This seminar is composed of two research papers. The objective is to find evidence of gender discrimination on the boards of directors of the large Spanish firms on one hand, and of European banks on the other.

The first paper concentrates on the analysis of observable factors related to the presence of women on boards and their possible relationship with different types of discrimination. To do this, we analyse the gender composition (in 2005 and 2008) of the boards of directors of the top 1,000 Spanish companies. We found that the mean percentage of women has grown from 6.6 per cent to 8.6 per cent. When seeking to identify possible causes of female under-representation, we opt to study determinants on the demand rather than the supply side. Supply-side determinants relate to the tendency of women to participate less in the labour market and to their relative lack of long-term career commitment when compared with men. However, survey data are likely to be biased by the self selection of those women who wish to “showcase” their successful careers. Besides, once a woman has reached the top executive rank, it is reasonable to assume that such supply-side differences are minimized and that such men and women are likely to be similar, sharing a high level of job motivation and lofty career ambitions. Hence, additional causes on the demand side should be explored.

The second paper investigates the gender diversity of the corporate board of banks in the European Union and tries to identify organizational characteristics that could be predictive of women’s presence on bank’s boards. We identify three factors that play a particularly important role in defining bank board gender diversity. First, banks with lower risk are the ones with higher proportion of women. Second, banks with larger boards have a higher proportion of women on its boards in part due to the fact that diversity in gender has been introduced largely in tandem with increases in the number of directors. Finally, banks that have a growth orientation are more prone to include women on their board, since women are often appointed to leadership positions under critical organizational circumstances.