

## EQUALITY CORRESPONDENTS: THE INSU-AA NETWORK AND ITS ACTIONS

M. Clavel<sup>1</sup>, A. Guilbert-Lepoutre<sup>2</sup>, R.-M. Ouazzani<sup>3</sup>, T. Paumard<sup>3</sup> and O. Venot<sup>4</sup>

**Abstract.** The INSU-AA equality network was founded in 2021 on the initiative of the INSU-AA Deputy Scientific Director, with the support of the SF2A *Femmes & Astronomie* Commission. The request was to appoint a pair of equality correspondents in each Astronomy & Astrophysics institute, in order to create local points of contact that should be easily identifiable by anyone working in Astronomy & Astrophysics in France. As of 2024, this network includes close to fifty equality correspondents who act both locally and collectively to raise awareness on equality issues, particularly in the context of the fight against acts of gender-based violence, moral harassment and all forms of discrimination in the workplace.

Keywords: Workplace, resources, harassment, equality

### 1 Challenges in terms of equality, diversity and inclusion in Astronomy & Astrophysics in France

Issues related to equality, diversity and inclusion are not specific to our field. The most documented ones are related to the under-representation of women in STEM\* worldwide, and does apply to A&A in France, with only about 25% of women among us (e.g. Berné & Hilaire 2020; Ouazzani et al. 2023). Gender biases are known to have a strong impact from early educational choices to career paths (e.g. Spencer et al. 1999; Breda et al. 2018; Gautier-Touzo et al. 2024), and lead to unequal-opportunity work environments where inappropriate behaviors are also more likely to happen (e.g. MESRI 2018; Ifop for Jean Jaurès Foundation 2019). Gender is not the only source of discrimination, and similar mechanisms affect a wide range of situations and identities (see e.g. Ifop for L’Autre Cercle 2024, for the LGBT+ community).

Worldwide, 86% of researchers in Science have witnessed at least one situation of sexism in their career and 49% of women scientists report having personally experienced sexual harassment at work (Ipsos for L’Oréal Foundation 2023)<sup>†</sup>. To assess the prevalence of gender discrimination, as well as other types of discrimination and sources of inequalities in A&A in France (e.g. homophobia, religious discrimination, social discrimination and racism), a dedicated survey was circulated early 2024 among all A&A staff. Results show that up to 80% of women respondents have faced sexist behaviors, while other types of discrimination investigated each affect about 20% of all respondents (Prospective INSU-AA 2024). They highlighted serious misconducts, including sexual assaults, happening in our work environments, similar to what has been reported worldwide. It is therefore crucial to raise awareness on these topics and create local support to help victims report inappropriate behaviors.

### 2 INSU-AA equality correspondents network

In 2021, the Scientific Deputy Director for Astronomy-Astrophysics of INSU (National Institute of Sciences of the Universe, CNRS), with a strong impulse from the *Femmes & Astronomie* Commission of the SF2A, initiated the equality correspondent network for Astronomy & Astrophysics in France. In each A&A institute,

<sup>1</sup> Univ. Grenoble Alpes, CNRS, IPAG, 38000 Grenoble, France

<sup>2</sup> LGL TPE, UMR 5276 CNRS, Université Lyon 1, ENS, Villeurbanne, France

<sup>3</sup> LESIA, Observatoire de Paris, Université PSL, Sorbonne Université, Université Paris Cité, CNRS, 5 place Jules Janssen, 92195 Meudon, France

<sup>4</sup> Université de Paris Cité and Univ. Paris Est Creteil, CNRS, LISA, 75013 Paris, France

\*Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.

<sup>†</sup>See Manchon et al. (2023) for figures specific to Physics in Europe.

two equality correspondents have been appointed to create local contacts that must be accessible to all staff (permanent or temporary, researchers, engineers, administrative or technical staff members, students) and easily identifiable, especially by temporary staff and foreigners.

### 2.1 The role of equality correspondents

Equality correspondents have a mission statement received from the Scientific Deputy Director of INSU-AA that formally define their role. They are mandated to help tackling equality related issues, including but not limited to gender-related ones (see also Section 4). One major goal of this network is to prevent and fight against acts of violence, moral or sexual harassment and sexist behavior in the workplace, as well as all forms of discrimination. In this context, the role of the equality correspondents is to raise awareness, provide information, listen to and guide victims and witnesses, monitor and compile statistics on these issues.

Starting from 2022, the equality correspondents have been gradually trained for their task by the MPDF (*Mission Pour la Place des Femmes*, CNRS). Given the wide range of their missions and the rapid evolution of the regulations on these topics, additional training is requested by the network for the coming years.

### 2.2 The identity of the current equality correspondents

More than 80% of A&A staff knows who are the equality correspondents in their own institute (Prospective INSU-AA 2024). The complete and up-to-date list of all equality correspondents can be found on the SF2A website, under the tab *Commission Femmes & Astronomie (Ressources contre le Harcèlement)*<sup>‡</sup>. There are currently close to fifty equality correspondents, with twenty two institutes having at least one correspondent. Since part of the resources are site-specific (see Section 3), contacting local equality correspondents is usually more efficient. Nevertheless, people should feel free to reach out to anyone from this equality network.

The coordinators of the equality network (Maïca Clavel & Thibaut Paumard, since 2024) do their best to keep this online list and the network mailing list up-to-date. Anyone having useful information to complete, update or correct this list should not hesitate to contact them.

## 3 Local and national resources

Available resources can vary from one site to the other and may also depend on the situation. Equality correspondents know both local and national resources and can help anyone navigate through the different possibilities. They listen to and assist victims and witnesses in total confidentiality.

### 3.1 Reporting units

Following the French legislation, all employers in the public sector in France should now have reporting units accessible to both victims and direct witnesses of inappropriate behaviors, including at least sexist behaviors, discrimination, moral harassment, sexual harassment and violence. The role of these units is to conduct internal administrative investigations in order to impose disciplinary sanctions.

For instance, the CNRS reporting unit is fully operational since summer 2022 and can be contacted through a unique email address: [signalement@cnrs.fr](mailto:signalement@cnrs.fr)<sup>§</sup>. Reports should describe precise facts and can include any information or document useful to support the report, in whatever format. Reports are fully confidential and can be done in English. Once a report is sent, it first goes through an admissibility examination phase, which in 2023 lasted one to two months on average. If the legal characterization of the facts is within the scope of the reporting unit<sup>¶</sup>, it then triggers an administrative investigation that in 2023 lasted a little more than six months on average. Based on the investigations conducted by the reporting unit, the CNRS imposed seven disciplinary sanctions in 2023, but it is probably too early to make any statistics on the outcome of the reports submitted to the CNRS reporting unit.

It is important to note that by default people should reach out to the reporting unit of their own employer. As any other students, PhD students can also reach out to their university reporting unit.

<sup>‡</sup>[https://sf2a.eu/website2023/commission\\_femmes\\_et\\_astronomie/#Ressources\\_contre\\_le\\_harcelement](https://sf2a.eu/website2023/commission_femmes_et_astronomie/#Ressources_contre_le_harcelement)

<sup>§</sup><https://mpdf.cnrs.fr/lutte-contre-le-harcelement/procedure-cnrs/>

<sup>¶</sup>If not, the reporting units can also transfer the report to appropriate CNRS services, such as the Mediation one that can help with conflict management.

### 3.2 Confidential resources

Resources to support victims and witnesses are critical on many aspects. The national organization France Victimes<sup>‡</sup> provides legal, psychological and social advice, with local branches in many places in France. They can be contacted by phone dialing 116 006 (or 01 80 52 33 77, through the CNRS partnership). Depending on their needs people can also contact occupational medicine services or mediation services. Equality correspondents can provide information about additional local resources.

## 4 2024 assessment of the network actions

To have a global view of actions implemented by the network, a survey was circulated among all equality correspondents early 2024. Figure 1 summarizes the answers collected (in French). Most of the actions reported aim at raising collective awareness on equality-related topics and making the resource information easily available to those who may need it. This included adopting codes of conduct, creating content for institutes intranets, displaying posters, making presentations during the institute general assembly, to the newcomers, and on other occasions.



**Fig. 1.** Word cloud created with answers equality correspondents provided about the actions they implemented.

In addition, about half of the equality correspondents have been called upon regarding inappropriate behaviors happening within our community. The events reported covered all types of situations and all degrees of seriousness. They emanated from all the different categories of staff working in our institutes. Most people reaching out to the equality correspondents were victims of these behaviors, but several witnesses also came to ask for advice. This first assessment, only two years after the network was created, is highly encouraging.

The number of situations brought to the attention of equality correspondents is however way lower than the number of cases reported in the recent anonymous survey circulated among the French A&A community (Prospective INSU-AA 2024, see also Section 1). People not reporting inappropriate behaviors give the following top three reasons for doing so: 1) they were not sure the situation was serious enough, 2) they had the feeling that it would not change anything, 3) they lacked support and resources (Prospective INSU-AA 2024). Therefore the mission of equality correspondents to raise collective awareness on these issues is critical.

## 5 Collective awareness and the crucial role of witnesses

Equality correspondents arrive in the third position of trustworthy persons contacted in case of professional difficulties, while colleagues are first. There are also more people declaring themselves as witnesses of problematic situations than persons declaring themselves as victims (Prospective INSU-AA 2024). This means that anyone, regardless of their status, can be a direct or indirect witness of inappropriate behaviors and, as such, could make the difference.

<sup>‡</sup><https://www.france-victimes.fr/>

### 5.1 Direct witnesses

Even if not responsible for the event they witness, when directly hearing or seeing a problematic situation, witnesses can move from passive to active bystanders following methods from the 5Ds\*\*:

- Distract: Derail the incident by interrupting it (talk about something random, cough, drop your keys...).
- Delegate: Find someone in a position of authority and ask them to intervene.
- Document: Offer to provide the victim with written statement and/or evidence.
- Delay: Comfort the victim after the event and tell them that what they have experienced is not acceptable.
- Direct: Name the inappropriate behavior and ask the perpetrator to stop.

### 5.2 Indirect witnesses

When informed of a problematic situation by someone who experienced it, it is important to welcome the person's words in a supportive manner and therefore to **not** make the victim feel guilty, **not** put things into perspective, and **not** trivialize the event. Because these situations are always complex, indirect witnesses should **not** try to deal with the situation themselves by discussing with the perpetrator.

Direct and indirect witnesses should **never** force victims to make an official report, and more generally should **never** go against the victims' will. They can reach out for help by calling on resource people, including the equality correspondents, while preserving the anonymity of the persons involved. Being aware of these topics beforehand will be more than helpful. This is why everyone is encouraged to attend awareness-raising and training sessions organized by the equality correspondents and our institutions.

We would like to thank all present, past and future equality correspondents for their commitment, and for the time and effort they have devoted to this challenging task.

## References

- Berné, O. & Hilaire, A. 2020, *Nature Astronomy*, 4, 296
- Breda, T., Grenet, J., Monnet, M., & van Effenterre, C. 2018, "Les filles et les garçons face aux sciences", Direction de l'Évaluation, de la Prospective et de la Performance (DEPP) du ministère chargé de l'Éducation Nationale., doi:10.48464/halshs-02135983.
- Gautier-Touzo, M., Brouillaud, A., Burricand, C., Monso, O., & Dauphin, L. 2024, "Les différences d'orientation entre les filles et les garçons à l'entrée de l'enseignement supérieur", direction de l'évaluation, de la prospective et de la performance (DEPP) du Ministère chargé de l'Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, doi:10.48464/ni-24-20.
- Ifor for Jean Jaurès Foundation. 2019, "Les violences sexistes et sexuelles au travail en Europe", survey conducted in April 2019 and involving 5000 female employees across five European countries.
- Ifor for L'Autre Cercle. 2024, "4ème édition du Baromètre LGBT+", survey conducted from January to February 2024 and involving 9000 employees in France.
- Ipsos for L'Oréal Foundation. 2023, "Sexism and sexual harassment in the scientific world and its impact", survey conducted from July to September 2022 and involving 5,200 scientists in 117 countries.
- Manchon, L., Ouazzani, R. M., Vauglin, I., et al. 2023, in SF2A-2023: Proceedings of the Annual meeting of the French Society of Astronomy and Astrophysics, ed. M. N'Diaye, A. Siebert, N. Lagarde, O. Venot, K. Bailliée, M. Béthermin, E. Lagadec, J. Malzac, & J. Richard, 25–30
- MESRI. 2018, "Sur les freins aux carrières des femmes chercheuses et enseignantes-chercheuses au sein de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche en France", think tank final report - Current situation and recommendations.
- Ouazzani, R.-M., Bot, C., Brau-Nogué, S., et al. 2023, arXiv e-prints, arXiv:2301.03658
- Prospective INSU-AA. 2024, "Rapport de Synthèse des travaux du groupe I.1: Inclusion Diversité, Égalité", document presenting several results from a survey circulated among the French A&A community.
- Spencer, S. J., Steele, C. M., & Quinn, D. M. 1999, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 35, 4

---

\*\*<https://righttobe.org/guides/bystander-intervention-training/>