



**RESIST**

Fostering Queer Feminist Intersectional Resistances against Transnational Anti-Gender Politics

### **RESIST project: Insecurity, cyberbullying, emotional distress – the heavy impact of anti-gender mobilizations**

**Anti-gender speeches and policies are not without effect! The second report of the European research project RESIST shows that, in all the cases studied, including in societies perceived as 'progressive', feminists and LGBTIQ+ people suffer verbal and physical attacks, attacks on property and systemic discrimination, often in public spaces and on social networks. This violence contributes to their marginalization. "Anti-gender" discourses and mobilizations are thus increasingly institutionalized, reinforced by polarizing media and political discourses, and Switzerland is not an exception.**

The team of the European research project RESIST, in which the Universities of Fribourg and Lausanne are associated, has just published a report that analyses the effects of "anti-gender" discourses, policies and mobilizations in Europe. It is based on nine case studies, covering Belarus, Germany, Spain, France, Greece, Ireland, Poland, Switzerland and people in exile.

As part of the study, about thirty people from each country/case study were interviewed about the effects and experiences of anti-gender discourse, policies and violence in their daily lives and in their professional lives. The results clearly show that violence does not stop at public speeches, but "trickles down" (as one Swiss participant put it) in everyday life and social relationships, and the anticipation of violence increases – a factor of stress and distress.

#### **Switzerland not spared**

At the Swiss level, the study conducted by Dr. Ekaterina Filep of the University of Fribourg and Gaé Colussi of the University of Lausanne reveals that recent legislative advances (extension of the anti-discrimination criminal law to sexual orientation, marriage for all) have nevertheless been accompanied by a persistence, or even an increase, of anti-gender discourse, which circulates so much in politics, in the media as well as in society, well beyond the far right and conservative religious movements.

These hostile speeches are not without effect with an increase in malicious acts towards LGBTIQ+ events (threats against Prides, disruption by far-right groups of *Drag Story Time*, etc.) In addition, these anti-gender discourses and policies contribute to a lack of security for the people targeted, both in their daily and professional lives. "The study shows once again: speeches, especially when they are delivered by prominent public figures, have a real impact and pave the way for hostile behaviour later on," says Dr. Ekaterina Filep.

#### **Impact on the people concerned**

For example, many of the respondents testified to the widespread prevalence of verbal harassment and online threats, and cases of physical violence were also reported. These acts have led many gender equality activists and practitioners to self-censor and resort to increased security measures when attending or organising public events. The hostility further increases the burden on those committed to equality, generating exhaustion and distress. "Many of those interviewed told us about the

additional burden that these movements and discourses place on individuals and organizations. "The risk of facing torrents of hate every time they open their mailbox or social networks obviously weighs heavily, and people take redoubled precautions to protect themselves as well as possible", says Ekaterina Filep.

This effect is found through the case studies in all the European countries studied. Thus, "anti-gender" mobilizations have significant effects on the people or groups targeted. This includes detrimental effects on mental and physical health. Several people shared their feelings of vulnerability as well as the consequences on their daily lives such as fear, exhaustion and anxiety. These effects are particularly severe for people with intersecting marginalized identities who face other forms of discrimination.

### **Resistance is getting organized**

Despite these challenges, activists have developed effective resistance strategies, including building political alliances by encouraging community solidarity and support. Participants also highlighted the importance of education on gender-related topics, while maintaining pragmatic approaches to counter the spread of anti-gender rhetoric. "It is clear that feminists and LGBTIQ+ people do not see themselves as mere passive victims," explains Ekaterina Filep, a researcher at the Department of Geosciences at the University of Fribourg, "they are actively engaged in actions aimed at challenging these discourses and policies, while seeking to create safer and more livable spaces for themselves."

Although the term "anti-gender" is rarely used by the participants in the study, it refers to a set of discourses, mobilizations and policies aimed at limiting the freedoms of women, LGBTIQ+ people and other minorities. The report is based on qualitative data collected from 254 people, including academics, journalists, activists, in 104 interviews and 36 focus groups conducted between January and May 2024. The results show a prevalence of verbal attacks, systemic discrimination and political violence, particularly in public spaces and on social networks, as well as various forms of resistance deployed by the targeted individuals and collectives.

To join the online launch, on 23rd October at 10:00am (GMT+1), please register here:

[https://ucd-ie.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_fSdPkzYaRE-947BpF65GwA](https://ucd-ie.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_fSdPkzYaRE-947BpF65GwA)

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A new report documents and analyses the consequences of "anti-gender" mobilisations in Europe and the responses provided by affected people and targeted collectives.