

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN UNIVERSITIES AND RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS

NATIONAL FIELDWORK REPORT

Country: [Czech Republic]

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of universities and research organizations, the term sexual harassment is usually used in the Czech Republic. The discussion about this topic was opened ten years ago when a prevalence study¹ which found that about 75% of participating students experienced different forms of sexual harassment was published. The results were communicated to the Czech rectors' conference which is an umbrella organization in the higher education sector. At that time, the reaction was very negative, with a huge wave of resistance, even if another quantitative study² concluded that sexual harassment was a quite frequent phenomenon students dealt with.

Six years later, a group of students from artistic universities formed a group called Čtvrtá vlna (Forth Wave), creating and sharing short videos focusing on various feminist topics and women's empowerment. This group has become highly visible due to its short video³ focusing on gender and sexual harassment that women studying artistic universities experience. The video made the issue public, and thanks to it, these universities have started to set the mechanisms for the prevention and elimination of gender and sexual harassment.

Another event contributing to increasing the visibility of the issue of sexual harassment in higher education institutions (further "HEIs") was the publishing of the experience of sexual harassment of two former students of Anglo-American University, which is a private university in Prague. On 16 July 2018, an online magazine A2larm.cz published an article⁴ describing the experience of sexual harassment of two former students of the Anglo-American University. In both cases, the perpetrator was a member of the academic staff. This private university is attended primarily by students from abroad. The article also refers to more recent incidents of sexual harassment at this institution, which were also described in an online article (in 2013). But this article was published through a channel targeting international readers; thus, the problem did not become a public issue. Already in 2013, the students confronted the management, but the issue was not taken seriously enough; there was a tendency to downplay it. Similarly, in 2018, the school belittled the problem and stated that an investigation into the allegations of sexual harassment is ongoing, following the school's policy on disciplinary procedures. Both students (who had addressed the school before publishing their cases but were frustrated with how the school was handling them) were subject to criticism by the school for making the issue public, which included threats of legal proceedings. In parallel, other students contacted A2larm to confirm the presence of abuse and harassment directed both to students and staff. Consequently, the

¹ Smetáčková, Pavlík 2011.

² Vohlídalová, 2009., Vohlídalová 2011.

³ <https://www.facebook.com/1611341725837655/videos/1623718984599929>

⁴ <https://a2larm.cz/2018/07/sexual-harassment-at-anglo-american-university/>.



school issued a press release addressing both the cases reported in the article and announced a revision of the existing procedures and an establishment of a specific task force.

The moment when the issue was opened at the national level by a national authority was in winter 2017. It was initiated by implementing a measure of the Action plan for the prevention of domestic and gender-based violence by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. A letter by the deputy minister for the higher education sector, science and research was sent to all rectors of public and private universities. The letter was a recommendation to rectors to start to deal with this issue seriously, and some examples of good practice were provided. At that time, a project⁵ called Gender equality at the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports was launched. To support the HEIs to handle sexual harassment (initiated by sending the letter), other activities followed within this ministerial project. A seminar for the management focused on providing information about instruments for combatting sexual harassment was held at the Ministry in April 2018. Also, the necessity to deal with sexual harassment was included in the Implementation Plan of the Long-term plan of educational and scientific, research, development and innovation, artistic and other creative activities for universities for 2019 as one of the recommended activities and subsequently, a financial incentive was provided within a tool called Centralized developmental programme⁶ for year 2019, where one of the funded activities was focused on enhancing the quality of the environment of the universities with stress on gender equality. Two out of 25 universities applied for it, running activities related to sexual harassment too. Another ministerial activity was the inclusion of sexual harassment in an annual monitoring tool called the Annual report of the higher education institution's activities in 2018. Since then, the HEIs must report annually on how they deal with sexual harassment. Lastly, in 2019 the topic of sexual harassment as a part of one the indicators devoted to gender equality was included in the Methodology for Evaluating Research Organizations and Research, Development and Innovation in the higher education sector, which was first launched in 2020 and is supposed to be run every five years. In this case, considering the number of the indicators and their weight, it seems more symbolic but still important as this quality assurance serves for distributing a significant amount of public funding.

Except for these activities at the national/ministerial level, there have been few activities (prevention and provision of services) worth mention taken by other actors in the academic (The Centre for Gender & Science) and nongovernmental sector (Konsent), (more information below).

2. MAPPING OF POLICIES AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

- The laws, policies, and strategies that exist at different levels (national level, regional level, RFOs);

There is no law in the Czech Republic that deals with gender-based violence or sexual harassment, specifically in HEIs and research organizations. The one which tackles this issue

⁵ The project was ran from April 2017 until March 2020. The goal was to mainstream gender equality within the internal processes and into policy making of the whole Ministry.

⁶ The programme is launched every year, different activities are prioritized based on the strategic documents in the higher education sector. Universities create cooperation with other universities (minimum two universities together) and apply for it by proposing to carry out one or more of the funded activities.

implicitly is Law no. 198/2009 Sb., the so-called Antidiscrimination law, applied to the labour market. Based on the analysis of the Ombudsman's office, there have been not many cases reported within this legislation so far in general⁷.

As to policies issued by a national authority, there have been five in the past five years that mentioned sexual harassment in HEIs explicitly. In all of them, only a few sentences are devoted to this issue, usually in the form of recommendations for the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports to deal with this phenomenon. In two action plans, it is framed within domestic and gender-based violence (Action Plan for the Prevention of Domestic and Gender-based Violence for years 2015-2018⁸ and for years 2019-2022⁹). In the first one, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports "should recommend¹⁰ to higher education institutions to include the topic of sexual harassment (among students, academic staff and management) in their internal directives (policies) and counselling services (provision of services)". In the second one, there is a recommendation to "implement a project focused, among other things, on the education of pedagogical staff and students of secondary schools and pedagogical faculties in the field of sexual violence" (prevention). Three other documents frame sexual harassment in HEIs within the gender equality and/or human resources and higher education sector; the Government Strategy for Equality of Women and Men in the Czech Republic for 2014 – 2020¹¹, which says that it is essential to "set preventative measures and create procedures and their implementation in internal directives to deal with cases of harassment and sexual harassment in an educational environment" (prevention, policies, provision of services); Strategy for Equality of Women and Men 2021-2030¹², which stresses "the quality and transparency of human resources in the evaluation of targeted support projects (funding schemes) by documenting quality and transparent institutional solution for human resources development and gender equality. The advanced level of human resources, including gender equality (e.g. in matters of sexual harassment, transparent working conditions, reconciling family and professional life) will be taken into account in the competition for public research funding (targeted support)." (policies). In both documents, the responsible actor is the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and in the second one, additionally, research funding organisations. The author of those four documents is the Secretariat of the Government Council for Gender Equality, which is a body within the Government of the Czech Republic. The last document, the Implementation plan of the Long-term plan of educational and scientific, research, development and innovation, artistic and other creative activities for universities for 2019¹³ recommended to "improve the quality of HEIs' environment through implementing measures against sexual harassment and other forms of inappropriate behaviors" (policies). The author of this document is the Ministry itself, and the responsible authorities are public HEIs.



⁷ <https://www.ochrance.cz/aktualne/10-let-antidiskriminacniho-zakona/>.

⁸ <https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/rovne-prilezitosti-zen-a-muzu/dokumenty/Akcni-plan-prevence-domaciho-a-genderove-podmineneho-nasili.pdf>.

⁹ <https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/rovne-prilezitosti-zen-a-muzu/dokumenty/AP-DN---grafikaFINAL.pdf>

¹⁰ The Ministry implemented this measure by sending a letter to rectors, the activity mentioned in the introduction section.

¹¹ https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/rovne-prilezitosti-zen-a-muzu/Projekt_Optimalizace/Strategie-pro-rovnost-zen-a-muzu-v-CR-na-leta-2014-2020.pdf.

¹² https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/rovne-prilezitosti-zen-a-muzu/Aktuality/Strategie_rovnosti_zen_a_muzu.pdf.

¹³ <https://www.msmt.cz/vzdelavani/vysoke-skolstvi/dlouhodoby-zamer>.

No Czech RFO has a policy to address GBV in relation to the applicants. Most of them have started to consider gender equality aspects of their work only recently, and any measures for promoting gender equality among applicants are still rare. The most active RFO (Technology Agency of the Czech Republic) has a general gender equality policy and employs in its funding programmes several measures directed towards beneficiaries and their organizations. Nevertheless, GBV is not addressed as part of these actions.

- The main actors/stakeholders;

As is already evident, the most important actors dealing with the sexual harassment at HEIs at the national level are the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, which is the authority responsible for imposing policies toward HEIs and also the author of some of the policies and activities; and the Secretariat of the Government Council for Gender Equality which is a body within the Government of the Czech Republic. Another relevant actor that might deal with this issue is the Czech Rectors' Conference but unfortunately this umbrella body has not dealt with the issue at all so far. Also, taking into account the autonomy of the HEIs in the Czech Republic, the HEIs are those to be active in combatting GBV (more details below). Last but not least, it is important to mention two organizations, an academic one, the Centre for Gender & Science at the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences) and one NGO called Konsent (more details below).

- Other relevant activities to combat GBV in universities and research organisations (national and regional level, RFOs);

Except for policies issued by the Secretariat of the Government Council for Gender Equality and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the Ministry launched few other activities as the letter of the deputy minister to rectors of public and private HEIs recommending to deal with the issue, holding the seminar for the management of public and private HEIs, providing financial incentives via the Centralized developmental programme and including sexual harassment in the gender equality indicator of the Methodology for Evaluating Research Organizations and Research, Development and Innovation in the higher education sector setting the process of quality assurance of HEIs (all mentioned already above).

Moreover, there are activities by other actors as the Centre for Gender & Science¹⁴ (the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences) and an NGO Konsent¹⁵. The Centre for Gender & Science, which is the national contact point for gender issues in European Framework Programmes and is supporting research performing organizations (further “RPOs”) in setting up Gender Equality Plans, offers training to and provides guidance concerning the mechanisms for preventing and eliminating gender and sexual harassment and coercion. The training aims to sensitize the Czech academic environment to these issues and present a framework for preventing and eliminating gender and sexual harassment and coercion. The Centre also provides support to individual institutions in setting up the mechanisms for preventing and eliminating these phenomena and integrating the measures in their internal documents and processes.

Konsent, NGO specialized in the prevention and elimination of all forms of sexual harassment and violence occurring in different spheres of life, has launched activities targeting specifically

¹⁴ The Centre for Gender & Science, <https://genderaveda.cz/en/gender-and-science/>.

¹⁵ Konsent, <https://konsent.cz/>.

the academic sphere, too. Konsent provides workshops for both students and the academic staff. Besides, it provides consultancy services to help higher education institutions' management to set a complex system to prevent and eliminate gender and sexual harassment and coercion. Konsent sensitizes all actors studying and working in academic institutions to GBV to prevent and eliminate GBV in universities, both at the institutional level (RPOs) and at the individual level (students, teaching staff), too.

- An expert assessment of the extent to which the national and/or regional as well as RFO policies have had an impact on the organisational level of universities and research organisations in the country;

The above-mentioned activities initiated at least some activities at few of 25 public HEIs. This can be monitored by the Annual report of the activities of HEI in which the HEI must report if and how they deal with sexual harassment (above). During the last three years, two out of 25 HEIs created an internal directive, and about eleven institutions reported that they had started to deal with it, e.g. preparing a directive, launching a survey, holding seminars. On the other hand, some HEIs report that there are no cases reported and so they do not need any measures. It seems like there is progress but very slow.

- The role of RPOs in providing knowledge on GBV, and whether and how GBV is included as a topic in relevant curricula, and in teaching in universities (e.g., medicine, police and the army, etc.).

Although it is impossible to provide a detailed overview, as this kind of information is not fully accessible, GBV seems to be included in curricula and teaching in several universities. However, the main focus is on domestic violence. Courses dealing with this topic are taught, for example, at The Police Academy of the Czech Republic ("Domestic violence and stalking") or Pedagogical Faculty of Charles University. There are also specialized workshops offered to students of medicine. To include GBV in the curricula of medical faculties in the Czech Republic, an interdisciplinary team developed a manual for doctors "Domestic and gender-based violence".¹⁶



3. DEBATES REGARDING #METOO AND THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION

National media did not cover #MeToo nor similar movements in terms of how the topic relates to universities and research organisations. The #MeToo movement in national media was interpreted in general and mostly in a negative manner. Its publicity had no impact on national politics in relation to sexual harassment in the higher education sector and research.

The Istanbul Convention mostly did not affect higher education at the national level. One of the reasons may be that the topic of GBV is still largely dismissed in Czech society. As such,

¹⁶ <https://www.mzcr.cz/wp-content/uploads/wepub/15189/33120/DOM%C3%81C%C3%8D%20%20A%20GENDEROV%C4%9A%20PODM%C3%8DN%C4%9AN%C3%89%20N%C3%81SIL%C3%8D.pdf>.

universities do not feel any societal or political pressure to introduce any measures. Also, as the victims of GBV are still stigmatised, and the universities often do not provide safe conditions for reporting, many of the victims do not come forward, which can be interpreted as if GBV is not a notable problem in higher education.

4. PUBLIC OPINION ON GBV

In the past decade, several public opinion surveys about GBV (in general) were conducted. In 2015 and 2018, Amnesty International (in cooperation with FOCUS Marketing & Social Research) conducted a representative study Violence on Women through the Lenses of the Czech Population [Násilí na ženách optikou české populace].¹⁷ In 2016, Persefona, an NGO specializing in domestic and sexualized violence (again in cooperation with FOCUS Marketing & Social Research) carried out a survey Sexual Violence through the Lenses of Czech Society [Sexuální násilí očima české veřejnosti].¹⁸ Both studies of the Amnesty International showed, for example, that the view of the victim as at least partially responsible for the rape act is still prevalent (63% in 2015, 58% in 2018). 37% in 2015 and 30% in 2018 agreed that the person is partially responsible for the act if she wore a "sexy dress", 43% (versus 37%) if she was drunk. The assumption is also very common that the perpetrator of rape is usually a person previously unknown to the victim (55% in 2015, 44% in 2018). Nevertheless, 71% of the population (in 2018) expressed the opinion that violence against women is a problem in the Czech Republic.

Although no public opinion survey focusing specifically on GBV in universities has been conducted, two older studies (both conducted in 2008-2009) focusing primarily on the prevalence of GBV among students also explored their self-definitions of "sexual harassment". They pointed out that only a very small proportion of students who have experienced teacher's behaviours that can be characterised as sexual harassment explicitly labelled it as such. In general, students tended to reduce sexual harassment only to the physical forms of harassment and felt a high degree of uncertainty concerning the definition.¹⁹



5. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DISCUSSIONS ABOUT GBV

During the pandemic, there was a debate about the risk of rising the incidence of domestic violence, but no debate about gender-based violence or sexual harassment in the context of universities and research organizations.

6. CONCLUSION

¹⁷ A short presentation of the results from 2015 can be found here: <https://www.focus-agency.cz/files/contentFiles/amnesty-international-fin.pdf>, and from 2018 here: https://www.amnesty.cz/data/file/4254-vvm_problematika-nasili-na-zenach-optikou-ceske-populace.pptx?version=1541109702

¹⁸ Basic information (in Czech only) can be found here: <http://www.persefona.cz/sexualni-nasili-nebo-obtezovani-zazilo-39-cechu>

¹⁹ Smetáčková, I., Pavlík., P. 2011. "Sexuální obtěžování na vysokých školách: Teoretické vymezení, metodologický přístup, výzkumné výsledky." [Sexual Harassment at Universities: Definition, Methodology, Research Results] *Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review* 47(2): 361–386. Vohlídalová, M. 2011. „Kdybych o tom mluvila, asi bych to nenazvala sexuálním obtěžováním“: sexuální obtěžování ve vysokoškolském prostředí z perspektivy studujících [“If I talked about it, I would not call it sexual harassment.”: Sexual harassment in higher education from the students' perspective]. *AULA* 19(2): 23-34.

To conclude, there has been some progress, albeit slow, in dealing with sexual harassment in HEIs and research organizations. The topic was included in a few important higher education policies, monitoring tools, financial incentives and quality assurance processes. A few universities have already started to create internal directives. It seems that developments at the European level, firstly HR AWARD and recently the eligibility criteria of having a gender equality plan to apply for funding within Horizon Europe, could have a positive impact on dealing with sexual harassment. Some institutions have already initiated gender audits and will have to tackle the issue of sexual harassment in their GEPs. Hopefully, this trend will continue and major changes will be achieved.

7. REFERENCES

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