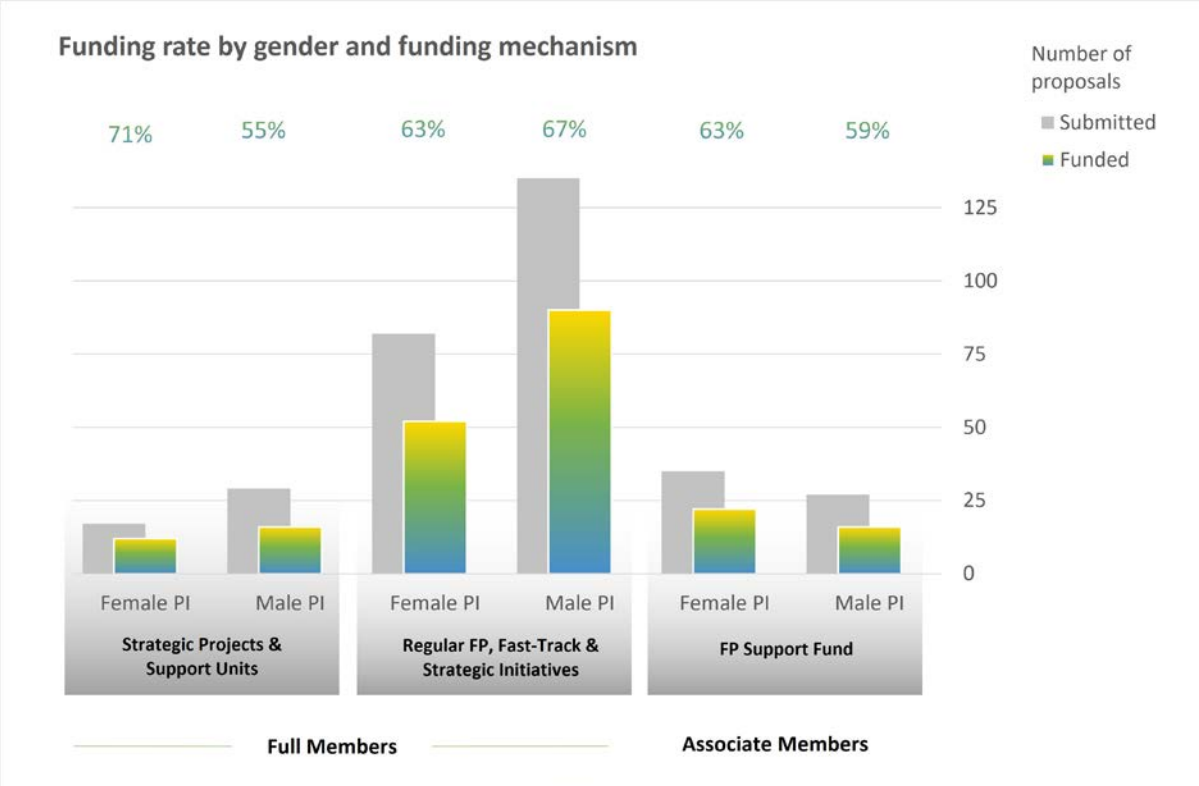

Figure 3: Funding rate by mechanism and gender of the main PI (inferred from first names). Percentages above the bars show the proportion of funded proposals.

This variation cannot clearly be linked to differences in career stages (full vs. associate members), so our data do not suggest that female researchers are only well supported in the early stages of their scientific careers but not in the later stages. However, this is based on a comparatively small amount of data, as we have only had two calls for Strategic Projects and Support Units and four calls in total in the Flexpool Support Fund (Appendix: Table 3).

2.4 Gender balance in funded projects and iDiv membership

Another way of looking at potential biases in funding allocation is to assess the ratio of male to female PIs - both in proposals and in funded projects. At the same time, it may be worthwhile to also incorporate iDiv membership in general, which is itself biased towards men.

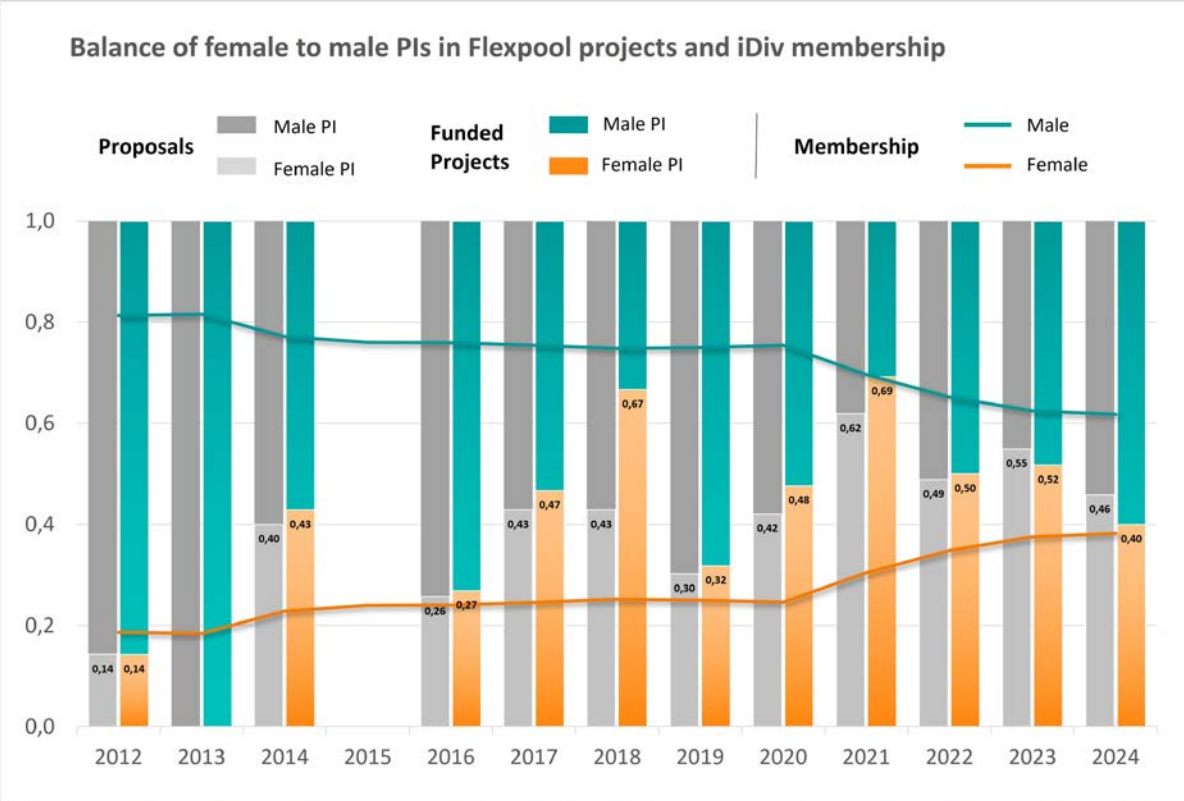

Figure 4: Balance of female (light grey / orange) to male (dark grey / green) PIs in proposals, funded projects (grey and coloured bars, respectively) and across all iDiv members (lines).

iDiv membership has over time slowly developed towards gender parity (from ca. 80/20 in 2012 to ca. 60/40 in 2024, lines in Figure 4). This was in part accelerated by the establishment of the iDiv associate membership in 2020, where we currently have 55% female members (compared to 31% female full members).

With the exception of the first two years, gender balance in iDiv proposals and funded projects has always been more even than in our membership: The proportion of submitted proposals and funded projects led by female PIs was higher (except for 2012 and 2013) than the proportion of female iDiv members. Furthermore, with the exception of three years (2012, 2023, 2024), the gender balance from proposals to funded projects shifted in favour of female PIs. Together, this suggests that female PIs have been more active and more successful than male PIs in getting their research funded at iDiv.

3. Conclusions

This is the first time that iDiv's funding decisions have been comprehensively evaluated and the data suggest that, in general, iDiv has done a good job in the past of distributing the available funds within the consortium as a whole and among its members, showing no systematic biases. However, it is also clear that there is still room for improvement, for

example in terms of diversity, and that efforts to further improve this need to be continued. Encouraging active participation and engagement is key to improving diversity at iDiv. This needs to be further strengthened in collaboration with the other bodies/committees in iDiv that aim to promote diversity (Equal Opportunities Committee, Female Scientist Career Fund, etc.).

It should be noted that we have only considered the gender of the main PIs (as inferred from first names). However, iDiv funding mechanisms aim to support integration and collaboration between iDiv members, with proposals often being led by teams of PIs. While the lead PI will in most cases be the person who contributes most to a proposal/project, the gender balance of the entire PI team will also be taken into account when evaluating funding rates in the future.

We will continue to monitor these data on a regular basis in order to keep abreast of developments and to develop regulation policies if necessary.

Jan Schnitzler
on behalf of the iDiv Flexpool Board

Appendix

Table 1: Funding rate through time for each host institution and the partner institutions (NUI, merged)

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
Uni Jena	100%	100%	100%	na	100%	0%	50%	63%	80%	100%	40%	62%	50%	**66%**
MLU	100%	na	75%	na	75%	100%	0%	20%	42%	100%	63%	80%	80%	**61%**
UL	100%	na	100%	na	88%	75%	60%	57%	55%	36%	47%	43%	100%	**61%**
UFZ	100%	100%	100%	na	58%	71%	50%	64%	60%	80%	50%	55%	83%	**67%**
NUI	100%	100%	na	na	60%	na	na	na	60%	na	100%	33%	100%	**71%**

Uni Jena: Friedrich Schiller University Jena, MLU: Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg, UL: Leipzig University, UFZ: Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research, NUI: non-university partner institutions

Table 2: Funding rate through time by gender* of the lead PI (*inferred from first names)

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
Female PI	100%	na	100%	na	78%	78%	67%	54%	63%	69%	52%	54%	73%	**64%**
Male PI	100%	100%	89%	na	73%	67%	25%	50%	50%	50%	50%	61%	92%	**64%**

Table 3: Funding rate by mechanism and gender of the main PI (inferred from first names).

	Gender	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
SU/SP	**Female PI**	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	67%	na	na	na	75%	na	**71%**
	Male PI	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	55%	na	na	na	57%	na	**55%**
Regular, Fast-Track, etc.	**Female PI**	100%	na	100%	na	78%	78%	67%	25%	63%	na	36%	50%	67%	**63%**
	Male PI	100%	100%	89%	na	73%	67%	25%	38%	50%	na	58%	50%	90%	**67%**
Support Fund	**Female PI**	na	na	na	Na	na	na	na	na	na	69%	70%	40%	100%	**63%**
	Male PI	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	na	50%	40%	83%	100%	**59%**