Recommendations
for research funding organisations
towards ending gender-based violence

This factsheet addresses research funding organisations at European, national, regional and local levels and provides recommendations on their role towards ending gender-based violence. Recommendations are based on the findings from the EU-funded UniSAFE project.

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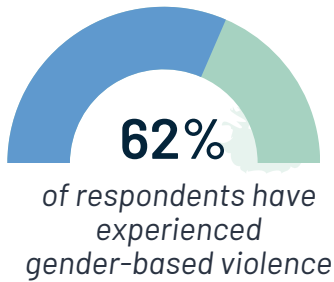
Nearly two in three (62%) of the over 42,000 respondents who took part in the UniSAFE survey on gender-based violence in research organisations in 2022 stated that they had experienced at least one form of gender-based violence within their institution (including physical, sexual, psychological, economic,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

The role of research funding organisations in ending gender-based violence

Research funding organisations (RFOs) support scientific research projects and research careers, and evaluate and assess the research and innovation they are funding. RFOs can play a crucial role in addressing and tackling gender-based violence in academia by enforcing policies and procedures, implementing targeted actions and mechanisms, and defining their own organisational culture and practices more broadly. By actively working to combat gender-based violence, RFOs contribute to enhancing the quality and excellence of research. In this way, preferably in collaboration with RPOs (Research Performing Organisations), RFOs are key stakeholders for creating academic cultures free from gender-based violence.

In addition, RFOs can fund research targeted in the area of gender-based violence. Furthermore, RFOs also have the power to influence institutional policies by requiring that the provision of such funding be contingent on the fulfilment of various criteria on the departmental (gender balance in representation in research teams) as well as institutional level (Gender Equality Plans). They can also enforce accountability by requiring institutions to report incidents and holding perpetrators accountable. Lastly, by acting as platforms for collaboration, coordination, and networking, and by facilitating the production and sharing of knowledge, emerging practices, and innovative approaches, RFOs can contribute to the development of f policy measures.

Recommendations

Policy

- Require applicants to provide proof of institutional policies and mechanisms in place addressing gender-based violence, as part of Gender Equality Plans or separately. Alternatively, such a measure can provide extra points for the proposal evaluation or any other incentive concerning the research site of the applied project. In case of multi-institutional applications, it is necessary to decide whether such a requirement/measure will apply to all institutions involved, or only for the principal investigator's institution.
- For programmes of international cooperation, require applicants to provide proof of policies in place to address gender-based violence as one criterion of the collaboration.
- Explore the possibility to require the inclusion of measures against gender-based violence in Gender Equality Plans as an eligibility criterion for funding.
- Include experts on gender-based violence in the internal evaluation of implemented measures targeting gender-based violence in RFOs. Make sure experts are included in planning, executing and analysing implementation processes within RFOs, and also ensure results and recommendations are used for institutional change.

Prevalence

- Ask for evidence that institutions publish regular data about cases of gender-based violence. Such requirement can be an eligibility criterion for institutions applying for grants.
- Request information, from each RPO awarded a grant, on the methods used to collect data on gender-based violence.

Prevention

- Ensure specific funding for research on addressing gender-based violence. Include gender-based violence among the supported research topics, which could strengthen the knowledge base and promote a better understanding of the topic.
- Set a Code of Conduct for RPOs awarded funding, which will include the declaration of responsibility for creating an appropriate research culture and for dealing promptly with allegations of gender-based violence in accordance with their internal procedures, guided by the relevant national legislation, policies and frameworks.
- Request individual applicants or RPOs to self-certify at the time of research application that there are no documented allegations of any gender-based violence against applicants in terms of a current investigation, or disciplinary warning or sanction in place.

- Create a mechanism that allows the transfer of grant funding in case of allegations or an ongoing investigation of any of the team members of the granted team. The mechanism for transfer of grant funding should be established in advance, and should be clearly outlined in the Grant Agreement ensuring that the necessary expertise and resources are secured to continue the research project effectively. Ensure the protection of all individual researchers involved through the process of implementing budget transfers and clarify the need for RPOs to hold perpetrators accountable for violations, abuse and other forms of misconduct. It is possible that this mechanism can also align with existing protocols and routines for research misconduct and ethical violations.

Protection

- Hold the grant awardee organisation accountable for handling and reporting any incidents of gender-based violence within funded actions, and by implementing sanctions such as the removal of the Principal Investigators, or other team members, or the withdrawal of funding. Make it clear that failure to comply with these measures may result in the grant awardee organisation being temporarily or permanently ineligible for future funding.
- Analyse, implement and evaluate necessary measures adopted to identify and prevent (potential) risks of gender-based violence within funded actions. This can entail, for example, initial and/or half-way evaluation interviews with PIs on how they act to secure avoiding risks of gender-based violence, or through implementing self-monitoring protocols to be used by project partners and reported back to RFOs at certain intervals.
- Consider establishing a whistle-blowing function for researchers funded by RFOs who experience gender-based violence, in order to alert the funded RPOs about ongoing violence and abuse. Make sure this function is independent of RPOs and align it with existing or emerging legal requirements or policy development.

Prosecution

- Alert RPOs when a complaint on gender-based violence reaches the RFO and set a deadline for the RPO to process the complaint or to confirm that the RPO has acted upon that complaint.
- Consider the suspension of relevant grant(s) for a limited period until the RPO has actively addressed reported cases of gender-based violence.
- Until the RPO reacts to and solves instances of gender-based violence, consider ways of applying restrictions on applications for specific grant types, for example, doctoral training programmes and overseas based research, including considering whether such restrictions should apply to individuals, groups or the whole RPO.
- Consider not accepting new grant applications for a limited period until the RPO addresses gender-based violence, including whether such restriction should apply to individual perpetrators, a group of researchers, fields of research, or the RPO as a whole.

Provision of services

- Include information on gender-based violence when publishing funding schemes and also when sending out preparatory information to applicants.
- Organise training sessions and seminars for researchers and other stakeholders, using external expertise as necessary, to provide information on the RFO policy and approach to gender-based violence and its impacts, and opportunities to contribute to a safe and inclusive research environment.

Partnerships

- Partner with other RFOs at the national, European and international levels, such as with the GENDERACTIONplus project and Global Research Council, to exchange knowledge and develop the most appropriate measures to tackle gender-based violence. Identify potential areas of collaboration, such as the review of how organisations that receive funding ensure appropriate policies and measures to prevent and tackle gender-based violence during the project's lifecycle. Facilitate sharing of knowledge and good practices among research funding organisations, including through the actions of umbrella organisations such as Science Europe.

Inspiring practices

** The UK Research and Innovation, UKRI, takes a stand in supporting healthy research and innovation culture, by preventing bullying and harassment. On their website, their actions and recommendations are outlined, including grant and training terms and conditions clarifying the role of funder organisations in preventing bullying and harassment. Explore further.

** Wellcome, a global charitable foundation that support research in sciences, implements the "Bullying and Harassment Policy" which is part of their grant conditions, considered along with their policies on responsible conduct of research. The policy clearly defined the expected actions from the funded bodies, it outlines the unaccepted behaviours, specified the information requested from the grant recipient, details potential sanctions and disciplinary measures applied and clarifies Wellcome"s role in any investigation related to such matters. Explore further.

** The National Science Foundation (USA) Harassment policy aims to ensure that the funded research projects are free from any case of harassment and provides the terms and conditions applied under the policy. Explore further.

Further reading

Explore the recommendations for other stakeholder groups developed by UniSAFE:

- Recommendations for Higher Education and Research Institutions, available <u>here</u>.
- Recommendations for Student Associations and Unions towards ending gender-based violence , available <u>here</u>.
- Recommendations for Staff Associations and Unions, available <u>here</u>.
- Recommendations for Policymakers, available <u>here</u>.
- Recommendations for higher education and research institution associations and umbrella organisations <u>here</u>

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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

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