

As the tragic story of the death and rape of Sarah Everard fills the news headlines in the UK once again, the European Projects team at Community Action Dacorum are proud to have been mobilizing to mitigate gender bias in the workplace for the past two years through the FENCE Project; but we remain concerned for the future.

The Erasmus+ FENCE Project began in October 2019, with partners across the UK, Spain, Italy, Greece, Cyprus and Romania hoping to change to reduce gender bias at the local, national and EU level. Although awareness of gender inequality is embedded within the legislations of all partner countries, the extent to which these are enforced ranges; with disparities, discrimination and gender-based violence still prevalent in each partner country.

For the UK, during the covid-19 pandemic there has been a surge of online campaigning for the safety of women since; the rape and murder of Sarah Everard,¹ since the cases of domestic abuse against women rose exponentially when England lost out in the Euros 2020² and since the cases of women's drinks being spiked and bodies being injected with lethal diseases have increased rapidly as clubs re-open.³ The UN Women's 2021 Report also found that 97% of women aged 18-24 in the UK have been sexually harassed in public places.⁴ This translates into the work environment too, with the pandemic seeing an upsurge of online sexual harassment targeting women in workplaces across the UK.⁵

The FENCE Project therefore plays a part in a vital fight for essential human rights and freedoms, by concentrating on mitigating implicit gender bias, discrimination and violence against women within the workplace. It does so through a free online training course in gender competence, which you can access here: <https://fence-project.eu/register/> with several Modules covering:

- Spotting Discrimination in the Workplace
- Gender Stereotypes and Bias
- Building a positive organisational culture
- Good Practices
- Action Planning

¹ Giulia Carbonaro, 'Reclaim the Night': Women campaign for safer streets after the death of Sarah Everard in London (CGTN Europe, 2021) available here: <https://cgtn-europe.shorthandstories.com/--reclaim-the-night---women-campaign-for-safer-streets-after-the-death-of-sarah-everard-in-london/index.html>

² Serina Sandhu, Euro 2020: Domestic abuse spikes in England with 400 extra cases reported during football tournament (inews, 2021) available here: <https://inews.co.uk/news/uk/euro-2020-domestic-abuse-england-increase-cases-during-football-tournament-1100995>

³ Sophie Gallagher, Girls Night In, (BBC, 2021) available here: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-59054772>

⁴ UN Women, Prevalence and reporting of sexual harassment in UK public spaces, (APPG UN Women, 2021), available here: https://www.unwomenuk.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/APPG-UN-Women_Sexual-Harassment-Report_2021.pdf

⁵ Rights of Women, Rights of Women survey reveals online sexual harassment has increased, as women continue to suffer sexual harassment whilst working through the Covid-19 pandemic, (Rights of Women, 2021), available here: <https://rightsofwomen.org.uk/news/rights-of-women-survey-reveals-online-sexual-harassment-has-increased-as-women-continue-to-suffer-sexual-harassment-whilst-working-through-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

We've already had such great feedback from those who have completed this training already- with our participants being impressed with the relevance of the content and how we assessed your progress!

As part of this process, all partners also thoroughly researched the existing training on gender competence available in each partner country. You can access this Review Paper here: https://fence-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/FENCE_TheReviewPaper.pdf. This process allowed us to not only understand what gaps our training needed to fill, but it also made it extremely clear just how important the fight against gender bias remains across Europe.

We are also in the process of producing a Policy Book too- which summarises the lessons we have learnt from this project and how these results can inform local and national decision-making. Our recommendations range from adjusting existing policies to better support a range of gender expressions, to implementing entirely new initiatives to properly address the structural causes of implicit gender bias in the workplace. One such recommendation is to incorporate gender equality training into primary and secondary education, as well as adult learning.

Throughout the Project, Community Action Dacorum have organised multiple fantastic events to share the lessons we have learnt and promote gender equality awareness- from training sessions to job fairs and even Conferences! Our Fighting Gender Bias 2021 Conference was a real success, with incredible talks from Sneha Khilay and Wendy Smith inspiring many of us to take action. See it for yourself here: <https://fb.watch/8V2jW85bdr/>

We are so thrilled with what our partners have achieved so far, and we have absolutely loved being part of such an important project!

