# UniSAFE
## ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

# Recommendations
## for higher education and research institution associations and umbrella organisations
## towards ending gender-based violence

This factsheet addresses associations and umbrella organisations at national or European level which unite, represent and support higher education and research institutions. It provides recommendations on their role towards ending gender-based violence. These recommendations are based on the findings from the EU-funded UniSAFE project. Importantly, gender-based violence is one of the five recommended areas to be covered by Gender Equality Plans required as an eligibility criterion in Horizon Europe.

UniSAFE acknowledges that working towards ending gender-based violence is not a minor challenge and not all actors are, at the present moment, geared up for the task. It is, therefore, suggested that clear priorities are set, even if this means that not all recommendations can be taken up at once.

Readers of this factsheet may want to consult UniSAFE's toolkit section on concepts and meanings. Background information about the root causes of gender-based violence in research and academia are laid out in the White Paper for Policymakers and Institutional Managers, together with a presentation of the 7P model (Prevalence, Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, Provision of services, Partnerships, Policy).

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# Gender-based violence in research and higher education

## Definition of gender-based violence

According to the Council of Europe, gender-based violence is 'any type of harm that is perpetrated against a person or group of people because of their factual or perceived sex, gender, sexual orientation and/or gender identity. On the 1st of June 2023, the European Union acceded to Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. It is important to clarify that while women and non-binary people are most affected by gender-based violence, it is relevant to everyone due to intersecting inequalities related to their gender and other characteristics.

UniSAFE adopts a broad understanding of gender-based violence, encompassing all forms: physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, economic violence, sexual harassment, harassment on the grounds of gender, and organisational harassment – in both online and offline contexts.

Gender-based violence occurs in every sphere and domain of life and in every organisation. Higher education and research institutions are particularly prone to high levels of gender-based violence. Some of the specific features of higher education and research institutions – such as unequal power relations, the specific organisational culture, and the high concentration of young adults – may make the occurrence of gender-based violence more common in these institutions than in other settings (O'Connor et. al., 2021). Gender-based violence in higher education and research institutions not only harms the victims, but it also harms the purpose and integrity of the knowledge-making mission of academic and research institutions by:

- jeopardising the future of students and staff and negatively impacting their health, well-being, and their study or career outcomes;
- causing institutional reputation loss and related economic costs resulting from the failure to provide a safe, inclusive and respectful environment;
- impacting the future of society, as higher education and research institutions train future leaders and shape societal progress.

To advance meaningfully towards a safe research and academic environment, the following features of gender-based violence must be recognised and put to the fore of institutional policies:

- Gender-based violence is a **continuum** (Kelly, 1987 ; Walby et al., 2014; Hearn et al., 2022), as different forms of violence are interrelated and overlap, and seemingly 'innocent', 'mild', and subtle forms of misconduct and transgressive behaviours — when not addressed — gradually escalate into more severe and graver forms of violence. This is reflected in students' and staff's **uncertainty as to what constitutes violence**, because different forms of violence of this spectrum are not recognised as such.

- Gender-based violence reflects the **unequal power relations** in academia between students and academics and between hierarchically positioned groups of academic staff. It also reflects the power relations in society as a whole, which are structured not only by gender but also by other characteristics, such as age, ethnicity, sexuality, or disability, which interact with gender and lead to intersectional inequalities. The hierarchical nature of higher education and research institutions contributes to the **underreporting of gender-based violence owing to fears of retaliation and negative impact on one's career .**

- Gender-based violence should be regarded not just as the inappropriate behaviour of an individual, but also as **an expression of the organisational culture** that allows such behaviours to continue unabated. This is reflected, when a case finally comes to the fore, in the realisation that everyone already knew about it.

# The scope of the problem in Europe

**62%**

*of respondents have experienced gender-based violence*
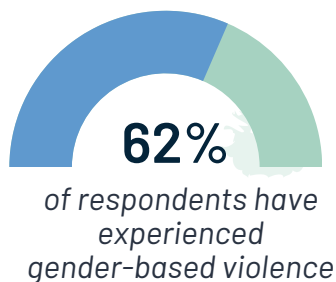
Nearly two in three (62%) of the over 42,000 respondents who took part in the UniSAFE survey on gender-based violence in research organisations in 2022 stated that they had experienced at least one form of gender-based violence within their institution (including physical, sexual, psychological, economic, and online forms of gender-based violence).

Respondents from minoritised groups (based on gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or disability) were more likely to disclose experience of gender-based violence. Women (66%) and non-binary people (74%) were more likely to have experienced at least one form of gender-based violence. Respondents who identified as LGBQ+ (68%), who reported a disability or chronic illness (72%) or belonged to an ethnic minority (69%) experienced at least one incident of gender-based violence more often than those who did not identify with these characteristics (Lipinsky et al., 2022).

What is alarming is that only 7% of students and 23% of staff who participated in the UniSAFE survey and stated that they had experienced gender-based violence within their institution reported the incident.

*Only 7% of students having experienced gender-based violence in the context of their institution have reported it*

Almost half of the victims (47%) did not report the incident because they were not sure that the behaviour was serious enough to report. Other common reasons for not reporting were that the survivors did not recognise the behaviour as violence at the time it occurred (31%) or did not think that anything would happen if they reported the incident (26%). This underscores the permissiveness and normalisation of violence in higher education and research institutions and the failure of institutions to take action against *all* forms of gender-based violence, including forms that are not always covered in legislative definitions of gender-based violence (Linková et al.,2023).

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# The role of higher education and research institution associations and umbrella organisations in ending gender-based violence

Higher education and research organisation associations work in the interest and for the promotion of the common goals of their members and represent them in relations with European, national or regional public authorities and other stakeholders.

> **Higher education and research organisation associations have a vital role in advocating for better policies against gender-based violence and can contribute to coordinating policy at EU as well as national levels.**

By leveraging their expertise and connections between their member institutions on the one hand, and policy-makers on the other hand, they can effectively promote evidence-based policies that are responsive to the needs of their members. Furthermore, as a crucial intermediary, they can translate experience-based insights and research findings into practical recommendations, providing policy-makers with the necessary tools to make informed decisions.

Associations and umbrella organisations can also act as platforms for collaboration, coordination, and networking, by facilitating the production and sharing of knowledge, emerging practices, and innovative approaches. They can engage in mutual learning and capacity-building and provide support to member organisations.

Lastly, associations and umbrella organisations have the power to set high standards and expectations for their member entities. By advocating for best practices and policies, they can push for meaningful change. This will help to create a culture of accountability and responsibility, where all member organisations are held to the same high standards when it comes to addressing gender-based violence in academia.

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# Recommendations

**Foster mutual learning, sharing and exchange activities among member organisations**

- Organise mutual learning workshops and exchange events for member organisations to promote knowledge sharing and capacity building on addressing and responding to gender-based violence.
- Involve top management, such as rectors, deans and directors, in these mutual learning and exchange efforts. Their active participation is essential in creating a meaningful impact.
- Establish working groups dedicated to identifying common challenges related to the implementation. This can help to build a community of practice around gender-based violence prevention and response and provide member organisations with new insights and strategies.

**Provide comprehensive capacity-building activities for member organisations**

- Support members by offering a range of capacity-building activities and resources to enhance their efforts in addressing gender-based violence. This is particularly important for member organisations that have limited institutional capacity and resources for this issue.
  - To this end, associations and umbrella organisations can promote and use the UniSAFE Toolkit that includes inspiring practices, templates and training guidance for a holistic response to gender-based violence in academic and research institutions.
  - In addition, the associations and umbrella organisations can provide information on the legal framework surrounding gender-based violence, such as a comprehensive document highlighting the relevant EU directives, including the rights of victims, the Gender Equality Directive, and regulations on privacy, among others. At the national level, umbrella organisations can create an inventory and clarify the existing legal framework applying to gender-based violence in academia and research (relating to safety and health at work, discrimination law, duty of care, etc.), providing guidance to institutions on how to act, while promoting a multi-disciplinary approach and a victim-centred handling of cases.
- Capacity-building efforts can also focus on training investigators and disciplinary committees on how to practically apply victim-centred and trauma-informed approaches.

**Building strategic partnerships and alliances**

- Build strategic partnerships and alliances with other organisations and networks working on gender-based violence at the local, national and European level, in order to amplify their voices and promote coordinated action on this critical issue.

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**Publicly declare and reinforce the commitment to end gender-based violence**

- Communicate proactively their role and responsibilities to their members, emphasising the importance of their collective efforts in preventing and addressing gender-based violence. It is crucial to ensure that all members understand the value and benefits of being part of the umbrella organisation, as well as their rights and obligations regarding gender-based violence.
- Utilise various communication channels to disseminate public statements reaffirming the association's commitment to addressing gender-based violence.
- Seek feedback and input from member organisations on priorities and needed action related to gender-based violence. This can help to build a sense of ownership and investment among members and ensure that the organisation's activities are aligned with the needs and priorities of its members.

**Set entry criteria for candidate member organisations, related to gender-based violence**

- Require, as relevant, that their (candidate) members to submit proof of efforts undertaken at the institutional level. For example, considering members' capacity, a report on the prevalence of gender-based violence in their institution could be requested. Candidate members might also be required to submit their Code of Conduct and the accompanying Protocol to be eligible to become members of the association or umbrella organisation, as proof of having policies in place. Any implementing and enforcing mechanisms can also be required to ensure the application of such protocols and policies.
- Members can be required to sign a pledge expressing their commitment to continuously reinforce their policies against gender-based violence. This would ensure that all members are committed to the same high standards and values and are held accountable for keeping their institutions free from gender-based violence. This would also help to ensure a unified approach and protection for international, mobile students and researchers in the European Higher Education and Research Area.

**Coordinate or require regular assessments of members' institutional policy frameworks relating to gender-based violence, based on the 7P model.**

- Commission or conduct regular assessments of member organisation policies to identify areas for improvement and potential points of vulnerability. Closer analysis can subsequently focus on specific Ps (Prevalence, Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, Provision of services, Partnerships, Policy), for example by conducting a review of prosecution policies and disciplinary regulations, as well as examining drop-out rates and patterns to understand potential reasons behind them.
- Provide support to member organisations in the design, dissemination, and analysis of prevalence surveys, especially in cases where member institutions have limited capacity and resources, assisting their efforts for evidence-based interventions and policies.

# Inspiring practices

** In the UK, upon the request of Universities UK (the association of UK universities), legal guidance has been published on how institutions are to handle cases of student misconduct, making the distinction between criminal and civil offences (Pinsent Masons, 2016). This triggered a debate and in addition complementary guidance documents.

** In the aftermath of the #MeToo campaign in 2020, the Conference of Universities' Rectors in Lithuania adopted the Guidelines for the Prevention of Sexual Harassment and Investigation of its Incidence (in Lithuanian).

# Further reading

**Explore the recommendations for other stakeholders groups, developed by UniSAFE:**

- Recommendations for Higher Education and Research Institutions, available here.
- Recommendations for research funding organisations towards ending gender-based violence, available here.
- Recommendations for Student Associations and Unions towards ending gender-based violence , available here.
- Recommendations for Staff Associations and Unions, available here.
- Recommendations for Policymakers, available here.

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## How to cite this document?

## About UniSAFE

UniSAFE is a three-year, EU-funded research project, which aims to produce in-depth knowledge on gender-based violence and sexual harassment in research performing organisations, and to translate this research into operational tools for higher education and research organisations. The project has analysed the mechanisms of GBV - its social determinants, antecedents, and consequences - at three different levels, using a holistic research model: 1) Prevalence and impacts of GBV by a survey at 45 RPOs (micro level); 2) Organisational responses and infrastructure via data gathered by in-depth case studies, interviews, and a strategic mapping of research organisations in 15 member states (meso level); and Legal and policy frameworks in 27 European states and 3 associated states (macro level). These results have been translated into an operational toolkit for research and higher education institutions and recommendations for relevant stakeholders.

## Disclaimer

More outputs from UniSAFE available at https://unisafe-gbv.eu
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