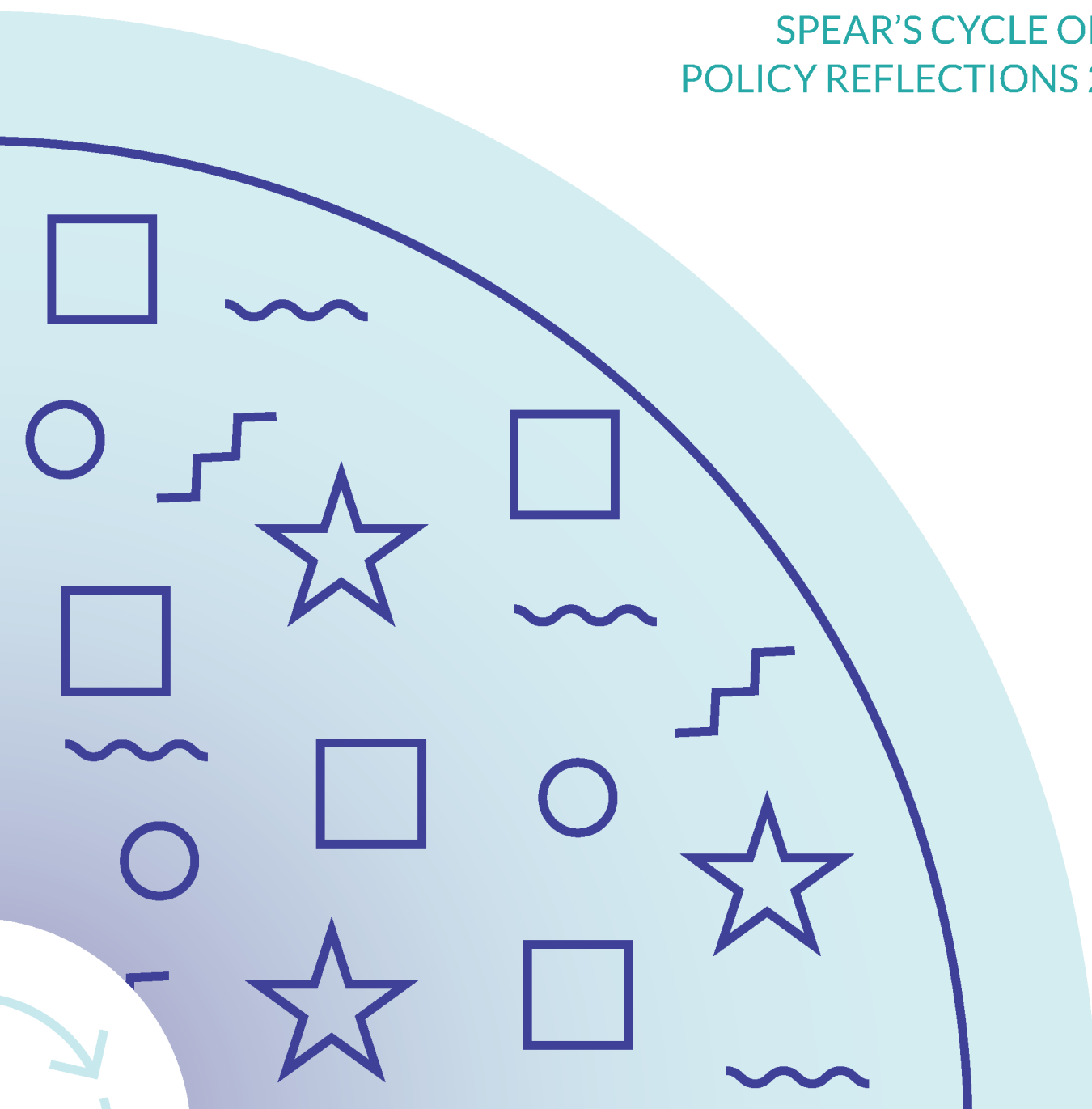


Supporting and Implementing Plans  
for Gender Equality in Academia and Research



# WORK AND STUDY ENVIRONMENTS AND SEXISM IN ACADEMIA

SPEAR'S CYCLE OF  
POLICY REFLECTIONS 2



# WORK AND STUDY ENVIRONMENTS AND SEXISM IN ACADEMIA

## WHAT

A growing body of evidence shows a correlation between poor work and study environments in Academia and threats to creative output of high quality on the one hand, and the prevalence of sexist, even misogynistic, behaviour and harassment on the other. Countering sexism is increasingly seen as a key to mitigate brain-drain, exclusion and inequalities.

SPEAR calls for countering sexism in recognition of the connections between quality, innovative environments and inclusive equality, and therefore SPEAR advocates for legislation, policies and resources that strive for a safe, respectful, inclusive and creative Academia.

## WHY

As a spearhead democratic institution, Academia holds important ethical imperatives of responsibility for the quality and standards of education and research as well as towards staff, students and surrounding communities. These imperatives are embraced through open and fair science, systematic research assessment, social and ethical responsibility, research integrity and sustainability.

However, Academia is inherently competitive and characterised by high demands, unclear expectations, harsh selection processes, few and powerful gatekeepers in long career trajectories, complex power relations and interdependencies, precarious affiliations, individualisation and blurring of personal and professional domains. These traits together comprise a rich foundation for hostile, chilly and sexist environments – which ultimately lead to unsafe and undemocratic institutions.

Academia is undergoing increasing diversification and internationalisation of student and staff populations. The greater the diversity – cultural, religious, socio-economic, gender, disciplinary, etc. – the larger the need for effective intersectional understanding and action. Academia possesses the scientific and intellectual strength to bring mechanisms that underlie inequality and sexism to light and to develop effective research-based countermeasures and support systems. Academia has the capacity and obligation to apply this to its own environments – and to contribute with awareness raising, enlightenment and debate beyond Academia.

For too long, Academia has shied away from this challenge. Taking on the responsibility of guaranteeing fair and transparent case handling, providing support for and by leaders and administrators, delivering training (for staff and leaders) and raising awareness about sexism and anti-discrimination, would counter not only sexism but also other inequality issues in work and study environments and contribute to upholding the democratic framework.

*SPEAR supports a gender+ understanding of inclusiveness, intersectionality and equality, i.e., an intersectional understanding where gender is the primary axis of intervention, extended to address other, simultaneously intersecting dimensions, such as nationality, ethnicity, race, class, age, sexuality, dis/ability, etc. (Verloo, M. (Ed.) (2018), *Varieties of Opposition to Gender Equality in Europe*. New York, USA: Routledge; EU DG for R&I (2022): *Approaches to Inclusive Gender Equality in Research and Innovation*).*

## HOW

The following presents what SPEAR considers to be useful actions at European level, for instance under the auspices of **the European University Alliance (EUA)**, **the Sub-Group to the ERA Forum on ERA Action 5 of the ERA Policy Agenda 2022–2024, Inclusive Gender Equality in the ERA**, **the United Nations Committee on the Elimination and Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**, and **the UniSAFE project**, to strengthen the sector's concerted efforts for an inclusive and equal European Academia, here through focusing on work and study environments and sexism.

### 01

**Create, promote and implement a code of ethics** in coordination with mandated EU level equality bodies and networks, such as the ERA 5 Sub-Group and EQUINET, and with policy and strategy documents currently under way.

### 02

**Establish an EU level taskforce**, for instance in affiliation with the ERA 5 Sub-Group, charged with defining wider measures for countering the framework conditions that foster sexist environments, such as dependency structures between early career researchers in precarious positions in relation to senior researchers, gatekeepers, mentors and supervisors. This could be done through, for instance, critical revision of funding schemes, grant sizes, objectives and beneficiaries, publications, research design and employment contracts.

### 03

**Develop a recurring system for national prevalence data on sexism in Academia** either in parallel or integrated with She Figures – inspiration can be found in the UNISAFE project, the 2021–2022 Swedish National study on gender-based violence in academia as well as the Lund University TELLUS project.

### 04

**Develop and financially support supranational resources**, so that they can be continuously coordinated and updated in aid of the adoption of recommendations put forward by, for instance, UniSAFE in their first policy brief and by the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union in their Call for Action to End Gender-Based Violence: 'Working towards safe and respectful higher education and research for all'. This could include support, infrastructure, bystander training, available resources and data, tools, training, etc. in liaison with existing or new centres – for instance modelled on the European IP Helpdesk.

SPEAR aims to bring about institutional change in research performing organisations by implementing gender equality plans. Our vision is a European Academia, where equality, diversity and inclusion is daily practice.

We see a need for a close connection between daily practices, the political debate and legislative processes to emphasise knowledge- and research-based arguments, to strengthen democratic values and to counter the consequences of antidemocratic movements.

SPEAR covers a diversity of backgrounds and national and institutional contexts – an asset for the quality of our endeavours. As gender equality experts, scholars and practitioners we know the value of community and ongoing support for effective implementation. Our unique methodology for learning and support inspires our practice and reflective capacity and empowers our organisations to act. For the wider community, our practice-based tools and resources are openly accessible.

### **Empowering (e)quality**

From the perspective of our research-based practice, we bear witness to the necessity of holistic and sustained approaches, policies and frameworks for bringing about required structural change. **This involves concerted, explicit and coordinated efforts to counter anti-gender tendencies with open eyes and responsible action.**

**SPEAR's Cycle of Policy Reflections** is our contribution to important developments on policy level in EU – thus putting forward our practitioners' voice, experiences, and expertise to reinforce and support these developments.

Reflecting,  
Spearpoints shine.  
Fiercely, fireflies shimmer  
In search of spirit, soul, and light.

A quest – not for words, but action  
For fair, universal, constant,  
Complex, enduring,  
Rights.

SPEAR's Cycle of Policy Reflections covers four interconnected topics in support of sustainable and inclusive Gender Equality in European Academia, anno 2023:

- 01 Careers in Academia: Recruitment, promotion, career development
- 02 Work- and study environment and sexism in Academia**
- 03 Gender mainstreaming and Gender Equality Plans
- 04 Integration of the Gender+ Dimension in research, innovation and teaching

**SPEAR Consortium:** University of Southern Denmark | Uppsala University | RWTH Aachen University | Europa Media | Joanneum Research | Plovdiv University Paisii Hilendarski | Vilnius University | Vytauto Magnus University | NOVA University Lisbon | University of Rijeka | International Business School, Botevgrad

Learn more and find resources here: [www.gender-spear.eu](http://www.gender-spear.eu)

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