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Author name(s)	Magdaléna Michlová, Eva Oliva, Michaela Fikejzová, Marcela Linková
Contributors	Lut Mergaert, Nathalie Wuiame, Panagiota Polykarpou, Vasia Madesi, Sarah Philipson Isaac, Anne Laure Humbert, Sofia Strid
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Partners



Summary

This report has been prepared as part of Work Package 2 of the GenderSAFE project. It presents the results of a needs assessment related to the experiences of gender-based violence among groups at increased risk of gender-based violence, with a particular focus on intersectionality, mobility and precarity. These groups at increased risk of gender-based violence included especially women and researchers facing multiple intersectional inequalities; people from various disciplines working in remote research sites, on mobility schemes or on field trips; and doctoral and postdoctoral fellows who tend to be employed in precarious positions.

The needs assessment focused on the institutional response to experience of gender-based violence in terms of institutional policies, practices, processes, and procedures related to reporting, investigation and case handling, protective measures and sanctioning. The objective was to also capture situations where institutional policies are lacking or where institutional gender-based violence or other policies are in place but fall short of adequately serving the defined at-risk groups. This needs assessment was preceded by a literature review of the needs and risks facing the defined at-risk groups.

A total of 29 interviews was conducted with researchers and non-academic staff across Europe between April and June 2024. To facilitate conducting the interviews, an interview guide was prepared, including a semi-structured topic guide. Ethical conduct and personal data protection provisions were an integral and important part of the guide.

The literature review identified various forms of discrimination and violence to which the defined target groups are exposed and some recommendations in terms of the needs and measures to be introduced to address the issue. Nevertheless, these recommendations often remain at a very general level (e.g., introducing inclusive policies or adopting an intersectional approach in the design and implementation of policies and measures).

The experiences reported in the interviews underscores various and multiple shortcomings in policies and the institutional responses to reported cases. The analysis presented in this report focuses on the following topics: The institutional response to experiences of gender-based violence; Power, hierarchies and different forms of marginalisation; Awareness; Services; and Training. These have been selected as particularly salient for further work in the project. In the next section of the report, the implications of these findings are discussed for the Model Policy Framework under development in GenderSAFE Task 2.3, before ending with brief conclusions.

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour
ERA	European Research Area
Eurodoc	the European Council for Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers
EU	European Union
GEinCEE Community of Practice	Community of Practice for Gender Equality in Central and Eastern Europe
UniSAFE	Universities implementing changes for safe environments Area (project name)
GenderSAFE	Advancing the zero-tolerance approach to gender-based violence in higher education and research in the European Research Area (project name)
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and others sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions

The GenderSAFE project

The EU-funded GenderSAFE project promotes zero-tolerance for gender-based violence in the European Research Area and supports research and higher education institutions in establishing safe, inclusive and respectful environments by setting up comprehensive policies.

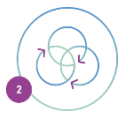
The UniSAFE project has provided strong evidence of the prevalence of gender-based violence across European higher education and research institutions and countries. (Lipinsky et al. 2022a; Humbert et al. 2022).

In recent years and responding to this prevalence, policy attention to gender-based violence in higher education and research has grown at the EU level, as well as at the level of responsible national authorities and research performing organisations. Despite advances in policy adoption, institutions are however failing in implementation, and very little is in place to monitor and evaluate existing policies. There is also a lack of understanding of what constitutes gender-based violence and how to proceed when something happens.

Building on the insights and operational tools developed within UniSAFE between 2024 and 2027, the GenderSAFE project aims to:



Strengthen zero-tolerance policies: to create a unified policy approach in the EU by incorporating the latest theoretical insights, focusing on power dynamics, intersectionality, mobility, and precarity.



Support higher education and research institutions in improving and implementing existing policies: gathering stakeholders from various contexts to co-design and share zero-tolerance policies on gender-based violence, in line with the EU baseline code of conduct, fostering mutual learning and support.



Build institutional capacities: training dedicated staff and a pool of trainers to help organisations develop and implement effective policies against gender-based violence.



Monitor policies at national and institutional levels: developing tools to gather and monitor comprehensive data on how zero-tolerance policies are adopted and implemented across the EU, creating a valuable resource for future efforts.



Raise awareness and advocate for policies with zero-tolerance to gender-based violence.

1. Introduction

A prevalence study conducted by the European project UniSAFE demonstrates that experiences of gender-based violence have serious consequences for the whole institutional community: victims, survivors and bystanders. According to Lipinsky et al. 2022a, among the UniSAFE more than 42,000 respondents, 66% of women, 56% of men and 74% of non-binary respondents disclosed experiences of at least one form of gender-based violence. Non-binary, trans and LGBTQ+ students and staff, as well as students and staff from ethnic minorities, and students/staff with a disability or a chronic illness were affected more often. In contrast to these numbers, only 7% of students and 23% of staff who experienced gender-based violence in the context of their institution reported the incident.

The survey (Lipinsky et al. 2022a) also showed that survivors of gender-based violence feel socially excluded, unsafe or generally unwell (70% of respondents) compared to non-experiencers (20% of respondents). Experiencing violence not only impacts their sense of safety and wellbeing, but it also impacts their work and studies. It makes people feel dissatisfied in their jobs (67% of respondents), reduces their work performance (54% of respondents) and makes them think about leaving the academic sector altogether (40% of respondents). It also creates a sense of exclusion from the community. Students are more likely to miss classes, withdraw from courses and feel dissatisfied with their study. A frequent consequence is a deterioration in academic performance or considerations of leaving university altogether.

The objective of conducting this needs assessment in the GenderSAFE project is twofold. The first is to fill a knowledge gap by generating new insight into the experiences of the defined at-risk groups (see below Target groups) with the institutional response to their experience of gender-based violence, focusing on intersectionality, mobility and precarity. The second objective is to contribute the operationalisation of the Model Policy Framework developed in Task 2.3, to be tested with the GenderSAFE Community of Practice with a view to making this Model Policy Framework reflective of the needs of these target groups, and thus more inclusive and sensitive to intersectional inequalities.

For the purpose of the analysis, needs are understood as the essential requirements and resources necessary to support victims/survivors effectively. Addressing these needs is crucial to ensuring that victims/survivors can recover from the trauma and secure justice, dignity, and well-being. Understanding and responding to these needs holistically is key to preventing further harm (“institutional betrayal”) and promoting empowerment and resilience (“institutional courage”) (Smith & Freyd 2014; Schmidt et al. 2023). The needs assessment focused on the institutional response to experiences of gender-based violence in terms of institutional policies, practices, processes, and procedures related to reporting and case handling, protective measures and sanctioning. The objective was to also capture situations where institutional policies are lacking or where institutional gender-based violence or other policies are in place but fall short of adequately serving the defined at-risk groups.

This needs assessment was preceded by a literature review of the needs and risks facing the defined at-risk groups with a view to identifying existing knowledge on the specific challenges and reviewing existing recommendations coming from research.

2. Methodology

This section outlines the methodological approach to the literature review into the needs of the defined at-risk groups and the needs assessment analysis.

2.1 Literature review

The literature review conducted as part of the work covered existing research on gender-based violence among people belonging to specific at-risk groups defined in the GenderSAFE grant agreement in relation to task 2.2, namely:

- Women and LGBTQIA+ researchers facing intersectional inequalities (based on ethnicity, nationality, economic background, disability and chronic illness, religion and other);
- Those with experience in remote research sites, on mobility schemes, on field trips in various disciplines;
- Doctoral and postdoctoral fellows in precarious working conditions.

Its aim was to extract information from existing research regarding the needs of people belonging to these groups in relation to their experience of gender-based violence and the institutional response to this experience.

The literature search procedure was as follows:

- (i) a systematic search of EBSCO and ProQuest databases,
- (ii) a Google scholar selective search for keyword combinations that yielded insufficient relevant results in EBSCO and ProQuest databases

A systematic search of the EBSCO and ProQuest databases was conducted in March 2024 using relevant keywords, a complete list of which is available in Appendix 2. Literature review keywords. The search was conducted in English only, and not restricted to a certain timeframe, nor was it restricted geographically.

In the ProQuest database, the search was limited to articles published in peer-reviewed journals, due to the unmanageable volume of outputs (tens of thousands of results) in the absence of this criterion. Relevant PhD dissertations were also identified in the EBSCO database and authors were contacted to provide full texts. However, none of the authors had responded by the end of March 2024. The results of the keyword searches were filtered based on abstract-scanning, eliminating texts that did not match the thematic definition of the literature search, i.e. those that did not match the mapping of the specific needs of vulnerable groups in the academic environment. Thus, for example, texts that were not situated in an academic context and were identified by keywords based on the literature cited rather than the content of the text, were excluded. After abstract-scanning of the two databases used, 103 relevant texts were identified, a list of which is provided in Appendix 1. Reviewed literature. The performed literature review is based on analysis of the full texts.

Subsequently, an additional general Google Scholar search was performed to supplement sources in areas for which the keywords did not yield sufficient literature in the systematic database search. These were primarily linked to the context of field research and early-

career researchers as vulnerable group. The specific keywords used for this search are listed in Appendix 2. . From this search, 22 additional texts were fully analysed, increasing total literature review to 125 texts.

Most of the texts analysed date from the last five years and the most frequently thematised vulnerable group is women in the hierarchical academic environment. The identification of specific needs of the defined vulnerable groups in the existing literature was most complicated in relation to people with disabilities, a topic only addressed in a small proportion of the texts analysed. Further, the literature analysed is generally Western-centric and often deals with the American context. In contrast, there is an absolute scarcity of texts dealing with the Central and Eastern European context.

2.2 Interviews

2.2.1 Target groups

The target group for the interviews included but was not limited to current and former research and non-research staff, in higher education and research institutions at higher-than-average risk of experiencing gender-based violence due to specific intersecting inequalities who had experienced gender-based violence in the past 5 years, in particular:

- Women and researchers facing multiple intersectional inequalities
- People from various disciplines working in remote research sites, on mobility schemes or on field trips
- Doctoral and postdoctoral fellows and researchers in other types of precarious working conditions including working as self-employed free-lancers or being employed on temporary contracts.

As Table 1 below indicates, many of the research participants occupied multiple positions which intersected with inequalities they faced based on race/ethnicity, LGBTQIA+ status, and disabilities or chronic illness.

2.2.2 Research questions

The research questions guiding the interviews were:

- Given the experience at their current or former research or higher education institution, what support and/or services did the research participants receive in response to their experience? Was a policy in place to support victims/survivors/bystanders in this situation?
- With reference to the 7P model (Mergaert, Linková, Strid [2023](#)), in what ways were these support measures and services adequate to the situation and answering their needs? What was missing/lacking?
- What would need to happen in the situation for them to feel that their experience is taken seriously and handled appropriately?

- What would need to happen in the situation for them to feel safer?
- What were the specific factors (e.g. mobility, fieldwork, their coming-out) that in their view contributed to their experience of violence?
- Are there additional specific aspects that institutions need to address in order to attend to the needs of the particular situation?

2.2.3 Interview guide

An interview guide was prepared to support the data collection. The interview guide detailed the theoretical background, research design, including target groups, research questions, a semi-structured topic guide (see Appendix 3. Structure of the interview script and guiding questions), ethics, personal data protection, pseudonymisation, informed consent form, an invitation letter and other guiding materials.

2.2.4 Recruitment

The foreseen number of interviews was 20, while 29 interviews have actually been conducted.

A sample of 29 research participants was recruited through personal contacts of the researchers with victims/survivors and liaison persons at higher education institutions and by contacting relevant associations and networks (such as Eurodoc, GEinCEE Community of Practice, the national e-mail list for the Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research, the German #MeToo in science initiative, diversiunity, the Trans* Research Association of Ireland, the Czexpats in Science).

2.2.5 Sample overview

Out of the 29 research participants, fourteen declared themselves to be an ethnic minority, seven as having a disability or chronic illness, eleven were of a minority sexual orientation and seven of a minority gender identity. Twelve out of 29 research participants experienced gender-based violence on a mobility scheme such as doctoral or postdoctoral fellowship and four researchers were at a remote site at the time of the experience of gender-based violence, with additional four on field research. Fourteen out of the 29 research participants were working on a precarious contract at the time they experienced gender-based violence. This includes various forms of precarious conditions including working as a self-employed free-lancer or being employed by the respective institution on a temporary contract.

Many of the research participants self-identified with multiple, intersecting inequality grounds. Six research participants identified to be of a minority gender identity and simultaneously a minority sexual orientation. Four of these six declared to be a person with disability or chronic illness and belonging to an ethnic minority. Two of these four stated to work on a precarious contract, two were on a mobility scheme at the time of the gender-based violent experience and two at a remote site.

As for the research participants' field of study, 17 indicated humanities or social sciences, four natural sciences, three engineering or technology, two applied fields (medicine, business), and three fine arts.

In terms of the geographical spread, ten research participants were in Northern Europe at the time of their experience, one in Eastern Europe, four in Central Europe, seven in Western Europe, six in Southern Europe and one at a remote site in international waters. In terms of their country of origin, two were from South America, four from North America, three from Asia, two from Northern Europe, two from Eastern Europe, four from Central Europe, six from Western Europe and six from Southern Europe.

For an overview of the interviews see Table 1 below.

Sixteen of the 29 perpetrators were identified by the research participants as men, two as women (one was identified as occupying a marginalised position as a queer academic) and in twelve instances the incident involved multiple perpetrators

2.2.6 Interview modalities

Online and offline semi-structured interviews of 45-150 minutes were conducted in English or the native language of a research participant if the researcher was fluent in the research participant's language. The pseudonymised interview data was put in the prepared templates by the researchers conducting the interview and checked by the task leader. The reports were coded and used as a basis for the analysis, to identify the concrete experience with gender-based violence and the needs of the research participants.

2.2.7 Ethics and personal data protection

The interview guide (see **Error! Reference source not found.**) contained detailed information about ethical principles for the GenderSAFE researchers to observe in their conduct as well as guidelines for personal data collection, protection, reporting and pseudonymisation.

An application for an ethics approval for the study was submitted by the ISAS team to the ISAS Commission for the Ethics in Research, which was granted on 27 March 2024 (file no. SOÚ-297_4/2024). An application for ethics approval was submitted by UGOT to the Swedish Ethical Review Authority, which was granted on 2 April 2024 (Dnr 2024-01517-01). Signed informed consent sheets were obtained from all the research participants; these are stored with the institution collecting the data in line with the institutional procedures.

Referral information was added to the informed consent form for the research participants should they request additional support following an interview.

2.2.8 Methodological considerations and researchers' positionality

This needs assessment was embedded in feminist approaches to conducting research into gender-based violence. Critical to the ways that this needs assessment was conducted were:

- **Participant-centred research:** At the centre of this is the need to build trust and share stories rather than “extract” data, treat research participants’ lived experiences as a form of expertise, and to consider how knowledge is represented (Potts et al. 2022). This links to developing an understanding of the meanings that research participants give to their experiences rather than merely documenting events, to help capture the emotional and psychological dimensions of the experience of gender-based violence.
- **Attention to power disparities and hierarchies in the research process:** Central to this concern is the recognition of power disparities and hierarchies that may exist between the research participant and researchers, attention to one’s own positionality including “staying with the discomfort” which has been theorised as “a form of resistance to the reiteration of comfortable and normative truths and ‘wilful ignorances’” (Chadwick 2021) of those writing from privileged positions.
- **Attention to care:** Attention to the safety and affect of both the research participants and researchers conducting the research has been a key concern. This included adopting victim-centred and trauma-informed approaches, attention to confidentiality and avoidance of retraumatisation. It also entails attention for psychological wellbeing of researchers and support provision in the course of the research process and after. This links to researcher vulnerability in the sense of relationality (Venäläinen 2023) with affecting and being affected in the research process.
- **Attention to institutional change:** Fundamental to this is a critical analysis of institutions and the various ways institutions neglect to respond to gender-based violence, silence, threaten and otherwise “betray” members of their community (Smidt et al. 2023; Smith & Freyd 2014).
- **Attention to advocacy:** An important element is the focus on applying the knowledge generated to contribute to social change. The findings generated are not treated as knowledge only but help to gain insights that will inform the development of policies and support services.

In addition, specifically for research into gender-based violence in higher education and research, the following aspects are salient and required attention:

- **Insider / Outsider status:** Researchers are part of the academic community and hence may have access to more nuanced understandings of the institutional culture, but this may also predispose them to biases. Adding to this issue is one’s position at the intersection with other axes of inequality such as when the research participant and researcher share being early-career researchers in precarious temporary positions or sharing experience of racism and racial inequity or other forms of marginalisation (disability and chronic illness, LGBTQIA+ etc.).
- **Shared experience of violence:** Researchers and research participants may share experiences of gender-based violence. This can be a facilitating factor in that it contributes to building rapport, sensitivity and trust; it may also introduce bias where researchers may be more attuned to augmenting the voice of the shared experience. It also relates to the attention to care mentioned above, both in relation to the

research participant and the researcher, in terms of the recognition and sensitive treatment of the shared experience.

These concerns underscore the need for reflexivity in the entirety of the research process. To facilitate this, the research teams included in the research reports a section for Interviewer's notes where researchers shared information about the research participant during the interview to capture interaction styles and pay attention to their wellbeing. A second element was a reflection on the dynamics of the interview where researchers shared reflections on the ease/challenges in the course of the interview and difficulty of asking specific questions. A third element was a critical reflection on one's performance during the interview, potential biases, feelings and emotions.

In the Interviewers' notes, the researchers reflected on their positionality in relation to:

- the identity markers of the research participants, which may have made them sensitive to particular types of experiences disclosed;
- the shared experience of violence;
- knowledge of one another and friendship.

Concrete considerations of such positionings are contained below in the Researchers' positionality section.

Interview pilot

Each of the three research teams (ISAS, UGOT, YW) conducted a pilot interview (ISAS two interviews as two researchers were involved in conducting the interviews), to test the feasibility of the interview guide and the questions asked. The researchers drafted a pilot interview reflection report with reflections on the interview guide, the interview script (difficulty and in-/appropriateness of research questions and their formulations) and any other relevant information to share in relation to the pilot interview. After the pilots, a meeting was organised to discuss this experience.

The researchers shared how it was for them to work with the interview guide and tips for improving this experience. In particular, this related to navigating the research questions during the interview, as research participants were left relatively free to narrate their experiences at their own pace and following their own logic. In some instances, this necessitated "jumping" from one section of the interview script to another. In line with the approach to semi-structured interviews in qualitative research, it was confirmed that the questions should be treated as guiding considerations rather than precise questions that must be asked in each interview.

Another challenge consisted in moving from the initial sharing of the experience of gender-based violence encountered to what was perceived as the "more technical" aspects of the institutional response (and the lack thereof) and reflection on the needs of the research participants in relation to the institutional response and policies in place.

Researchers' positionality

The researchers variously reflected on the following aspects in their research reports:

- **Positive bias and sensitivity to the experience shared:** These were expressed in relation to issues of academic hierarchies, abuses of power and issues with supervisors, as well as previous personal experience linked to intersectional inequality. The researchers reflected that sharing their own experience was conducive to reassuring the research participant that their experiences will be recognised and treated with much care as the researchers recognise the vulnerabilities that follow from talking about the experience encountered.
- **Sensitivity and validation:** In some instances, the researchers reflected on the importance of the participant-centred approach and the validation of and sensitivity to the experience shared. Given the hostility of the environment encountered and lack of institutional response and recognition, they reflected that the validation of the experience was vital and emotional.
- **Prior knowledge of incidents shared:** This may have resulted in a certain “awkwardness,” asking questions about what the research participant and the researchers had already shared previously. In other instances, this may have resulted in the researcher reflecting that the concerns in this needs assessment were not giving enough space for the research participant to address aspects that were not immediately related to the needs assessment but may have been salient to the research participant’s testimony (e.g., the impact of the actions of the person perpetrating violence on the research participant). In addition, the prior knowledge may have created uncertainty in the researcher whether the research participant would prioritise their own wellbeing rather than going through with the interview on behalf of the friendship between the research participant and the researcher. Finally, some researchers expressed difficulty they faced in having the research participants recount their experiences of violence and fears of retraumatisation given the prior knowledge they had of the impact the experience of violence had on the research participant. In some instances, the researcher planned a follow-up with the research participants to see how they felt a few days after the interview to ensure the wellbeing of the participants.
- **Knowledge and awareness of issues of gender-based violence:** In several instances, the research participants had knowledge of issues related to gender-based violence specifically and social science research more generally. The researchers reflected that this fact facilitated conducting the interview because there was less of a need to explain certain aspects of the research (e.g., in relation to communicating around informed consent, objectives of the needs assessment and the types of questions asked).
- **Confidentiality and concerns about identification:** Some research participants expressed concerns about confidentiality and potentially identifiable information shared. In such instances, the researchers reiterated the process of pseudonymisation and talked through the research participant’s worries. Also, in some cases, the interview reports were shared with the research participant to reassure them, ensure their sense of control over the process and let them verify

that the report does not contain anything the research participant would find potentially identifying.

- **Conflicting responsibilities:** In some instances, the researchers reflected on their conflicting responsibilities entailing on the one hand the sense of needing to provide space and acknowledge the experience being shared by the research participant and on the other hand the responsibility toward the research conducted and the motivation to cover the areas being researched. In a few instances, the researchers may have made several attempts to redirect the interview but in the end let the research participant navigate the narrative as the interview questions did not serve the purpose of redirecting.
- **Naming the experience:** The researchers reflected that in some instances the interview had given the research participant a language for identifying the different dimensions of violence. This was facilitated by sharing definitions of the various forms of gender-based violence both in the call for research participants and prior to the interview, which also allowed the research participants to understand e.g., financial violence as part of larger experience of violence.
- **Researchers' emotional exhaustion and wellbeing:** In some instances, the researchers reflected on the mental strain of conducting the interviews, particularly if two interviews were scheduled on one day. In the case of the ISAS team with two researchers conducting the interviews, they were very positive about the ability to share and debrief after the interviews together. In addition, two intervision sessions were organised with a therapist specialising in gender-based violence to support the researchers in handling the experience shared by the research participants, and in preventing their own retraumatisation which was appreciated by the researchers.

2.2.9 Analysis

The research analysis was conducted based on the 29 interview reports which served as the primary source material. The interview reports were analysed against the defined research questions, using a participant-centred approach. The primary focus of the analysis was to examine the adequacy of policies, support measures and services through the research participants' perspective and experience, and to identify the gaps and shortcomings in the implementation of the institutional policy and delivery of services. If available, the analysis also focused on the participants' suggestions for institutional improvement.

Intersectionality was applied as a key analytical approach, focusing on the specific factors of precarity and mobility and identity characteristics, such as gender identity, nationality, ethnicity, LGBTQIA+ self-identification, disability and chronic illness etc.

The interview reports were coded reflecting the above-mentioned analytical approach. The coded reports served as bases for the categorisation and conceptualisation of key topic areas of relevance to the development of the Model Policy Framework, which are discussed in Section 4. Interview analysis: The institutional response to experiences of gender-based violence; Power, hierarchies and different forms of marginalisation; Awareness; Services; and Training.

Pseud. code	RES / NON-RES / PhD candidate at the time of the gender-based violence experience	Gender of the participant	Minority sexual orientation (LGBTQIA+)	Minority gender identity (non-binary, trans)	Disability	Ethnic minority background	Precarious contract at the time of the gender-based violence experience	On a mobility scheme at the time of the gender-based violence experience (such as postdoctoral fellowship)	In a remote site at the time of the gender-based violence experience	On field research at the time of the gender-based violence experience
Target number			4		2	4	4	2	2	2
Actual number			11	7	7	14	14	12	4	4
ISAS01	PhD candidate or equivalent	woman				x				
ISAS02	Researcher	woman				x	x	x		
ISAS03	Researcher	a-gender/non-binary	x	x			x	x	x	x
ISAS04	PhD candidate or equivalent	woman	x		x		x	x		x
ISAS07	PhD candidate or equivalent	woman					x			
ISAS08	MA student	a-gender/non-binary	x	x	x	x		x		
ISAS09	PhD candidate or equivalent	woman					x			
ISAS10	Senior researcher (12 years after getting a PhD)	woman					x			

ISAS11	PhD candidate or equivalent	a-gender/non-binary	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
ISAS12	PhD candidate or equivalent	woman				x	x	x		
YW01	MA student	woman			x	x		x		
YW02	Researcher	woman					x	x		
YW03	MA student	woman						x		
YW04	Researcher	woman					x	x		
YW05	BA student	male	x						x	
YW06	Postdoc	a-gender/non-binary	x	x			x			
YW07	MA student	woman	x							
UGOT01	PhD candidate or equivalent					x				
UGOT02	Postdoc	woman	x			x				
UGOT03	PhD candidate or equivalent	woman				x	x	x		
UGOT04	PhD candidate or equivalent	a-gender/non-binary	x	x	x	x	x	x		
UGOT05	MA student	a-gender/non-binary	x	x	x	x			x	x
UGOT06	Non-research staff	woman				x	x			
UGOT07	PhD candidate or equivalent	a-gender/non-binary		x		x				
UGOT08	Postdoc	woman								

UGOT09	Senior researcher (12 years after getting a PhD)	woman								
UGOT10	PhD candidate or equivalent	woman				x				
UGOT11	PhD candidate or equivalent	woman	x		x					
UGOT12	MA student	woman								

Table 1. Overview of the profiles of the research participants recruited for the interviews

3. Literature review

The present literature review is structured according to types of vulnerabilities into the following groups: (i) women and LGBTQIA+ people, (ii) people with disabilities, (iii) people in precarious academic positions, such as early-career researchers, PhD students or postdoctoral researchers, (iv) researchers conducting fieldwork, and (v) researchers and students in medical settings. This is a thematic division of the literature under analysis, taking into account that the vulnerability of these groups is influenced by intersections with race, disability or socio-economic status. Such division is therefore primarily analytical for the clarity of the literature review; specific individuals are often concerned with vulnerability in terms of several of the aforementioned thematic headings.

Women and LGBTQIA+ individuals are disproportionately vulnerable to experiencing gender-based violence, as evidenced by numerous studies (McMahon et al. 2023; Vargas et al. 2021; Magić 2021; Reidy et al. 2023; Smith & Gayles 2018; Pilgaard et al. 2023; Barthelemy et al. 2016, 2022; Anteneodo 2020; Agbaje et al. 2021; Agardh et al. 2022; McKinnon & O'Connell 2020). Such victimisation is linked with **heightened risks concerning mental health and overall well-being** (Boyle & McKinzie 2021). In addition, perceptions of experiencing sexual harassment correlate with **elevated levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms** (Amaro et al. 2024). Moreover, women and LGBTQIA+ individuals, together with people of colour, are disproportionately subjected to workplace bullying (Hollis 2017). **Various manifestations of (hetero)sexism contribute** to diminished self-esteem and educational opportunities among women and LGBTQIA+ individuals, with **intersecting factors such as race and socioeconomic status exacerbating these effects** (Cheng & Yang 2015; Nama 2017; Torres Acosta 2023; Allen et al. 2022; Aycok et al. 2019; Tsouroufli 2023). The phenomenon of **'minority stress'** significantly impacts the health, educational pursuits, and career trajectories of LGBTQIA+ individuals, stress which is compounded by the potential for double jeopardy among researchers within this community, who may face scepticism regarding their impartiality while conducting research closely related to their identity (Veldhuis 2022). **Symbolic violence**, characterised by **identity-based coercion and negative reinforcement of heteronormative norms**, presents challenges for LGBTQIA+ individuals in acknowledging and addressing such forms of violence due to inherent evidentiary complexities (Moretti-Pires et al. 2022). Inclusive campus climates, underscored by supportive social networks and visible institutional backing, play pivotal roles in ameliorating minority stress among LGBTQIA+ individuals (Evangelista et al. 2022; Ueno et al. 2023; English & Fenby-Hulse 2019; Phillips 2024). Conversely, perceiving campus environments as less inclusive engenders reluctance to express one's identity openly, erodes trust in support services, fosters suspicion of homophobic attitudes, and diminishes the likelihood of bystander intervention in instances of gender-based violence targeting LGBTQIA+ individuals (Bartolo 2010; Gabriele-Black & Goldberg 2021; Dessel et al. 2017). Combating non-inclusive climates and discrimination against LGBTQIA+ faculty members engenders feelings of exhaustion and disillusionment (Robinson 2022; Krausch 2019). Furthermore, **the heteronormative orientation of bystander training programmes** poses challenges in effectively addressing the needs of LGBTQIA+ individuals (DeKeseredy 2021). Identified imperatives include the **provision of LGBTQIA+-specific mentoring initiatives, the formulation of inclusive and intersectional policies, including those governing**

conference organisations, and the establishment of dedicated LGBTQIA+ counselling services to facilitate incident reporting (Coulter 2020; Roskin-Fraze 2020; Traylor-Knowles et al. 2023; Clark et al. 2022). **Mitigating retaliatory actions** and other adverse repercussions associated with reporting constitute additional needs of potential victims/survivors within this realm (Puigvert et al. 2022). The need for such mitigation is shared with all vulnerable groups considered in this literature review.

Within academia, individuals with disabilities often encounter systemic barriers that perpetuate their social marginalisation (McKenzie & Khan 2023). Their needs are frequently construed through the lens of **individualism**, emphasising the necessity for personalised support mechanisms (Sépulchre 2023). **Students with disabilities bear the responsibility to navigate and advocate for the implementation of these support measures within the higher education landscape** (Meadows-Haworth 2023). Moreover, students with disabilities face barriers to gaining recognition of their scientific potential, i.e. it is implicitly questioned that people with disabilities can be knowledge producers (Lillywhite & Wolbring 2022). Although qualitative investigations into gender-based violence against individuals with disabilities within academic settings remain limited, quantitative inquiries suggest a higher incidence of such violence among students with disabilities compared to their non-disabled counterparts (Dawson et al. 2024). Additionally, **researchers grapple with the decision of whether to disclose their disabilities, with attendant repercussions such as heightened exposure to derogatory language and negative identity attributions** (Marin-Spiotta et al. 2023).

Given the neoliberalisation of the academic landscape, consisting in viewing the student as a customer, the university as a service provider whose goal is profit and emphasising the individual measurable most streamlined performance of lecturers and researchers on which their evaluation and financial remuneration is based following the new managerialism (see e.g. Lynch 2013, 2015; Phipps 2017; Tight 2019), an expanding cohort of researchers in **“transitional” roles**, i.e. roles that are, by their very nature, intended to be temporary within an individual’s career, encompassing contractual or precarious positions emerges as a vulnerable demographic (Pilinkaite Sotirovič & Blažytė 2024; Lasser et al. 2021; Alderson 2022; Poggio 2022; Feldman & Sandoval 2018). Gender discrimination, coupled with subsequent precarisation, correlates with caregiving responsibilities disproportionately assumed of women, leading to preferential treatment of male colleagues for higher-ranking positions or societal pressures to compromise caregiving responsibilities (Menard & Shinton 2022; Gallardo-Nieto et al. 2021). Notably, instances of sexual harassment appear more prevalent among **women pursuing doctoral studies and postdoctoral positions** (Webb et al. 2023). Despite frequent encounters or observations of bullying behaviour perpetrated by principal investigators and/or supervisors in postdoctoral roles and supervisors in the case of PhD students on short-term contracts often **strive to maintain amicable relationships with given principal investigators and/or supervisors** (Menard & Shinton, 2022). This dynamic underscores the significant power asymmetries within academic hierarchies, where postdocs and PhD students are in a particularly precarious position. Their professional futures heavily depend on the goodwill of their supervisors, as they require positive recommendation letters and continued support to secure subsequent employment opportunities. This dependency exacerbates their vulnerability and limits their ability to confront or report abusive behaviour. While abusive supervisors targeting graduate students or postdoctoral researchers appear prevalent, gender distinctions are not always

evident (Moss & Mahmoudi 2021; Bami et al. 2023; Christian et al. 2020, 2022). Instances of supervisor-supervisee harassment blur into a “grey area,” complicating differentiation from managerial styles (Moran et al. 2022). Early-career researchers, particularly women, in precarious postdoctoral positions, lack tailored mentoring initiatives to address their unique challenges (Brizuela et al. 2023; Shellock et al. 2022). Women early-career researchers are additionally vulnerable to “**everyday microaggressions**,” given their positioning at the lower echelons of the academic hierarchy (Lopes et al., 2023). Postdoctoral roles, characterised as staff rather than student roles, entail distinct needs for international researchers. Analysed literature illustrates scenarios where **principal investigators, during visa renewals and similar bureaucratic processes, inflict financial and other forms of harm upon international researchers** (Hayter & Parker 2018). Moreover, a so-called “**deficit narrative**” is observed among international PhD students, indicating their encounter with structural barriers associated with conforming to “**idealised foreigner**” personas, meaning to conform to local standards more strictly than local colleagues and not to challenge local standards, and hesitance to challenge local norms (Foteva et al. 2023; Guschke et al. 2022).

Researchers become a specific at-risk group during **fieldwork** that does not occur at the home institution. In general, fieldwork is described as unsafe for historically marginalised groups (Cronin et al. 2024), **especially women and non-heterosexual individuals** (Bradford & Crema 2022). Female researchers, in their experience of Antarctic fieldwork, report receiving substantial **unwanted sexual attention**, stemming from their minority status within the research domain or within the research group (Nash 2019). Gendered experiences and sexual harassment during fieldwork are mapped in the existing literature as gendered and hierarchically stratified, with supervisors disproportionately perpetrating violence against early-career researchers, among whom female trainees are primary targets (Clancy et al. 2014, 2017). Incidences of sexual transgressions, objectification, disparaging remarks regarding appearance, and apprehensions about disclosing one’s sexuality during fieldwork are documented in archaeological (Nakhai 2018) and ethnographic research (Haddow 2021). Bami et al. (2023) elucidate that women frequently encounter sexist **attitudes questioning their suitability for fieldwork**, relegating them to tasks perceived as “academic housekeeping” or domestic chores during field expeditions. Gendered barriers related to achieving a balance between family and career obligations (Lynn et al. 2018), as well as concerns regarding personal safety in unfamiliar locales (Hall-Clifford 2019), further compound the challenges associated with field research. A salient intersectional issue arises from **the cultural expectation of alcohol consumption during fieldwork**, alienating individuals adhering to certain religious beliefs (Eggert & Rumsby 2024). Nakhai (2018) underscores the prevalence of alcohol and substance abuse during archaeological fieldwork, advocating for proactive measures such as familiarising oneself with reporting mechanisms and local legal frameworks before embarking on fieldwork trips.

Working in medical settings presents another context where certain groups may face heightened risks. Gender-based violence manifests within **medical school settings, involving interactions with both local supervisors and patients**. Trainees belonging to marginalised groups recount experiences of discrimination, resulting in significant emotional distress (Rezaiefar 2022; Kisiel et al. 2023). Women particularly detail the detrimental effects of various forms of sexism on their well-being and professional development (Ibrahim 2023; McMahan et al. 2023). Perpetrators of such violence are often physicians or

male medical superiors, although male patients also contribute significantly to the problem (Schoenefeld et al. 2021; Ibrahim 2023; Giglio et al. 2022). The absence of training to address inappropriate patient behaviour and the imperative to foster a more inclusive environment emerge as pressing needs within this domain (Marr 2022; McMahon et al. 2023; Chang et al. 2020). Moreover, ethnographic field research delineates instances of gender-based violence directed by research participants towards female researchers (Kloß 2017; Pritchard 2019). Such occurrences of gender-based violence, whether emanating from colleagues, superiors, or research participants, are often influenced by the stigma of incompetence attributed to survivors (Hunt 2022).

In sum, the above literature review provides an exploration of gender-based violence across various at-risk groups, including women in male-dominated field, LGBTQIA+ individuals, those in precarious employment, researchers engaging in fieldwork, and individuals facing intersecting inequalities. These categories were not regarded as clearly unified and separable categories; instead, the literature review emphasised the intersecting factors such as race, disability and socioeconomic status exacerbating the effects of the vulnerability of such groups. By synthesising existing research, the review has identified specific possible needs of such at-risk groups to be covered by specific mechanisms and policies and/or to be included in the general mechanisms and policies. The findings underscore especially **the need for tailored support mechanisms for various at-risk groups, inclusive policies, and proactive measures, such as dedicated officers, accessible reporting systems and explicit inclusion of intersectional aspects in the institutional policies to address gender-based violence and promote safer environments for all individuals.**

4. Interview analysis

This section presents the main findings from the interviews and discusses them against the findings from the literature review.

In line with the methodological approach outlined above in Section 2, the participant-centred perspective is taken, to highlight failures and shortcomings in institutional policies and response to incidents of gender-based violence. The needs analysis did not perform an actual check of whether the institutions had a policy or specific services in place (and this would in some instances have been difficult given the fact that the experience of gender-based violence may not be current) but started from the perspective of the research participants.

4.1 Institutional response

The interviews underscore multiple failures and shortcomings in the institutional response to experiences of gender-based violence. The research participants report the following responses:

- The failure of the institution to act and respond to experience of gender-based violence (ISAS_07, ISAS_12, UGOT_01, UGOT_07, UGOT_10, UGOT_12);

- The failure to recognise behaviours as instances of gender-based violence, especially in cases of culture-related misconduct at the intersection with other forms of gender-based violence (ISAS_02, ISAS_12, UGOT_01, UGOT_02, UGOT_03, UGOT_04, UGOT_05, UGOT_07, UGOT_08, UGOT_10, YW_03, YW_06);
- Downplaying the seriousness of the misconduct such as being accused of “making a big thing out of nothing” (ISAS_11, UGOT_07, YW_06);
- Individualisation of reported incidents (ISAS_08, ISAS_11, UGOT_02, UGOT_03, UGOT_04, UGOT_05, UGOT_12) where research participants were forced or advised to put “personal things” aside; in other instances, it was suggested that “personal issues” or personal grievances should be kept from others (UGOT_12, UGOT_03);
- Suppression of reported incidents (ISAS_07, ISAS_11) ;
- Backlash in the form of threats, retaliation against and silencing of the reporting persons (UGOT_02, UGOT_07, UGOT_09, YW_07);
- Nepotism, collusion and closing ranks, especially in relation to perpetrators in positions of power (UGOT_09, YW_04).

The interviews demonstrate multifaceted institutional failures. This experience was described as “feeling betrayed” (ISAS_07) and being let down and relate to the recent research into institutional betrayal in scholarly literature (Smidt et al. 2023; Smith & Fryed 2014), In multiple cases, the research participants discussed the gap between the policies on paper or the institutional performativity of diversity and inclusiveness and the actual lack of response (ISAS_03, ISAS_10, UGOT_04, YW_05). The latter experience can be compounded by the perception of tokenism of members of ethnic minorities (ISAS_03, UGOT_04).

Such an organisational culture is not conducive to building a culture of coming forward and trust in the bodies, responsible staff and procedures. This then affects whether the research participants and other members of the academic community make actual use of the policies and services, and report.

4.2 Reporting and preexisting relations of trust

The interviews underscore that preexisting knowledge and relations of trust are critical for people to address their concerns and report. Several research participants (ISAS_01, ISAS_07, ISAS_08, ISAS_11, UGOT_02, UGOT_04, UGOT_06, YW_07) shared that they only reported cases of gender-based violence because they personally knew the person formally in charge of receiving complaints from previous engagements or knew individuals and bodies without this agenda being explicitly assigned to them (most frequently, their supervisors and other superiors) with whom they were already in close and frequent contact. These preexisting relations gave them more confidence and trust in the procedure. These liaisons helped them to locate and access the necessary information or body within the support infrastructure and sometimes guided them through the entire process.

The accessibility of the procedure thus de facto depends on these pre-existing relations of trust. This has serious implications for the implementation of policies and is linked to the

various institutional failures discussed above. In the current situation, it appears that asking for help and reporting are contingent upon the research participants having a personalised trusted entry point to the system.

4.3 Power, hierarchies and marginalisation

This section summarises the main findings related to power, academic hierarchies, and various forms of marginalisation. The interviews highlight, first, the high degree of exposure to gender-based violence of people in subordinate and dependent positions such as PhD students and postdoctoral fellows, which is compounded by these positions being precarious (temporary status, financial dependency). Second, they illustrate the various forms of gender-based violence experienced by the research participants on mobility schemes and in remote research sites and those facing intersectional inequality and marginalisation based on race/ethnicity, gender identity and sexual orientation, disability and chronic illness.

4.3.1 Academic hierarchies and abuse of power

The literature review reveals high frequency of bullying behaviour perpetrated by principal investigators and/or supervisors toward postdocs and PhD students on short-term contracts and that these at-risk groups strive to maintain amicable relationships with the principal investigators and/or supervisors (Menard & Shinton 2022).

The interviews (UGOT_04, UGOT_08, UGOT_12, YW_03, ISAS_01, ISAS_12) confirm vulnerability of precarious positions embedded in hierarchical inequality and dependency, from PIs/supervisors to PhDs and postdocs. A large majority of the research participants have experienced gender-based violence in precisely such unequal positions. Results show that victims continue to endure abusive behaviours and maintain amicable relations due to fear of retaliation and it being unlikely that the situation would be addressed, especially if the supervisor is an important figure in the institution, as they often are (UGOT_03, UGOT_04, UGOT_10, YW_01, YW_06, ISAS_01, ISAS_03). Several research participants shared that they experienced fear and found it risky to report (YW_02, UGOT_12).

In academic relations people are very dependent on their supervisors. Research participants therefore often feel that they must endure their problematic behaviour in order to succeed in their academic aspirations or simply to keep their contract. The research participants described behaviour such as undermining their work and analytical approaches (ISAS_12), embarrassing them in front of their colleagues (UGOT_01, UGOT_05, UGOT_12, ISAS_02, ISAS_09, ISAS_10), attempting to steer their analysis (YW_03, UGOT_01), undermining their language skills (UGOT_01, ISAS_12), hindering them from participating in valuable educational opportunities (UGOT_01, UGOT_04, UGOT_06, YW_07), stealing work and data (YW_04), not giving credit (UGOT_08, YW_04), being unavailable, ignoring (UGOT_03, UGOT_04, ISAS_07), bullying (UGOT_08, YW_02, ISAS_12), creating obstacles on purpose, withholding or draining their PhD funding by, for instance, cancelling their thesis review seminars, which prohibits them from moving forward with their research (ISAS_07), contacting them after the agreed working hours, oversharing personal information or asking personal information.

4.3.2 Mobility, precarity and intersectionality

This section summarises specifically the experience of international researchers, those on mobility schemes and at remote research sites and the research participants facing various forms of intersectional marginalisation.

International researchers

The literature review shows that international researchers are exposed to specific abuses including where principal investigators, during visa renewals and similar bureaucratic processes, inflict financial and other forms of harm upon international researchers (Hayter & Parker 2018).

Interviews (ISAS_03, YW_02) confirm that due to their non-permanent status, the research participants experience anxiety about losing their positions, which are either limited and potentially renewable, or require reapplication. This prevents or discourages them from making demands on the institution's policies and reporting.

In addition, the interviews reveal that their foreign status entails a lack of practical domestic resources (e.g., access to healthcare) and information on how to navigate the infrastructure (e.g., the national healthcare system) (UGOT_07, YW_06). Furthermore, there are cases where support and services are not available in English. The research participants agree that both sending and receiving institutions need to provide information as to where to ask for help and support.

Moreover, the interviews confirm the “deficit narrative” described in the literature review (Foteva et al. 2023; Guschke et al. 2022). The interviews indicate that international PhD students encounter structural barriers associated with pressure to conform to “idealised foreigner” personas (UGOT_10, ISAS_02), meaning to conform to local standards more strictly than local colleagues and not to challenge local standards, and hesitance to challenge local norms.

Mobility and field research

The literature review shows that fieldwork is described as unsafe for historically marginalised groups, especially women and non-heterosexual individuals (Bradford et al. 2022; Bami et al. 2023; Clancy et al. 2014, 2017; Cronin et al. 2024; Haddow 2021; Hall-Clifford 2019; Khalid 2014; Nakhai 2018; Nash 2019).

The interviews show that in cases of mobility and field research people are left with little or no information on what policies are in place and what their options are if something goes wrong (ISAS_03, ISAS_07, ISAS_11). Mobile researchers are often isolated in the receiving country/institution and lack support networks.

Furthermore, a physical barrier in accessing information about a policy in place was described by some research participants, when the research participant worked at a remote site where the support was either completely inaccessible (for instance, on a ship or a submarine), or the support would necessarily arrive after some time, potentially too late for the research participant (the person being practically trapped with the perpetrator in one enclosed place for a certain period of time, see ISAS_03). The remoteness bars the

research participants from acting immediately and reporting, leading them to endure transgressive behaviour. One research participant reported being forced to complete field work while experiencing gender-based violence (ISAS_11), which led them to argue that there should be procedures in place that allow researchers/staff to stop fieldwork immediately, with the costs for the early return being covered by the institution (ISAS_11).

Intersectional marginalisation

There is a significant lack of an intersectional approach in policies and services provided, as described by many research participants (UGOT_01, UGOT_03, UGOT_04, UGOT_05, UGOT_07, UGOT_10) Even when the policies are in place, they lack focus on intersectionality. Some of the research participants (UGOT_03, UGOT_04, UGOT_05) problematised ideas of representation, stating that “the minority within the minority” tends to be excluded, ignored, or left unacknowledged through the focus on those who fit into the pre-existing norms or forms of recognition. The institutions may have diversity initiatives/bodies that are only focused on one axis of inequality, for instance, a binary gender, which fails to acknowledge intersectional oppression or genders outside of the binary construct. Some research participants (ISAS_03, YW_07) addressed the lack of deeper understanding among people responsible for the policy implementation (e.g., relating to possible challenges for non-binary people to report to a cis woman), and identify shallowness and performativity in the institution's diversity policies without such policies being used and implemented in actual situations. The lack of institutional recognition and acknowledgement of the cases involving minority and precarious groups is seen as a form of violence in itself (UGOT_1, UGOT_2, UGOT_06, UGOT_12, ISAS_11).

People of colour and ethnic minorities

In the scholarly literature, it is discussed that for racialised Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC), the ongoing presence of racism is sometimes concealed or transformed into a “new” or “cultural” racism, no longer dependent on racial stereotypes or typologies but rooted in notions of cultural and ethnic difference (Clarke 2003). The emphasis has switched to a discourse of cultural difference in which a racialised person is treated differently from an in-group, which can also occur along the continuum of violence.

The interviews indicate several types of gender-based violence including racist stereotyping, marginalisation, tokenisation, backlash against addressing racism at the institution and epistemic injustice and marginalisation.

For example, one research participant (UGOT_10) recounted an incident where a Black female PhD student from South Africa was asked by a male professor whether she worked in the kitchen, despite being a PhD candidate. The participant felt this interaction was an attempt to reinforce stereotypes of women of colour being suited only for unqualified jobs, reflecting deeply ingrained biases within the department.

Another research participant (UGOT_03) noted a persistent sense of marginalisation as a brown woman in academia. She felt the need to constantly anticipate potential backlash from white women when addressing issues like racism, believing that such interactions

often escalate into official conflicts. Additionally, a research participant discussed the support received by their institution as limited to getting visa while other experiences of marginalisation are individualised and treated as if the person is not performing well enough. On top of that, this participant (UGOT_04) noted how people of colour are tokenised in how the institute markets itself.

In relation to epistemic injustice and marginalisation, one research participant (UGOT_01) reported feeling undermined by her main supervisor, who disagreed with her theoretical approach and criticised her research, even after it received positive feedback from others in the department. The supervisor's actions, including publicly pointing out flaws in her work during seminars, left the participant feeling humiliated. As a Black researcher focusing on Black subjectivities, she interpreted the supervisor's feedback as exoticising and racist, believing that her resistance to these narratives triggered the supervisor's hostility.

LGBTQIA+ people

The literature review reveals symbolic violence in the form of identity-based coercion and negative reinforcement of heteronormative norms (Moretti-Pire et al. 2022). It also shows that combating non-inclusive climates and discrimination against LGBTQIA+ faculty members leads to feelings of exhaustion and disillusionment (Robinson 2022; Krausch 2019). Literature suggests that inclusive campus climates, underscored by supportive social networks and visible institutional backing, play pivotal roles in ameliorating minority stress among LGBTQIA+ individuals (Evangelista 2022; Ueno 2023; English et al. 2019; Phillips 2024).

The interviews highlighted the symbolic violence perpetrated against LGBTQIA+ people, and in particular misgendering and failure to respect the use of pronouns (ISAS_03, ISAS_08, ISAS_11, UGOT_02, UGOT_05, UGOT_10, YW_06). The research participants highlight the need for official communication being sensitive and specific towards various genders, refraining from addressing two genders only (e.g. "Ladies and gentlemen"), or neutral enough to include and not to misgender a-gender or non-binary researchers and staff. A research participant (UGOT_10) emphasised that despite being proclaimed as a very inclusion- and diversity- friendly country, LGBTQIA+ people are largely invisible at the university in this country, further pointing to how gender equality is formulated in very binary terms. Furthermore, research participants (UGOT_02, UGOT_05, UGOT_10) stressed the need for the institution to understand that sexual orientation can, but does not have to, align with gender identity and to tailor the support to the specific needs of the vulnerable or at-risk person. For example, the support for what a lesbian woman needs is not automatically the same as what a trans person needs. Finally, one research participant found it very inappropriate that they should be requested to do a diversity training themselves due to their non-binary status (ISAS_03).

People with disabilities and chronic illnesses

The literature review reveals the systemic barriers faced by people with disabilities and chronic illness (McKenzie & Khan 2023) and greater exposure to gender-based violence among students with disabilities compared to non-disable students (Dawson et al. 2024),

which was also confirmed in the UniSAFE study. Moreover, students with disabilities face barriers to gaining recognition of their scientific potential (Lillywhite & Wolbring 2022); similarly, researchers consider whether to disclose their disabilities to avoid repercussions (Marin-Spiotta et al. 2023).

The interviews confirm these findings. One research participant (YW_01) reported how she had to prove her emotional state through the testimony of other students to counter the arguments made by the perpetrator's lawyer in relation to her health condition.

The interviews also show that researchers and academic staff with disabilities or chronic illnesses are confronted with structural inaccessibilities that are both physical and psychological. Not only can these inaccessibilities not be removed by the same means for every form of disability or chronic illness, but furthermore, these forms must not be hierarchised (which is often the case with physical disability to the exclusion of mental illness and can result in the victims themselves not recognising their disability as severe or relevant enough, as for instance in YW_06).

Furthermore, these categories add to the layers of disadvantage, creating intersectionally precarious conditions. As described by a research participant (ISAS_04), her disability status added to the already faced challenges primarily due to her gender, age, and smaller stature. While her chronic illness and sexual orientation remained hidden from most colleagues, it made her feel more vulnerable. She feared retaliation and doubted that any intervention would change the entrenched biases of older male colleagues, expressing concern that attempts to address her experience might provoke revenge. Another research participant with disability (ISAS_08) shared their perception of the environment as not being explicitly discriminatory, but rather full of implicit pressure to “show no weakness” (ISAS_08). Two research participants (UGOT_07, ISAS_08) stressed the importance of dedicated safe spaces at the university for LGBTQIA+ people and people with disabilities, where the more vulnerable and at-risk groups can actually feel safe, a feeling they normally lack.

To conclude, it is crucial to acknowledge that each of these axes of disadvantage works differently and cannot be treated in the same way. Attention needs to be paid to different intersecting inequality grounds and tailoring the response accordingly (for instance, the cases of a racialised person with a disability, a queer person with a disability, a racialised queer person, and a racialised queer person with a disability are not the same and cannot be supported by the same means).

4.4 Awareness

Being aware and having knowledge of policies and support services in place is critical for people to actually make use of such policies. While the development of policy frameworks and formal documents is a significant step in addressing gender-based violence, their impact depends largely on the extent to which they are known and understood by those they are meant to serve.

One important finding from the interviews is that there appears to be a significant lack of awareness about the concrete policies, reporting procedures and services available, which made it difficult for the researcher participants to get the support they needed (ISAS_02,

ISAS_08, ISAS_09, UGOT_01, UGOT_02, UGOT_11, YW_06, YW_07). No participant could name a particular policy from memory, including a participant operating herself within an institutional framework partly responsible for the implementation of institutional policies (an ethical committee).

Furthermore, the research participants tended not to know whether there were any possibilities to seek help at their institution, where to find proper support and what the correct steps in the process were. The absence of a clearly visible reporting mechanism meant that the research participants had to navigate the system with limited knowledge and guidance.

This lack of awareness is related to several types of shortcomings.

4.4.1 Lack of information accessibility

The interviews reveal significant difficulties in accessing information. In some instances, the issue is the actual ability to access the information, for example, on the institution's website. Some research participants also reported not being able to access information about what specific type of support would potentially be provided to them, which discouraged them from seeking support. The visibility of this information in the physical spaces and on the institutional website, easy access and regular repetition of the information is necessary for the victims and reporting persons to use them (ISAS_04, UGOT_10).

Accessing information about policies is especially difficult for self-employed researchers and researchers on limited contracts and in precarious working conditions. Research participants (ISAS_03, UGOT_06, UGOT_12, YW_02) described being unable to reach internal information concerning the institutional support infrastructure. The division of the workplace into internal and external, permanent and non-permanent, and on employment contract and self-employed does not only create a segmented academic labour market in terms of stability and security, but it also leads to differences in accessibility of information and hence in accessibility of the support infrastructure and services.

4.4.2 Lack of clarity of the processes and procedures

In other instances, research participants reported not knowing who they should contact and through which channels (ISAS_02, ISAS_03, ISAS_08, ISAS_10, YW_06, UGOT_07, UGOT_11, YW_04). While some of the institutions had a contact point or an ombudsperson, it was unclear whether these should be the first points of contact. In practice, there may be multiple options of seeking the support needed, yet often the institution did not offer clear guidance on the correct steps that should be taken in the process of seeking help and reporting.

Another participant (UGOT_03) emphasised the lack of support for international students and guest researchers. As she was a guest PhD fellow on an extended visit, neither recognised as a student nor an employee, it was unclear whether she could access the student union or who would represent her as a non-employee. There was a lack of clear guidelines for visiting students regarding their rights and the process of filing a complaint.

4.4.3 Lack of clarity about prohibited misconduct and microaggressions

The literature review shows that women early-career researchers are vulnerable to microaggressions, related to their lower hierarchical position. This is corroborated by the UniSAFE findings which show that 47% of the respondents answering the survey were unsure if the behaviour was serious enough to report and 31% did not recognise the behaviour at that time as violence (Lipinski et al 2022)

The interviews revealed that microaggressions are a frequent occurrence and that it is very difficult for research participants to recognise microaggressions as a form of misconduct covered by the institutional policies (ISAS_01, ISAS_02, ISAS_03, ISAS_08, ISAS_09, ISAS_10, UGOT_07, UGOT_11, YW_04, YW_06).

Furthermore, communication and awareness campaigns lack examples and definitions of what forms of behaviour are unacceptable and therefore in which instances people can seek support and report (ISAS_07). Examples of gender-based violence depicted in communication materials tend to be defined narrowly as physical sexual harassment, resulting in the research participants not recognising their experience as legitimate or severe enough to report. One participant (UGOT_01) talked about emotional harassment as she did not dare to use sexual harassment as a term, seeing sexual harassment as reduced to physical encounters. This failure to include microaggressions and other psychological forms of violence discouraged many research participants from reporting.

The research participants, therefore, call for microaggressions being included in institutional policies and among prohibited conduct explicitly, to convey to people in the institution that these behaviours are recognised as transgressive and subject to the policy protection.

4.4.4 Lack of clarity about evidence needed

Another aspect related especially to microaggressions is the lack of clarity about the types of evidence needed to report such incidents. Some research participants (ISAS_02, ISAS_04, ISAS_10, ISAS_12, UGOT_01, UGOT_07, YW_03, YW_06) stressed that especially in cases of microaggression, they lacked the hard evidence of misconduct required by the institution. In a similar vein, some research participants mentioned that it was almost impossible to collect evidence of “softer” forms of gender-based violence and “milder” forms of misconduct (YW_01, ISAS_11, UGOT_07).

4.4.5 Lack of inclusiveness and attention to intersectional inequalities

In Section 4.3.2 above we discuss the lack of attention to intersectional inequality in the institutional policies and institutional response. This issue is also evident in how institutions communicate around gender-based violence. This manifests in the lack of inclusiveness in the communication materials which fail to address intersectional inequalities too. The interviews confirm that research participants often fail to recognise themselves in the communicated examples and personas or they do not relate to the information provided. This primarily reflects the institutional failure to understand gender-based violence as an intersectional issue, across multiple axes of inequality spanning gender identity, nationality,

ethnicity, and disability as well as functional position, type of contract or residency, etc. (UGOT_05, YW_06).

4.5 Services, inclusive counselling and mental health

The literature review identifies heightened risks of mental health issues and reduced wellbeing among women and LGBTQIA+ (Boyle 2021) at intersections with race and socio-economic status (Cheng & Yang 2015; Nama 2017; Acosta 2023; Allen et al. 2022; Aycock et al. 2019; Tsouroufli 2023), with heightened levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms (Amaro et al. 2024).

The interviews show that there is:

- A need for psychological and psychotherapeutic services, with a wide agreement among the research participants about the need for institutions to provide these (ISAS_03, ISAS_04, ISAS_07, ISAS_08, ISAS_09, UGOT_01, UGOT_08, YW_01, YW_02, YW_03, YW_04, YW_07);
- A critical gap in the availability of these services, as these are often oversubscribed or only available for a limited time and therefore cannot be actually used, or used as long as the victims/survivors need them (ISAS_03, ISAS_04, YW_03);
- A need for the counselling services to be provided by properly trained personnel who understand the specific needs of diverse situations and groups (ISAS_03, ISAS_09, ISAS_12, UGOT_05, UGOT_07, UGOT_12, YW_04). Some of the research participants suggest that services should be provided by staff members from the same at-risk group, to ensure that the specific challenges and experiences are understood and taken on board (ISAS_03, ISAS_04, UGOT_07).

4.6 Training

The literature review identifies a lack of inclusiveness in trainings. This includes, for example, the heteronormative orientation of bystander training programmes in relation to addressing the needs of LGBTQIA+ individuals (DeKeseredy 2021).

This is not the only aspect that has emerged from the interviews; the topic of trainings was addressed in the interviews in relation to the following:

- **Provision of training to the academic community:** There is an overall agreement among research participants that trainings are an important instrument that should be provided by institutions (ISAS_03, ISAS_04, ISAS_08, ISAS_09, ISAS_10, ISAS_12, YW_05, YW_06, UGOT_05, UGOT_10). The research participants variously stated that training in gender diversity, anti-racism and intersectionality should be mandatory for all members and should be provided every year (ISAS_04); that training should be provided for students and staff (YW_07); that it should be regular (YW_05); that university staff who should receive bystander training so that they can intervene (ISAS_09). Others mentioned compulsory courses for professors

on "gender-based violence and issues highlighted around recognition of queer people, use of pronouns" (YW_06).

- **Attention to inclusiveness in training:** Some research participants discussed the need for inclusiveness and including diverse experiences of victims (YW_07).
- **Provision of training to equality/diversity staff and people responsible for handling cases:** Some research participants discussed the need for the equality/diversity staff and people responsible for handling cases to receive training on intersectionality and various forms of marginalisation (ISAS_03, ISAS_09, ISAS_12, UGOT_05, UGOT_07, UGOT_12). One research participant mentioned that information should be available about whether the responsible staff have received such training so that they could decide whether to report to this person (ISAS_08).
- **Training as box ticking and window dressing:** There were also instances where the research participants stated that training on diversity is provided when an issue arises, performatively, to show that the institution is taking some action (ISAS_03). In another instance, a research participant cautioned against training being "one-off and tick the box" rather than part of a long-term commitment to fostering an inclusive environment (UGOT_05).

5. Implications for GenderSAFE Task 2.3

This section summarises the implications of the findings from the conducted interviews for the operationalisation of the Model Policy Framework in Task 2.3. It is structured in two sections; the first reviews the implications for the conceptualisation of the zero-tolerance approach and the second for individual areas addressed in the draft Model Policy Framework.

5.1 Implications for the concept of zero-tolerance

A Zero-Tolerance Code of Conduct has been developed by the European Commission's ERA Forum Sub-group on Action 5 of the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024 (Promoting gender equality and fostering inclusiveness, taking note of the Ljubljana Declaration). It builds on four elements put forward in relation to the zero-tolerance approach which are: 1. Clear message; 2. Strong deterrence; 3. Institutional change and 4. Clarity of intent. In the following, findings from the interviews are discussed that are of relevance to these four elements of the zero-tolerance approach.

1. **Clear message:** Sending a clear message that gender-based violence is unacceptable at the given institution/in the given area.

The interviews show that the institutions tend to fail in sending a clear message of unacceptability of gender-based violence in its different forms. The institutional response often entails marginalisation, downplaying seriousness, individualisation, tokenism, and acceptance of the behaviour. The imperative of clear messaging pertains both to the design

of the institutional policies, ongoing communication around the policy including examples of misconduct covered by the policy, and specific response to incidents.

The issue of clear messaging is related to the need on the part of victims/survivors/bystanders of seeing real consequences (such as a penalty or dismissal of the perpetrator) resulting from the cases reported, in order to trust the system. Seeing real consequences gives a sense of recognition and validation, sending the message to the actual victims/survivors as well as the community that incidents will be taken seriously.

2. **Strong deterrence:** A zero-tolerance approach can serve as a strong deterrent against gender-based violence, as it ensures that all acts of gender-based violence will be thoroughly taken seriously and addressed with the sanctions and redress measures that are appropriate to the severity of the abuse.

The issue of strong deterrence embodies conflicting rationales and approaches. On the one hand, a group discussion with representatives of Irish higher education institutions conducted in Task 2.1 (Bondestam et al. 2024) underscores that strong deterrence related to strict sanctions may be an obstacle to adopting a zero-tolerance approach in that it may prevent people from reporting incidents due to concerns of too severe punishments for perpetrators. In contrast, the results of the interviews conducted in Task 2.2 show that from the perspective of the research participants, the institutional response is far from optimal and in many cases, there were, in fact, no sanctions imposed and things were left to fade away, which the research participants were critical about. In some instances, the institution takes action such as moving the perpetrator to another department but the situation is not monitored further. In one instance (ISAS_11) it was reported that the perpetrator moved to another country, avoiding punishment at the original institution. Only in few instances the investigation resulted in a sanction such as dismissal. It thus appears that concerns about the zero-tolerance approach being impractical due to the implication of strong deterrence does not currently reflect the predominant approach to imposing sanctions.

In addition, the interviews show that the research participants find it important for institutions to show that all incidents will be treated seriously, including microaggressions. Finally, the interviews indicate the wish among research participants for the punishment to be stricter and more severe and for internal disciplinary follow-up to be reinforced.

3. **Institutional change:** Embedding any and all actions to address gender-based violence in the institutional change approach (fixing institutions).

At its most elementary, an institutional change approach as currently promoted in the EU moves away from “fixing women” to fixing institutions” and “fixing knowledge” (Linková & Mergaert 2021). However, in contemporary neoliberal academia, the underlying value system is one of individualisation and choice which eradicates “any idea of the individual as subject to pressures, constraints or influence from outside themselves” (Gill 2008). As Linková et al (2021) argue, this renders invisible power structures in which different groups of people make and have circumscribed, their choices. The interviews with at-risk groups highlight the individualising move in evidence at the institutions, making instances of gender-based violence a matter of personal sensitivity, perception and culpability.

In addition, the issue of individualisation also pertains to perpetrators. Often, incidents are treated as examples of individual failures. The interview results indicate the need to move away from treating incidents as cases involving a single perpetrator and to take these as symptoms of a deeper and more systemic issue, treating abuse, discrimination, and violence not as individual failures but rather as conduct embedded in larger structures and organisational cultures at play. As such, the institution must address the cause of the violence, not only its symptoms.

4. **Clarity of intent:** Indicating a clear intent and stance to take all acts of gender-based violence along the entire continuum seriously.

The findings from the needs assessment highlight that microaggressions in particular fail to capture institutional attention, and these are often not communicated or recognised. As a result, the research participants report high degrees of uncertainty as to whether such microaggressions and other forms than the most serious ones constitute breaches of policy that merit reporting.

Furthermore, the needs assessment highlights the failure to address gender-based violence in an intersectional perspective; it specifically reveals failures in relation to the needs of LGBTQIA+ and particularly non-binary people; people of colour and ethnic minority groups; people with chronic illness and disability; internationally mobile staff and students and people on field trips; as well as people on various forms of precarious contracts.

5.2 Implications for the Model Policy Framework

In this section, implications of the needs assessment findings are considered in relation to the Model Policy Framework, under development in GenderSAFE.

Policy statement

In addition to what is discussed in the preceding section, the following findings in particular are relevant to aspects possibly covered by a Policy statement:

- Explicit inclusion and recognition of **microaggressions** in the policy: One of the main and most general findings yielded is that research participants (ISAS_02, ISAS_04, ISAS_10, ISAS_12, UGOT_01, UGOT_07, YW_03, YW_06) do not see themselves and their experience covered by the institutional policy because the scope of the policies is often limited to physical sexual harassment. With experience of microaggressions and milder forms of gender-based violence along the entire spectrum and continuum of violence, many research participants do not recognise their cases as legitimate or severe enough to be reported. Because evidence of these is hard to collect, they also fear that their testimonies will not suffice (this is linked to issues of admissibility).
- Explicit inclusion and conceptualisation of hierarchical manifestations of gender-based violence as **abuses of power**: Several interviews (UGOT_04, UGOT_08, UGOT_12, YW_03, ISAS_01, ISAS_12) confirm vulnerability of precarious positions embedded in hierarchical inequality and dependency, from PIs/supervisors to PhDs

and postdocs. Many of the research participants have experienced gender-based violence in precisely such unequal positions. Results show that victims/survivors continue to endure abusive behaviours and maintain amicable relations due to fear of retaliation and it being unlikely that the situation would be addressed, especially if the supervisor is an important figure in the institution.

- Comprehensive treatment of the **intersectional nature** of gender-based violence: Such an approach recognises the different needs and concerns of different at-risk groups and acknowledges the intersections of gender-based violence with other axes of inequality (ISAS_08, UGOT_02, UGOT_03, UGOT_05, UGOT_06, UGOT_10). It is essential to recognise that each axis of disadvantage operates distinctively and cannot be addressed uniformly. Additionally, the intersection of these axes produces unique experiences that require tailored approaches.
- **Inter-institutional cooperation:** Several research participants expressed concerns about perpetrators moving away to another department/institution/country to continue their professional activities without further oversight or concern from the institution they have left (see UGOT_01, UGOT_10, YW_07, ISAS_01).

Reporting mechanisms

The following findings from the needs assessment are relevant to this aspect:

- The zero-tolerance approach must entail a '**culture of coming forward**' (Linková & Fikejzová 2024) where reporting is encouraged (UGOT_07, UGOT_09, YW_06, ISAS_01, ISAS_04, ISAS_08). The findings from the needs assessment show that victims/survivors and bystanders may be discouraged from reporting on account of reporting being seen as complaining and complaining, in turn, seen as something that spoils an allegedly friendly or familial atmosphere at the institution.
- General **accessibility** of information on the policy and reporting mechanisms: The findings shows that access to reporting procedures is often perceived to be contingent upon pre-existing knowledge and ties with the persons to whom a report is being made because the reporting individual has trust in that person (ISAS_01, ISAS_07, ISAS_08, ISAS_11, UGOT_02, UGOT_04, UGOT_06, YW_07). In contrast, when such a trust relationship with the responsible person does not exist, reporting is perceived as inaccessible. This has implications not only for the institutions in terms of making the policies and procedures known to the community but also in terms of taking care to make the responsible staff well known and recognised by the community.
- A diversity of the **staff responsible for case handling:** The interviews indicate that there are issues of trust and re-traumatisation related to representation and a lack of diversity among the responsible staff handling cases. Research participants discuss failures to reflect needs of e.g., non-binary people by the responsible staff (who often may be cis women) (ISAS_03, ISAS_07).
- **Anonymous reporting and confidentiality:** Another barrier to reporting identified in the interviews links to availability of anonymous reporting and the fears on the

part of prospective reporting individuals that the information about who made the report would be leaked to the person reported (UGOT_10, UGOT_12, YW_01, YW_04, YW_06, ISAS_01, ISAS_03, ISAS_04). Often, this is tied to the precarious working position of the reporting person and their concern about their ability to keep their work contract.

- **Clarity of steps** in the reporting system: Despite a policy being in place, the research participants declare that actual reporting procedures are not communicated clearly and hence they are uncertain about the steps in the reporting mechanism (UGOT_05, YW_07, ISAS_03; also ISAS_02, ISAS_08, ISAS_09, ISAS_10, UGOT_07, UGOT_11, YW_04, YW_06). This again prevents people from reporting.

Protection and precautionary measures

The following findings from the needs assessment are relevant to these aspects:

- **Confidentiality:** The interviews indicate that confidentiality of the reporting persons may be breached by the responsible staff (e.g., trust persons etc.). The interviews indicate cases when the identity of a reporting person was disclosed to the person being reported (UGOT_09, UGOT_12, ISAS_01, ISAS_11). Such breaches prevent other people from reporting and create a sense of mistrust and alienation.
- **Protection against retaliation:** The interviews indicate instances where a reporting person may be ostracised for lodging a complaint, people who want to report are pushed to keep silent in order to preserve the institutional reputation, and where a person is threatened with being fired should they report (UGOT_03, UGOT_04, UGOT_10, YW_01, YW_06, ISAS_01, ISAS_03).
- **Precautionary measures:** A sustained commitment to creating an inclusive environment is essential for establishing an effective institutional system. Support should be proactive rather than reactive, addressing issues before misconduct arises (ISAS_04, YW_05, YW_07), for instance, having an ombudsperson, diversity officer, or another relevant figure present at key meetings.

Investigation procedures

The following findings from the needs assessment are relevant to this aspect:

- **Admissibility:** The interviews indicate that there are instances where a report is rejected without substantiation (UGOT_01, UGOT_03). This may be due to the fact that the institutional processes are in some instances highly individualised and review processes are not in place.
- **Investigation committee:** Impartiality and conflict of interest are regarded as critical by the research participants (ISAS_03, UGOT_09, YW_04), who in some instances expressed preference for the investigators being external to the institution, without any personal ties. Similarly, it was argued that institutions should appoint

independent bodies to handle complaints to prevent conflicts of interest, such as reporting incidents to the perpetrators' supervisors.

- General principles of investigation:** The investigation process involves the procedures followed by the ombudsperson, designated committee, or other investigative body to examine reported incidents, based on the institutional mechanism in place. According to research participants (UGOT_09, UGOT_10, UGOT_12, YW_03, YW_04, YW_07, ISAS_11), these processes are frequently disorganised and lack protective measures. Policies often fail to provide victims with clear information about what is required of them, such as details on testimony, evidence submission, and the individuals they will encounter during the investigation. To improve, the investigation process needs to be more transparent and clearly communicated to the reporting persons. They should be assured of ongoing support and protection from the institution throughout the process.
- Burden of proof and evidence:** The interviews indicate that the burden of proof is a particularly problematic issue especially in relation to microaggressions where it is difficult to obtain the hard evidence that institutions require. Also, the institutional policies do not make clear what evidence is necessary for lodging a complaint, and this is particularly true again of the softer or milder forms of gender-based violence. In some cases, the research participants state that the reporting person should not be responsible for collecting the evidence. Furthermore, some argue that the report itself should be treated as evidence and the procedures should be based on trust. Some research participants also discussed strengthening the role of the victims/survivors/bystanders by ensuring that they do not need to provide their testimony on multiple occasions (ISAS_02, ISAS_04, ISAS_10, ISAS_12, UGOT_07, YW_01, YW_03, YW_06).
- Communication and information provision:** Some of the research participants discussed situations where they had no information about the steps taken. As a result, they did not have any sense of control over the process (ISAS_02, ISAS_03, ISAS_08, ISAS_10, YW_06, UGOT_07, UGOT_11, YW_04).
- Anonymity and meeting the perpetrator:** Issues of anonymity have also been discussed in relation to the investigation procedure. The research participants mention instances where the institution brings the reporting and reported parties together and consider this as bad practice, expressing the preference for staying anonymous to the reported party. Research participants also shared that institutions may suggest a mediating meeting with the reported party, which they find re-traumatising (ISAS_03, UGOT_08, YW_05, YW_07).

Disciplinary measures

The following findings from the needs assessment are relevant to this aspect:

- Appropriate disciplinary action and sanctions:** The interviews reveal a general lack and inadequacy of institutional response, and in many instances, the research participants stated that no sanctions are imposed and things are left to fade away. In some instances, the institution takes action such as moving the perpetrator to

another department but the situation is not monitored further (UGOT_09, YW_02, ISAS_02, ISAS_07, ISAS_11). In one instance (ISAS_11) it was reported that the perpetrator moved to another country, avoiding punishment at the original institution. Only in few instances did the investigation result in a sanction such as dismissal (for instance, YW_03).

Prevention of gender-based violence

The following findings from the needs assessment are relevant to this aspect:

- **Thorough and accessible onboarding:** Many research participants (ISAS_02, ISAS_03, ISAS_07, ISAS_09, ISAS_11, ISAS_12, UGOT_08) emphasised the need for comprehensive onboarding for all incoming researchers and staff, particularly PhD students and postdocs. It is crucial that PhD students receive explicit information about their rights, such as the ability to consent or refuse consent regarding their supervisor, procedures for changing supervisors if necessary, and safeguards to prevent career disruption if a supervisor is suspended. This information is essential, especially in contexts where such changes are not currently feasible or where protections are lacking (which is the case of some EU countries).
- **Training:** Research participants agree on the importance of training provision to the academic community (ISAS_03, ISAS_04, ISAS_08, ISAS_09, YW_05, YW_06, UGOT_05, UGOT_10) (see above Section 4.6 Training). It was stressed that such training should focus on intersectional perspectives to enhance understanding of the varied experiences of victims. Awareness-raising workshops should be incorporated into study programmes and be regular, made accessible to everyone, and promoted effectively, possibly through incentives like credits or certificates.

Support services and resources

The following findings from the needs assessment are relevant to these aspects:

- **Psychological counselling, medical, social, and legal services, as well as academic support, financial aid, and accommodation options for victims/survivors:** There was a broad agreement (ISAS_03, ISAS_04, ISAS_07, ISAS_08, ISAS_09, UGOT_01, UGOT_08, YW_01, YW_02, YW_03, YW_04, YW_07) on the need for support services, particularly paid professional psychological and therapeutic help, either through internal resources or external contracts, making these services easily accessible and well-promoted (see above 4.5 Services, inclusive counselling and mental health above). Some research participants (ISAS_04, ISAS_09) suggested that unlimited therapy sessions should be offered and that related costs such as legal services should be covered.
- **Adjustment of obligations:** Some research participants (YW_02, UGOT_04) suggested that institutions should offer the option to adjust work and study obligations based on the victim's/survivor's needs, recognising the potential impact on performance and suggesting flexible solutions for affected tasks such as exams or deadlines.

- **Support for precarious workers:** Access to institutional support information is often difficult for these workers (ISAS_03, UGOT_06), contributing to disparities in support available and provided. Institutions should work to ensure that all employees, regardless of contract type, have equal access to support and information.
- **Competence:** Research participants (ISAS_03, ISAS_09, ISAS_12, UGOT_05, UGOT_07, UGOT_12, YW_04, YW_05) agree on the need for the counselling services being provided by properly trained personnel who understand the specific needs of diverse groups. It was also suggested that services should be provided by staff members from the same at-risk groups (ISAS_03, ISAS_04, UGOT_07). The research participants recommend that training in intersectionality and marginalisation be mandatory (ISAS_03, ISAS_04, UGOT_10) especially for the equality/diversity staff as well as the people handling cases so that they can tailor the support according to the specific cases when gender-based violence intersects with other axes of inequality.

Monitoring and evaluation

The following findings from the needs assessment are relevant to this aspect:

- **Dedicated task force/working group:** One research participant stated that the university should establish a dedicated task force or working group to address concerns from employment surveys and feedback mechanisms, involving representatives of PhD students, faculty, and administrative staff to ensure diverse perspectives. Clear action plans with specific, measurable goals and deadlines should be developed based on survey results and communicated transparently. A systematic follow-up process must track progress and make necessary adjustments, with regular updates provided to stakeholders. Institutionalising these processes will maintain continuity and accountability despite management changes (see UGOT_10).

Policy dissemination and communication

The following findings from the needs assessment are relevant to this aspect:

- **Improved communication on policies:** The lack of awareness of institutional policies and of the processes and procedures is one of the main findings from this needs assessment (UGOT_01, UGOT_10, UGOT_11, YW_03, YW_04, YW_06, ISAS_01, ISAS_03, ISAS_07, ISAS_09, see 4.4 Awareness above). Research participants highlighted the need for better communication about institutional policies and support services. There should be clear and comprehensive information on what policies exist, what support options are available, and how to access them. Institutions must be proactive (ISAS_04, YW_05, YW_07) in sharing this information with the entire community, including students, researchers, staff, and visitors.

- **Improved online and onsite communication:** Information on support services should be prominently displayed on institutional websites (ISAS_04, ISAS_12, UGOT_12). Websites should feature a dedicated, clearly labelled section on support services, ideally with a flowchart to simplify navigation. Physical copies of information, such as posters and flyers (UGOT_10, YW_05, ISAS_03, ISAS_04, ISAS_08), should be available within institutional buildings.
- **International students and researchers:** There is a need for clear guidelines for international students and guest researchers regarding their rights and the complaint process; this is particularly true in the case of remote locations where physical barriers may exist in accessing support (ISAS_03). Language barriers can further complicate access to support services, especially if information is not available in English (ISAS_12, UGOT_01, UGOT_08).

Resource allocation

The following findings from the needs assessment are relevant to this aspect:

- **Allocation of resources for services:** Institutions need to dedicate resources to comprehensive support services, especially professional psychological and therapeutic help. This support should encompass fully funded therapy sessions and cover related legal expenses (ISAS_03, ISAS_04, ISAS_07, ISAS_11, YW_07) as it transpires that psychological support can be very helpful for the person experience gender-based violence and can help them to report (UGOT_08).
- **Allocation of resources for compensation to victims/survivors:** One research participant (ISAS_04) suggested that additional compensation be provided to victims/survivors, such as paid leave, to help them manage the impacts of their experiences effectively.

6. Conclusions

This needs assessment reports on the experiences of gender-based violence among defined at-risk groups in European research and higher education institutions. It takes the research participant-centred perspective to analyse the institutional responses to experience of gender-based violence. The assessment reveals significant gaps in current policies and policy implementation and the overall shortcomings in institutional response.

Key findings highlight the lack of effective and inclusive institutional policies, inadequate awareness and communication about available policies and support mechanisms, and challenges in reporting, investigating and sanctioning incidents of gender-based violence. The findings also emphasise the compounded vulnerabilities of individuals who belong to multiple marginalised groups, who often face unique challenges that are not adequately addressed by existing policies.

Concretely, the interviews show that in several instances institutions fail to respond to reported incidents altogether. In other instances, policies may be in place, but there is an implementation gap between what is on paper and what is provided to the reporting persons. The interviews also reveal that whether research participants ask for help and report is often contingent upon having preexisting relations of trust at the institution. The lack of support services and protection negatively affects all victims/survivors, and this is especially true of newcomers, external employees and contract research staff as well as mobile researchers and international students, as they lack the connections and networks within and also outside the institution.

The interviews further indicate that the policies, and communication and training materials fail to incorporate an intersectional perspective. This makes it difficult for people from marginalised groups to recognise themselves in these policies and also makes the procedures and services ineffective in relation to the needs of these groups. Specifically, the findings underscore the lack of attention to the forms of marginalisation and violence experienced by students and staff of colour, LGBTQIA+ students and staff, and those with a disability or chronic illness, and that the forms of misconduct and abuse faced by people at intersections of these positions and their needs are heterogenous and support services must be tailored to the specific marginalised position.

Overall, the findings highlight that institutions tend to fail when cases of intersectional gender-based violence occur, creating a sense of mistrust and betrayal. These experiences of institutional failure have serious consequences for those concerned, not only in relation to the direct experience of various forms of gender-based violence along the entire continuum but also as a result of the negative psychological impact of such an institutional betrayal.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Reviewed literature

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Appendix 2. Literature review keywords

EBSCO

gender-based violence	academia	disability
gender-based violence	higher education	disability
gender-based violence	research institutions	disability
sexual harassment	academia	disability
sexual harassment	higher education	disability
sexual harassment	research institutions	disability
gender-based violence	academia	lgbt
gender-based violence	research institutions	lgbt
gender-based violence	higher education	lgbt
sexual harassment	academia	lgbt
sexual harassment	research institutions	lgbt
sexual harassment	higher education	lgbt
bullying	academia	lgbt
bullying	research institutions	lgbt
bullying	higher education	lgbt
gender-based violence	academia	precarious workers
gender-based violence	research institutions	precarious workers
gender-based violence	higher education	precarious workers
sexual harassment	academia	precarious workers
sexual harassment	research institutions	precarious workers
sexual harassment	higher education	precarious workers

bullying	academia	precarious workers
bullying	research institutions	precarious workers
bullying	higher education	precarious workers
gender-based violence	academia	fieldwork
gender-based violence	higher education	fieldwork
gender-based violence	research institutions	fieldwork
sexual harassment	academia	fieldwork
sexual harassment	higher education	fieldwork
sexual harassment	research institutions	fieldwork
bullying	academia	fieldwork
bullying	higher education	fieldwork
bullying	research institutions	fieldwork
gender-based violence	academia	marginalized people
gender-based violence	higher education	marginalized people
gender-based violence	research institutions	marginalized people
sexual harassment	academia	marginalized people
sexual harassment	higher education	marginalized people
sexual harassment	research institutions	marginalized people
bullying	academia	marginalized people
bullying	higher education	marginalized people
bullying	research institutions	marginalized people

ProQuest

gender-based violence	academia	disability
gender-based violence	higher education	disability
gender-based violence	research institutions	disability
sexual harassment	academia	disability
sexual harassment	higher education	disability
sexual harassment	research institutions	disability
gender-based violence	academia	lgbt
gender-based violence	research institutions	lgbt
gender-based violence	higher education	lgbt
sexual harassment	academia	lgbt
sexual harassment	research institutions	lgbt
sexual harassment	higher education	lgbt
bullying	academia	lgbt
bullying	research institutions	lgbt
bullying	higher education	lgbt
gender-based violence	academia	precarious workers
gender-based violence	research institutions	precarious workers
gender-based violence	higher education	precarious workers
sexual harassment	academia	precarious workers
sexual harassment	research institutions	precarious workers
sexual harassment	higher education	precarious workers
bullying	academia	precarious workers
bullying	research institutions	precarious workers
bullying	higher education	precarious workers
gender-based violence	academia	fieldwork
gender-based violence	higher education	fieldwork
gender-based violence	research institutions	fieldwork

sexual harassment	academia	fieldwork
sexual harassment	higher education	fieldwork
sexual harassment	research institutions	fieldwork
bullying	academia	fieldwork
bullying	higher education	fieldwork
bullying	research institutions	fieldwork
gender-based violence	academia	marginalized people
gender-based violence	higher education	marginalized people
gender-based violence	research institutions	marginalized people
sexual harassment	academia	marginalized people
sexual harassment	higher education	marginalized people
sexual harassment	research institutions	marginalized people
bullying	academia	marginalized people
bullying	higher education	marginalized people
bullying	research institutions	marginalized people

Due to insufficient data on ERCs, additional following search in ProQuest:

gender-based violence	academia	early-career researchers
gender-based violence	research institutions	early-career researchers
gender-based violence	higher education	early-career researchers

Additional Google Scholar search

sexual harassment	field research	
physical violence	early-career researchers	
bullying	early-career researchers	
bullying	early-career researchers	foreigner

Appendix 3. Structure of the interview script and guiding questions

INTRODUCTION

Instructions for an interviewer:

- This research uses a victim + person centred approach which means it is crucial to let people talk first after giving them a framework for what we are after. Let them take their own approach to what interests us. Feel free to ask further, but do not insist if it seems too difficult for the partner. Be prepared that the research participant might want to talk about what happened to them in details which might prolong the beginning of the interview. As this might be very important to them, do not rush or interrupt them despite the fact that this interview is focused on different aspects of their experience.
- Remember that the following interview script is merely a support tool and does not have to be adhered strictly as long as the aims of the research are being fulfilled by the interview.
- It is recommended to write down the notes for the following interview report immediately.
- **Start the interview with an “icebreaker” to ease the research participant to the interview**
“Thank you again for agreeing to engage with GenderSAFE, I appreciate it. How is your day so far?”
- **Recap the information from the informed consent and stress the option to withdraw from the interview at any time**
“Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you may stop the interview at any time without giving any reason or any consequences to yourself. If you stop the interview, you may ask me to destroy the information provided by you.”
- **State the objectives of the research task and what we want to know**
“Our objective in this study is to establish your needs in relation to your experience of gender-based violence in your academic and/or research settings and how to improve the institutional response to this experience: Was the institutional response in terms of procedures and services adequate or not? What would you have needed to happen to receive adequate support? We are interested in your specific situation and how that may have impacted what happened and how the institution reacted.”
- **Note what we mean when referring to a gender-based violence:**

“By concerning ‘gender-based violence,’ we refer to **all forms of gender-based violence, be it a:**

Physical violence and abuse, meaning an intentional use of physical force against another person or group including kicking, beating, pushing, slapping, shoving, hitting and blocking,

Sexual violence, meaning any sexual act that is perpetrated against someone’s will, including rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and sexual coercion,

Psychological violence, also known as emotional abuse, involving harmful and intentional behaviours that undermine, manipulate, or control a person’s thoughts, feelings, and actions, which can include verbal abuse, threats, blackmail, controlling behaviour, and coercion, and can occur in both online and offline contexts or, in an academic setting, public insults, ridiculing of someone’s work, or humiliating a colleague in public,

Economic and financial violence and abuse meaning intentional acts or behaviours that result in financial or economic harm to an individual or make them financially dependent which can include controlling financial resources, denying access to money or other resources, forbidding participation in education or employment-related activities, and withholding support, or a sextortion, where a person abuses their entrusted authority to obtain a sexual favour in exchange for a service, benefit, or economic gain, or, in research, a quid pro quo, denying access to financial resources, restricting employment opportunities or healthcare services, withholding employment contracts, or not fulfilling economic responsibilities.

Sexual harassment or any form of unwanted verbal, nonverbal, or physical behaviour of a sexual nature, including but not limited to unwanted sexual comments, jokes, innuendos, stalking, sextortion, bullying, sexual invitations, and demands,

Gender harassment or unwelcome behaviours, actions or comments that create a hostile or offensive environment and are directed towards an individual or a group based on their sex, gender identity or gender expression, which can include derogatory or degrading remarks, sexist jokes, exclusion, silencing, stereotypical prejudices or other forms of demeaning treatment that belittle or marginalise individuals based on their gender, both online and offline, including workplaces, educational institutions and public spaces,

- **Online violence**, abuse, and violation that occurs through the use of information and communication technologies, such as social media, e-mail, text messages and online forums. It can take many forms, including cyberstalking, cyberbullying, internet-based sexual violence, and the non-consensual distribution of sexual images and text,
- and **Organisational gender-based violence**, meaning the manifestation of gender-based violence at the collective, group, and organisational levels of research-performing organisations, such as weak or autocratic management that allows or condones individual gender-based violence or the existence of group/organisational cultures that directly or indirectly promote gender-based violence, including hostile environments and psychological violence.

- **Acknowledge that the interview may be challenging and include a trigger warning**

“The focus of this research is on gender-based violence and how institutions handle these cases. Therefore, some questions may be sensitive or challenging to revisit. You should not feel obliged to answer the question that make you feel uncomfortable. You have a right to omit any question without giving me the reason.”

- **Stress the importance of openness during the interview**

“We appreciate your openness. We are seeking information about your own experience that will help us understand better the challenges faced and aspects that should be improved in the institutional response that would address your needs better.”

- **To ask for approval to audio record the interview and then start audio recording.**

“Besides taking notes, I will – with your permission – start recording. This will allow me to go back to a concrete citation of yours if needed, to better facilitate further analysis.”

- **If the research participant refuses to be recorded, the interviewer should continue with the interview and keep notes on what is said.**

CURRENT POSITION, WORK/STUDY CLIMATE, FORMS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE EXPERIENCED AND AWARENESS OF OPTIONS AT THE GIVEN INSTITUTION FOR STEPS TO BE TAKEN

1. Could you tell me about yourself and your current work?
 - 1.1 How do you feel at your current institution? How do you perceive the work / study climate here?
 - 1.2 What are your professional plans and aspirations?
2. During your time in academia, have you personally experienced any inappropriate behaviour towards you? Could you please share what happened and what you considered was not appropriate?
 - 2.1 What happened, when (current / former place of work / study) and where?
 - 2.2 Who was/were the perpetrator(s) in relation to you at the time of the incident?
 - 2.3 Were there any people present during the incident? What was their reaction?
 - 2.4 Going back to the information provided in the sociodemographic questionnaire, would you say that any of the characteristics you have shared played a role in your experience?
 - 2.5 How did you respond to what you experienced (e.g., did you confide in someone, did you report, ...)?
3. At the time of the incident, did you have information about the policies that were in place at the institution where this happened and what avenues for action were open to you at the institution? Did you consider making use of these? Why yes / Why not?

INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES / SUPPORT AND SERVICES PROVIDED

4. What happened next? Did you consider reporting the case at your institution? Why / Why not?

> If they reported the case:

 - 4.1 How was the reporting experience?
 - 4.1.1 How long did you take to report the case and why?
 - 4.1.2 Was the reporting procedure clear to you?
 - 4.1.3 Did you know immediately where to find the support you needed or whom you can contact and which channels to use?
 - 4.1.4 What would help you navigate the support system of at the institution better?
 - 4.1.4.1 Can you please elaborate on that?
 - 4.1.5 Was there anything about the reporting process that did not work for you?
 - 4.1.5.1 Can you please elaborate on that?
 - 4.2 Going further, what happened after you reported?

4.2.1 What worked about this process for you? And what did not? Were any services or additional support offered to you?

4.2.2 Did you feel recognised by the institution or anyone else?

4.2.3 Was there any specific support you would have liked to receive and did not? Conversely, what support was helpful for you and made you feel recognised and vindicated?

4.2.3.1 Can you please elaborate on that?

4.3 [ref 2.4] You have said that XXX played a role in your experience of violence. Did the institution acknowledge these intersectional grounds in their handling of the case?

4.3.1 In your opinion, should the institution handle cases where multiple axes of inequality intersect differently? Should the procedure differ if more than one section--or characteristics--played role in the case?

4.4 Has the institution introduced any changes as a result of what happened to you? If not, what do you think should have changed?

4.4.1 Can you please elaborate on that?

> If they did not report the case:

4.5 What were the main reasons you decided not to report what happened to you?

4.6 What would have needed to be in place for you to report what happened to you?

4.6.1 Can you please elaborate on that?

5. To the extent that you can judge this, is your case unique at the institution where this happened or was this something that happened to other people too?

> If the incident occurred at a remote workplace / during a fieldwork / international or interinstitutional mobility:

6. Can you please consider whether the fact that the incident took place during fieldwork / on a mobility scheme / in a remote research site made the situation worse for you? If so in what ways?

7. Was there any communication from the sending or receiving place prior to the move related to addressing cases of gender-based violence/sexual harassment? Were you aware of what avenues are open to you in these specific circumstances?

8. What would need to be in place in these circumstances for you to perceive the handling of the situation as appropriate and adequate to what happened?

8.1 Can you please elaborate on that?

9. How did you experience the aftermath of the incident – for example in terms of the overall atmosphere, interactions with colleagues and superiors, ability to conduct your work / study?

10. Did you feel forced into doing something you were not comfortable doing because of the specific situation on mobility / fieldwork / remote research site – if yes, could you share that with me?

> If they stated in the sociodemographic questionnaire they are LGBTQIA+ and/or people with disabilities / chronic illness:

11. Do your co-workers know about your condition / gender identity / sexual orientation?

> If yes:

11.1 Did you tell them yourself, or did they find out another way?

11.2 If you told them yourself, with whom did you decide to share that, and with whom not – and why?

11.3 What were the reactions like, and what did you need in that situation?

> If not:

11.4 Why is that? What would need to be different for you to share this information at your workplace?

11.4.1 Can you please elaborate on that?

12. Do you consider the institution to be, in general, inclusive and diversity-friendly (queer-friendly, disability-friendly), and why?

12.1 Is/Were there any awareness raising campaigns launched by your institution that you know of related to gender-based violence / sexual harassment / social safety? How would you evaluate them in terms of being inclusive to these different groups?

12.2 Is/Were there any official statements made by the representatives of the institution on the topic of inclusion in the workplace that you know of?

12.3 Does/Did the institution organise any kind of community meetings or support groups gatherings of which you are aware?

12.3.1 If yes, do you know who (what body) organises them?

12.3.2 If you wanted to attend/join such group/meeting, would you know where to find information about it?

12.3.3 If you, theoretically, wanted to run a support group yourself, would you know what steps to take?

12.4 In your opinion, does/did the institution's behaviour towards its members align with how it presents itself publicly in terms of gender equality, diversity and inclusiveness or social safety and misconduct?

CONSEQUENCES

13. When you consider the situation after what happened to you, can you please share how you continued to feel and whether anything changed in your circumstances - e.g., your relationship with your co-workers, and with the superiors, in terms of your professional plans and aspiration including mobility schemes for example?

14. [If the research participant is at a different institution] How do you feel in your current position?

14.1 Are you currently stressed at work? What are the main stressors for you right now?

14.2 Is the climate here different from your previous institution?

14.3 Do you have confidence that an incident you have experienced before would be addressed differently here? What would be different and what makes you think this way?

CONCLUSION

15. Considering what we have been discussing, do you see any specific gaps related to your specific situation between the content of the institutional policies and their actual implementation and impact on the people they should help and support?

15.1 Can you please elaborate on that?

16. Feel free to tell us about anything you consider important or worth mentioning that has not been covered so far.

Instructions for the interviewer (to sum up the interview):

- Acknowledge the research participant's time and openness in this interview.
- Summarise the technical details again (how the pseudonymisation will be ensured and how the recording will be stored, who will have access)
- Check how the research participant is feeling and whether they need support. In the event of a challenging interview, make doublecheck whether any support is needed
- Offer to share reflections on the interview situation, what was asked and discussed
- If you feel like not saturated with data after the interview, you can set a follow-up interview. Reserve the possibility with the interview partner. During analysis, patterns may start to emerge and we may need to go back to a particular interview partner to check from this new perspective/emerging pattern.