

# GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN UNIVERSITIES AND RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS

## NATIONAL FIELDWORK REPORT

**Country:** France

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### INTRODUCTION

Gender policy is set by the French Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MESRI) and implemented in universities and RPOs. It has focussed on GBV since about 2015, replacing, to a certain extent, previous policies that had paid more attention to careers. (As an illustration, in 2013, GBV was the object of only 1 of 8 policy measures<sup>1</sup>.) Today, while equality is still an objective, GBV has become central<sup>2</sup>. All universities and RPOs have had to set up units in charge of fighting sexual and sexist violence, training and communication (there is an interactive map of them on the Ministry website, with the name of the institution, contact and in some cases, a website<sup>3</sup>). The Ministry supports these actions financially.<sup>4</sup>

#### 1. MAPPING OF POLICIES AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

The laws that apply to HEIs and RPOs are general national ones applying to all people or specifically to civil servants (which most of their permanent employees are). The most recent ones are Law n° 2012-954 of 6 August 2012 on sexual harassment, Law n° 2014-873 of 4 August 2014 for true equality between men and women and a circular on fighting sexual and sexist violence in the civil service.<sup>5</sup> The penal code also covers sexual aggression, violence and exhibitionism. On the other hand, the question is not mentioned in the research law.

Policy for HEIs and RPOs is set up by MESRI. The latest element, published in 2021, is the National action plan for professional equality between women and men 2021-2023 (Plan national d'action pour l'égalité professionnelle entre les femmes et les hommes 2021-2023). Earlier elements were a Roadmap for true equality between women and men (Feuille de Route 2017 pour l'égalité réelle entre femmes et hommes), published in 2017 and Instructions on the Prevention and treatment of sexual harassment in public higher education and research establishments (Prévention et traitement du harcèlement sexuel dans les établissements publics d'enseignement supérieur et de recherche relevant du MENESR) published in 2015. An operational Guide for setting up a structure for the prevention and treatment of sexist and sexual violence in Higher education and research establishments was produced in 2018.

- *The main actors/stakeholders;*

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/pid29676-cid70662/egalite-entre-les-femmes-et-les-hommes-plan-d-action-du-m.e.s.r.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/pid38153/egalite-et-lutte-contre-les-discriminations.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/pid38153/egalite-et-lutte-contre-les-discriminations.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/cid148396/www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/cid148396/financements-de-projets-en-faveur-de-l-egalite-des-sexes-et-de-la-lutte-contre-les-violences-sexistes-et-sexuelles-au-sein-de-l-enseignement-superieur-et-la-recherche.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/download/pdf/circ?id=43173>



The main policy-making actor is the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation. It regularly sets up and/or recalls policy and legal obligations around GBV, the latest publication being a gender action plan for 2021-23 that includes GBV. It is quite active in the field, organizing meetings and various forms of communication (8<sup>th</sup> March, etc.).

Gender and diversity policy officers are the local actors within HEIs and RPOs. They set up a very active network in 2011<sup>6</sup> that has been an important factor in developing gender policy in HE. They are co-authors of an important document, the Vade-mecum (with CLASCHEs, see below).

RFOs are not active on GBV since they are not the employers of the researchers (the main one, ANR, has an internal policy for its own employees).

A non-institutional actor, CLASCHEs, a feminist civil society organisation created in 2003 by doctoral students, has played a major role in drawing attention to GBV in universities. It follows cases, produces guides and its vademecum<sup>7</sup>, written in collaboration with the network of gender policy officers and the national association for Feminist Studies, has become a reference for all actors in the field.

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

There is a High Council on the Equality between women and men (Haut Conseil à l'Égalité entre les femmes et les hommes) that has not been focussing on universities. It auditioned the network of gender and diversity policy officers last September 2020, but on equality issues, not on GBV.

- *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 laws are being progressively applied in HEIs and RPOs, and conscience is certainly rising (also because of #MeToo type public debates). Some establishments have been definitely more proactive than others (for example, CNRS, University Paris Diderot, University of Strasbourg, University of Lyon II, ...). The Ministry has been proactive on this issue and has put quite a lot of pressure on universities and RPOs. Practically all now have some type of equality and diversity office as well as a Gender action plan (imposed on all civil service institutions). It is a slow process that meets a lot of "inertia". The victims of GBV under-report and, if they do, they go through long and painful procedures. There is still a lot of potential for delaying or diluting disciplinary procedures, which remain an extremely difficult experience for victims. Under-reporting is clearly an issue, with prevalence studies giving much higher figures than the official numbers of reported cases. A really major issue is the increasing precarity of positions in the university that makes young students, researchers and teachers particularly vulnerable.

- *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.).*

University of Paris (ex-Diderot) delivers a university diploma called Violence on women: gender violence (Violences faites aux femmes : violence de genre). University of Toulouse Jean-Jaures

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cped-egalite.fr/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://clasches.fr/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Vade-mecum.pdf> - see Grid



has a course called Gender Violence and Territories (Violences de genre et territoires). There are a number of gender courses that may approach the subject.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. DEBATES REGARDING #METOO AND THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION

*Provide a brief overview of any debates related to the #MeToo movement (or other similar/related movements if relevant) and the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, specifically in relation to universities and research organisations.*

#MeToo is not at the origin of Ministry policy on GBV (several documents were published earlier). The #MeToo movement was widely discussed in the French public space, both concerning its American origin and the local version #BalanceTonPorc (denounce your pig). Most of the debate was positive, with a few contrary positions around the loss of gallantry, political correctness, etc. It clearly had an impact on the coverage of sexual harassment (for instance, in television news<sup>9</sup>), although the theme had begun to appear earlier (in part due to the Strauss-Kahn affair).

The debate has recently moved, at least in part, towards incest after the publication of a book accusing the head of the foundation running the prestigious political science higher education institution, SciencePo. Although the aggression took place outside academia, the impact was quite strong, leading to the resignation of both the head of the foundation as well as the director of SciencesPo when it became clear that he was aware of the facts. In a sense, this has impacted the illusion that Academia is “above” such things. A new #MeToo type of wave followed in all the political science institutes, called #SciencesPorcs. This is quite typical of the dynamic of the debate that rebounds with new events.

Another somewhat related public debate concerns "Gender theory" (and intersectional studies) that are strongly attacked by the political right-wing – but not only.

There has been some media coverage of the recent withdrawal of Turkey from the Istanbul Convention. Otherwise, there has been very little discussion about it. France ratified it in 2014.

## 3. PUBLIC OPINION ON GBV

*Please comment on the results of any relevant national public opinion surveys about GBV in general or in universities and research organisations that are in the national language.*

An opinion survey about GBV (in general) was run in 2019<sup>10</sup>, updating a previous one from 2015 by an NGO called Mémoire traumatique et victimologie. They describe the results as proof of a "rape culture" (e.g. 42% of the people questioned believe that if rape victims had a “provocative attitude”, the responsibility of the rapist is diminished). Knowledge about the statistical realities of rape is poor among the people who were surveyed. Nevertheless, 83% of them said that #MeToo had had a positive effect.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.haut-conseil-egalite.gouv.fr/stereotypes-et-roles-sociaux/zoom-sur/article/des-formations-a-l-egalite-dans>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.inattheque.fr/publications-evenements/ina-stat/les-violences-faites-aux-femmes-dans-les-journaux-televises.html>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ipsos.com/fr-fr/les-francais-et-les-representations-sur-le-viol-et-les-violences-sexuelles>



#### 4. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DISCUSSIONS ABOUT GBV

*Please comment on the impact of COVID-19 on discussions about GBV in universities and research organisations and new related developments.*

Universities have run online-only for nearly a year and since then have opened very partially (1 day per week per student). To my knowledge, there has been little discussion of GBV in universities during this period. On the other hand, there has been a lot of public debate about the increase in domestic violence due to the lock-down.<sup>11</sup>

#### 5. CONCLUSION

*Please comment on possible ways forward.*

In France, gender issues have always had low legitimacy - French universalism posits equality and tends to ignore any signs showing that it is not always effective... However, GBV is becoming more visible, raising more public debate and becoming less and less acceptable – including in HE&R.

Ways forward could be:

- continue pressure from the Ministry, well linked to the funding of the universities (for instance, via victimisation prevalence studies)
- reinforce gender units (more people, diverse profiles so it is easier to find the right one to talk to)
- support grassroots initiatives by students, young staff
- pay attention to technical and administrative staff that tend to be in weaker positions
- perhaps most important, reduce the precarity of positions

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<sup>11</sup> [https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2021/03/15/des-passages-a-l-acte-beaucoup-plus-terribles-comment-le-confinement-a-aggrave-les-violences-conjugales\\_6073169\\_3224.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2021/03/15/des-passages-a-l-acte-beaucoup-plus-terribles-comment-le-confinement-a-aggrave-les-violences-conjugales_6073169_3224.html) ; [https://www.liberation.fr/france/2020/11/25/pres-d-une-francaise-sur-deux-victime-de-violences-sexistes-ou-sexuelles\\_1806554/](https://www.liberation.fr/france/2020/11/25/pres-d-une-francaise-sur-deux-victime-de-violences-sexistes-ou-sexuelles_1806554/)



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