

# GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN THE ERA: AN ENDEMIC PROBLEM IN NEED OF A NEW CURE

## A pervasive challenge for ERA institutions

Nearly two in three (62%) of the over 42,000 respondents in the UniSAFE survey on gender-based violence in research organisations stated that they had experienced at least one form of gender-based violence within their institution (including psychological, physical, sexual, economic, and online forms). Respondents from minority groups reported even higher rates of gender-based violence (UniSAFE 2022). These findings have been confirmed in other studies in EU national contexts (HEA 2021; Rudolfsson et al 2022) as well as in research (Bondestam & Lundqvist 2020). Gender-based violence has severe consequences for individuals, including stress, depression, anxiety, alcohol abuse, lack of motivation, an increased tendency to interrupt studies or leave work, and deteriorating mental and physical health, and it also impedes participation and affects perceptions of safety in the study and work environment in general (McDonald 2012; Selkie et al 2015).

### **The definition of gender-based violence from the UniSAFE project**

All forms of gender-based violence, violations and abuse, including but not limited to, physical violence, psychological violence, economic and financial violence, sexual violence, sexual harassment, gender harassment, stalking, organisational violence and harassment – in both online and offline contexts, including emerging forms of violence, experienced as violence, violations and abuse not yet necessarily named or recognised as violence. (Strid et al. 2021, p. 13)

## The need for sustainable infrastructure

Looking at the current situation in research and policy in the ERA on ending gender-based violence, there have recently been some important developments:

- a few ambitious and productive EU-funded projects on the topic (UniSAFE, GENDER-ACTIONplus, GenderSAFE);
- a small number of important national and regional laws and policies have been introduced;

- a GEP requirement was recently introduced for ERA institutions and it promotes ending gender-based violence as one of five recommended thematic areas for ERA stakeholders;
- a few pioneering research studies on gender-based violence and ERA institutions are paving the way for new, evidence-based knowledge;
- a growing body of ERA institutions are setting new policy standards and implementing important measures and activities.

Beyond this, the current situation is inadequate, especially in the light of the strong research evidence indicating that the majority of staff and students in ERA institutions have experienced gender-based violence. Thus, despite good intentions, the strong advocacy for change at every level, and the tireless work developing useful strategies and measures, the current lack of a *systemic infrastructure* for change means that the fight against gender-based violence in the ERA remains a too minor, marginal, and underfinanced issue, leaving victims and survivors unheard and without redress.

## No clear progress in policy

The zero-tolerance code of conduct on gender-based violence in the ERA (EC 2024) will be an important push forward, but the ERA's overall policy framework is still made up of divergent policies that target different stakeholders with measures and strategies that are not always clearly aligned (Bondestam, Lundqvist & Young Håkansson 2023). Several gaps and inconsistencies in the ERA's overall policy framework have also been identified (Call for Action 2022; Ljubljana Declaration 2021). Extensive and recent studies on the implementation of policies targeting gender-based violence in ERA institutions indicate that the progress has been slow. There is foremost a lack of comprehensive policies at the national and institutional levels in the majority of EU Member States, gender-based violence as a concept has only been addressed in a handful national contexts, and activities and measures (at the institutional level) for ending gender-based violence are still scarce and not systematic (Fajmonová et al 2021; SWG GRI 2020). All in all, this demonstrates the urgent need to revise and extend current ERA policy, where the EC has a specific role to play in advancing the agenda on ending gender-based violence in the ERA.

## Recommendations

The main task for the EC in the upcoming period is to further advance policy implementation in order to establish a solid infrastructure for ending gender-based violence in all ERA institutions. These are the suggested next steps for the EC to achieve this purpose:

- Support full compliance with the zero-tolerance code of conduct on gender-based violence (EC 2024) in all ERA institutions;
- Support the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in national R&I systems;
- Ensure ending gender-based violence is a mandatory requirement in ERA GEPs;
- Require that institutions have targeted support structures in place – including standardised procedures for the formal reporting of incidents of gender-based violence and sustained support for victims and survivors of gender-based violence – in order to be eligible for EU funding;
- Counteract gender-based violence in all ERA mobility schemes (including Marie Curie and Erasmus) by requiring applying institutions to acknowledge their commitment to the zero-tolerance code of conduct on gender-based violence (EC 2024).

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