

ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE THROUGH RESEARCH FUNDING

Introduction

Funding research and innovation (R&I) creates the foundation for science and education to strive towards excellence. But there is no excellence if research and education rest on the potential for and actual experiences of gender-based violence. Research Funding Organisations (RFOs), in collaboration with other R&I stakeholders in their national contexts, have the power to have a vital impact on ending gender-based violence in the European Research Area (ERA). By acknowledging their responsibility for ensuring that R&I does not support potential perpetrators of gender-based violence, RFOs will directly help to protect potential victims and, because of this, will foster high-quality research and education. This policy brief summarises the core knowledge on gender-based violence in the ERA, including examples of best practices and recommendations for RFOs.

Gender-based violence - an endemic problem in the ERA

The prevalence of gender-based violence in the ERA is high. According to the UniSAFE survey (Lipinsky et al. 2022), two out of three students and staff have experienced some form of gender-based violence since they started working at their institution. This endemic violence and abuse is also well documented in other research (Anitha & Lewis 2018) and has been described in recent policy conclusions (Ljubljana Declaration 2021; Call for Action 2022; EC 2024). The consequences of being exposed to gender-based violence are far-reaching and long-term for individuals and include stress, depression, anxiety, alcohol abuse, lack of motivation, an increased tendency to interrupt studies or leave work, and deteriorating mental and physical health. Gender-based violence also has a negative long-term effect on both study and work groups and impedes participation in and perceptions of safety within the study and work environment in general (Bondestam & Lundqvist 2020a; McDonald 2012; Selkie et al 2015). Specific groups at risk of gender-based violence, due to intersections of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and other factors, experience more severe and qualitatively different consequences from exposure to gender-based violence (Fedin, Holmes & Backes 2018; Ong 2005).

Ensuring funding is not enhancing toxic and abusive researchers is key for change, as both research and experience clearly show the vast consequences of a laissez-faire approach to gender-based violence.

Gender-based violence is a relatively recent concept in the context of ERA policy and is still under development. The most inclusive and widely used definition of gender-based violence covers physical violence, psychological violence, economic and financial violence, sexual violence, sexual harassment, gender harassment, stalking, and organisational violence and harassment – in both online and offline contexts (Strid et al 2021). The current state of research knowledge on ending gender-based violence in this respect is progressing slowly in the ERA, as is the adoption of targeted actions to combat gender-based violence at an institutional level (Bondestam, Lundqvist & Young Håkansson, 2023a). Research evidence on methods that work to decrease the prevalence of gender-based violence is also scarce (Bondestam & Lundqvist 2020b; Vladutiu, Martin & Macy 2011). Several gaps and inconsistencies in the current ERA policy framework have also been identified (Call for Action 2022; Ljubljana Declaration 2021; EC 2024). All in all, this points to the urgent need to move forward by suggesting concrete measures for ending gender-based violence for different stakeholders.

Emerging best practice

Analyses of recent policy developments on ending gender-based violence illustrate progress in some EU Member States, but also include examples of setbacks that both can and have occurred in some national contexts (Bondestam, Lundqvist & Young Håkansson 2023b; Fajmonová et al. 2021; SWG GRI 2020). Yet the importance of RFOs as key stakeholders in combatting gender-based violence is largely acknowledged (Bondestam 2024; UniSAFE 2023) and there are already several examples of tools (UniSAFE 2023) and best practices (Bondestam, Lundqvist & Young Håkansson, 2023b) on the issue. A comprehensive report on the current state of policy development in the ERA on gender-based violence, especially targeting RFOs, suggested a holistic infrastructure comprised of several different components aimed at encouraging RFOs to take on the important role as one of several key stakeholders in ending gender-based violence in the ERA (Figure 1):

Figure 1.

Proposed ERA RFO infrastructure on ending gender-based violence

Extracted from Bondestam, Lundqvist & Young Håkansson 2023b: 28



As Figure 1 shows, the ERA Zero Tolerance Code of Conduct (EC 2024) is the overriding policy document for all other suggested policies, tools and measures. The specific RELIEF model especially addresses the current internal procedures and mechanisms of RFOs of relevance for ending gender-based violence. The RELIEF model consists of six different parts (for more details cf. Bondestam, Lundqvist & Young Håkansson, 2023b) outlined below:

Role clarity: RFOs should redefine themselves as key actors in ending gender-based violence.

Ethical governance: Ethical statutes on research misconduct should be used as a way of inhibiting perpetrator behaviour and cultures in RPOs.

Legal framework: RFOs should take supplementary actions beyond legal boundaries, such as withdrawing or withholding funding, setting up whistleblowing systems, building support structures.

Internal procedures: the notion of gender-based violence should be mainstreamed throughout the funding process, including requiring RPOs to declare there are no ongoing processes or cases of gender-based violence in the name of an applicant.

Evaluation and monitoring: Notions of gender-based violence should be integrated into already existing evaluation and monitoring mechanisms in the funding system.

Funding: A proactive approach should be adopted towards funding research on gender-based violence.

The 7P framework is also part of the suggested template for RFOs to differentiate the different areas of necessary action. The constituent parts of the 7Ps framework are not further described here, please visit the UniSAFE project website for more information (<https://unisafe-gbv.eu/>) and other sources on the 7Ps model (Mergaert, Linková & Strid 2023).

Recommendations

- **Develop core procedures within RFOs**

Work with the RELIEF model as a baseline starting point for an institutional framework for implementing concrete measures. This work should include thinking through each key area in more depth to develop the importance and relevance of the model for a particular RFO, develop concrete measures for each part of the model, and identify and include dilemmas and risks involved in working with the model. Introduce and/or develop new policies on gender-based violence targeting actual problems identified by working with the RELIEF model in more detail. Use the UniSAFE 7P model and other ERA policy framework developments to advance the agenda on ending gender-based violence in Research Performing Organisations (RPOs).

- **Build strong partnerships with other stakeholders**

Create partnerships between RFOs within and across national contexts. Develop partnerships between RFOs, RPOs, national authorities, and other relevant stakeholders. Establish both formal and informal networks and continued mutual learning using expert knowledge and competencies on gender-based violence.

- **Ensure continuous knowledge and awareness raising**

Compile a digital course targeting RFOs based on up-to-date and relevant research on gender-based violence in RPOs. Compile digital materials based on the knowledge and practices of RFOs on how to work with the issue of gender-based violence in relation to RPOs applying for funding. Develop training sessions on gender-based violence targeting potential and actual grant holders.

- **Establish long-term funding for research on gender-based violence**

To-the-point research, with results and recommendations for policy development in RFOs, is needed to develop the existing policy framework on gender-based violence in the ERA. Both national authorities, national RFOs, and the European Commission (EC) should fund research and research programmes focusing on RFOs as an important stakeholder in the work ending gender-based violence in RFOs.

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