

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN UNIVERSITIES AND RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS

NATIONAL FIELDWORK REPORT

Country: Malta

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1. INTRODUCTION

Within the only official university in Malta (University of Malta), the attitudes towards GBV in universities and research organisations have, according to the available data, remained unchanged over the last five years. This is to say that there do not appear to have been any new initiatives or actions in regard to GBV in universities and research organisations (either at the University of Malta or any other institutions/entities), since the Sexual Harassment Policy at the University was implemented more than five years ago and has remained unchanged. GBV in the context of universities and research organisations is not tolerated by the University administration, and any instances of alleged harassment are dealt with accordingly and may result in disciplinary proceedings – thereby indicating that the attitudes towards such actions are strictly negative and unacceptable.

2. MAPPING OF POLICIES AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

The following are the laws that exist in Malta with regard to combating GBV but not specifically targeting universities and research organisations, in other words, these only implicitly refer to the context of universities and research organisations.

The ACT XIII of 2018, Chapter 581 does not specifically refer to the labour market, however, this aspect is still included in the legislation. The Act was intended to take into consideration the relevant articles of the Council of Europe Convention with regard to preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, whilst promoting and protecting the right of all individuals "to live free from violence in both the public and private sphere". However, it should be noted that another piece of legislation, the Constitution of Malta (Equal rights of men and women. Substituted by: XIX. 1991.2. 14.), does refer specifically to the labour market in the context of equal rights. This legislation states that: "The State shall promote the equal right of men and women to enjoy all economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights and for this purpose shall take appropriate measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination between the sexes by any person, organisation or enterprise; the State shall in particular aim at ensuring that women workers enjoy equal rights and the same wages for the same work as men."

The law provides the following definition of GBV: "gender-based violence" means all acts or omissions that are directed against a person because of their gender, that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life;"



There is currently no national or regional policy which focuses specifically on GBV in universities and research organisations; however, the University of Malta does take a proactive approach with regard to the topic of sexual harassment at its institution.

Policy specification: Sexual Harassment Policy - University of Malta

The policy, which covers both staff and students at the University, defines a number of examples of what constitutes harassment: "to subject other persons to an act of physical intimacy; to request sexual favours from other persons; to subject other persons to any act or conduct with sexual connotations, including spoken words, gestures or the production, display or circulation of any written words, pictures or other material, where the act, words or conduct is unwelcome to the persons to whom they are directed and could reasonably be regarded as offensive, humiliating or intimidating to the persons to whom they are directed; the persons so subjected or requested are treated less favourably by reason of such persons' rejection of or submission to such subjection or request, it could reasonably be anticipated that such persons would be so treated." (pp. 139-140). The policy aims to draw University members' attention to the relevant legislation regarding gender equality, thereby taking a preventative approach. Furthermore, the Committee offers protection, prosecution (where necessary, in the form of disciplinary actions) and provision of services to any instances of sexual harassment at the University.

There are currently no other relevant activities to combat GBV in universities and research organisations. However, there is one policy (Committee for Gender Issues Policy), published by the Gender Issues Committee at the University of Malta. This policy states that the University aims to make an active commitment to promoting equal opportunities for staff and students at the University, particularly with respect to Gender Issues. The policy also outlines the Committee's Terms of Reference, which include: identifying sources of unequal treatment or opportunities; promoting equal opportunities; handling complaints from staff or students about sex discriminatory practices; liaising with Special Advisors on issues of sexual harassment and making relevant recommendations for policy and procedures; promoting research and teaching which is reflective of the experience, knowledge, and aspirations of both men and women, and; establishing contact with individuals or organisations who hold similar objectives, as well as acting as a focal point for the University on gender issues.

With regard to more national-based authorities, The Commission on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence would be the appropriate entity for setting actions and policies to combat GBV in universities and research organisations. However, there have not been any actions or measures taken to specifically address GBV in universities and research organisations. This could potentially be due to the fact that the issue has not gained any relevance in the public sphere. Furthermore, the issue of domestic violence is very prominent on the national agenda, and this may be at the expense of devoting resources and attention to other issues, such as GBV in universities.

The previously mentioned policy, regarding sexual harassment at the University, does not appear to have had any noticeable impact on the organisational level of the University.

RPOs (in this case, the University of Malta) has a crucial role in providing knowledge on GBV, particularly due to being the primary entity providing the necessary accreditation required for careers such as police officers, doctors, lawyers and judges, etc.

GBV is included in the curricula of the University's courses. Some examples are described below:

A study-unit for postgraduates in midwifery titled 'Working with volatile families - a course for midwives' aims: " to provide practitioners with a forum to discuss various theoretical explanations as to the dynamics of gender-based violence and domestic violence; to help practitioners to analyse current legislation, policies and practices in the area of domestic violence; to help practitioners identify how individual victims of domestic abuse may present in different health care settings related to ante – and post-natal care and how the subject of domestic abuse can be approached; to provide practitioners with the skills of risk assessment and safety planning and guide them as to which services they can refer their patients."

Similar study-units are offered to students in the areas of Law (Code: CVL4022, Title: Gender and the Law), Criminology (CRI1009, Interpersonal Violence), and Medicine and Surgery (MDS2034, Psychological and Social Aspects of Health Care and Ethics). Law students are provided with training about the relevant legislative aspects relating to gender-related issues. Criminology students, who would typically be working as police and in the army, are given detailed information about interpersonal violence, including sexual harassment, workplace violence, and domestic violence. Medicine and Law students are taught about theories relating to psychological and social aspects of health care, including issues related to gender.

3. DEBATES REGARDING #METOO AND THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION

There have not been any debates in Malta related to the #MeToo movement (or other similar/related movement) and the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, specifically in relation to universities and research organisations.



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4. PUBLIC OPINION ON GBV

There have not been any relevant national public opinion surveys about GBV, either in general or in universities and research organisations (neither in English nor in Maltese). The most relevant research which looked into this topic was an analysis of the barriers to help-seeking amongst victims of violence against women (VAW) (Naudi et al., 2018); However, this study was not carried out with a national sample and instead used qualitative interviews. It is expected that more relevant data will be available through the EU-wide surveys on GBV currently being conducted by Eurostat, with an anticipated publication date in 2023. Moreover, as part of Malta's National Strategy on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence 2021-2022¹, the Commission on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence and the Ministry for Justice, Equality and Governance will develop a memorandum of understanding with the University of Malta and the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology to carry out academic research on GBV & DV as well as evaluate legislation and policy based on research findings to assess the level of implementation, efficacy and victim satisfaction.

5. IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DISCUSSIONS ABOUT GBV

¹ [https://stopviolence.gov.mt/en/Documents/Docs/20524%20-%20Second%20Strategy%20\(another%20duplicate\).pdf](https://stopviolence.gov.mt/en/Documents/Docs/20524%20-%20Second%20Strategy%20(another%20duplicate).pdf)

Since there were no publically available details of discussions about GBV in universities and research organisations prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, it can be inferred that the pandemic did not have any impact due to a lack of discussions.

6. CONCLUSION

Given the lack of any policies or actions which specifically relate to GBV in universities and research organisations, there is a clear gap in the literature with regard to this topic. Therefore, further research is required in order to explore this topic and propose appropriate policy actions, based on the findings of such research. The research should aim to gather prevalence data regarding GBV in the University of Malta, as well as other higher educational institutions such as MCAST (The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology – a vocational education and training institution). Qualitative data regarding the experiences of any individuals who have experienced GBV in such institutional settings should also be obtained.

7. REFERENCES

Naudi, M., Clark, M., & Saliba, H. (2018). Full cooperation: Zero Violence. Barriers to help-seeking in gender-based violence against women: A research study. Ministry for European Affairs and Equality. stopviolence.gov.mt



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