



EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



UNISAFE POLICY BRIEF 1

Findings on gender-based violence in higher education and research to inform policy makers.

10 November 2022

INTRODUCTION

Combating gender-based violence is a key area of the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, which states that the EU needs ‘comprehensive, updated and comparable data for policies [...] to be effective’, and that ‘the data should be disaggregated by relevant intersectional aspects and indicators such as age, disability status, migrant status and rural-urban residence’. Gender-based violence is prevalent across the European Union and beyond, and is a human rights violation. It is both a cause and a consequence of gender inequalities. For this reason, it is important that institutions find the courage to tackle the issue within their midst.

The problem of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, is not new in universities, but it has too often been overlooked, or worse, covered up. There exist numerous reports on sexual harassment within European universities and research institutions which identify detrimental effects on physical and mental wellbeing, as well as on scientific careers and studies. Gender-based violence also hinders research and educational performance at the institutional level. Several studies have shown that those working in precarious working conditions (e.g., early-career stage researchers, transnational researchers, and researchers with short-term affiliation) may be particularly at risk of experiencing gender-based violence, including sexual harassment.

Despite growing scholarly and policy interest in the issue, a full understanding of the scope, consequences and measures on gender-based violence and sexual harassment in European universities and research organisations is yet to be achieved. Further, it is crucial that the problem of gender-based violence in universities and research institutions is examined using an intersectional lens as well as by situating it in the context of the institutions and countries in which it takes place.

The EU H2020 funded project UniSAFE (2021-2024) aims to provide evidence-based answers to these issues through a complex research study design, involving qualitative and quantitative analysis on micro, meso, and macro levels. An ambitious and holistic 7P model, covering prevalence, prevention, protection, prosecution, provision of services, partnerships, and policy, is used to collect and analyse data on each level. The model is

better suited to collect data, analyse their relations, and translate findings into operational tools than the conventional 3P model or the Istanbul Convention 4P model. The same 7P model is used to co-design a comprehensive set of measures and tools to be applied by universities and research organisations and by other stakeholders, including policymakers and RFOs. In applying the 7Ps model, UniSAFE has conducted: a prevalence survey of gender-based violence, its determinants, and consequences; interviews with researchers at increased risk of gender-based violence; in-depth case studies on institutional measures to combat gender-based violence; strategic policy mappings of national and organisational legal and policy frameworks and responses; and a multi-level analysis of the comprehensive body of collected data. Based on these results, UniSAFE is developing a toolbox to combat gender-based violence.

The expected impacts of this project are to:

- achieve a better understanding of gender-based violence in European universities and research organisations;
- make recommendations on what effective policies and measures can be implemented by universities and research organisations to combat gender-based violence;
- provide tools to increase the capacity of staff and students to address gender-based violence within universities and research organisations in Europe;
- contribute to a reduction of gender-based violence in academic environments and research workplaces in Europe.

This policy brief focuses on the results of the prevalence study and policy mappings.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

Between January and May 2022, UniSAFE conducted a survey in 46 research organisations and universities in 15 countries. It is the largest survey conducted so far in the European Research Area, with over 42,000 responses. In the unweighted sample, 67% (28,214) identify as women, 30% (12,762) identify as men, and 3% (1,154) identify as non-binary or a gender identity not listed. In total, 43% of the respondents are staff and 57% are students.

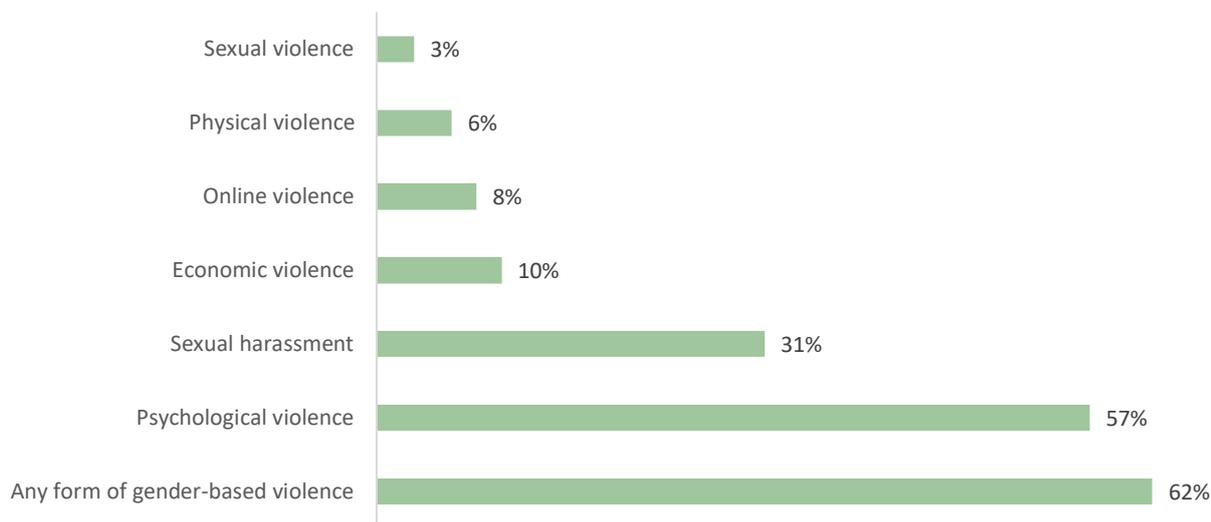
A unique feature of this survey is its holistic approach to investigating gender-based violence. The survey focused on capturing gendered experiences of violence, whether physical, sexual, psychological, or economic, including online forms of gender-based violence. The survey also investigated intersections with respondents' individual situation, such as their sexual orientation, age, ethnic minority status, disability, and international mobility among others. The consequences of such experiences were investigated for respondents' well-being, career, and studies.

Nearly two in three (62%) of the respondents who took part in the UniSAFE survey disclosed having experienced at least one form of gender-based violence since they started working or studying at their institution. Looking into the different forms of violence, 3% of respondents have reported experiencing sexual violence, 6% physical violence, and almost one third (31%) sexual harassment. Psychological violence was experienced by the majority of respondents (57%), economic violence by 10% of respondents, and online violence by 8% of respondents.

The UniSAFE survey asked follow-up questions for one of the incidents of gender-based violence disclosed by respondents, including their identification of the perpetrator(s) gender. One or more men was the most frequently identified category for the gender of the perpetrator(s), compared with experiences of gender-based violence that involved either one or more women, or mixed groups. Perpetrators consisting of one or

more men were identified in 80% of cases of sexual violence, 78% in cases of sexual harassment, 69% of cases of physical violence, 59% in cases of psychological violence, 59% in cases of online violence and 53% in cases of economic violence.

Figure 1: Prevalence of any form of gender-based violence and by form of gender-based violence



These overall prevalence rates from the survey, however, mask differences between groups of respondents. Students are less likely than staff to have experienced any form of gender-based violence (58% compared with 74% respectively), which likely reflects differences in how long they have been working or studying in their institution. Nonetheless, data suggest that students are less affected by economic violence, psychological violence or sexual harassment, but are much more at risk of physical or sexual violence.

Further differences, based on socio-demographic and functional diversity characteristics, also underscore the importance of examining prevalence using an intersectional lens. The gender-based nature of violence is apparent in how women, non-binary people and men are affected. Women (66%) and non-binary people (74%) were more likely to disclose experiences of at least one form of gender-based violence, though men also disclosed experiencing gender-based violence (56%). Women were most at risk of sexual violence and sexual harassment; men most at risk of physical violence; non-binary people most at risk of sexual harassment, psychological violence, and economic violence.

While controlling for other socio-demographic determinants, trans people (defined as non-alignment between sex at birth and current gender identity) were not more nor less affected by overall gender-based violence compared with non-trans people. However, being trans was associated with a higher prevalence of psychological violence and sexual harassment. Most minority sexual orientation groups, compared with people who are heterosexual, have a higher prevalence of gender-based violence overall and particularly pronounced for online violence, sexual harassment, and psychological violence. For bisexual and queer people, there is also a higher prevalence of sexual violence. The prevalence of gender-based violence, overall and across its different forms, is higher for people that report a disability or chronic illness. Being from a minority ethnic group is associated with higher prevalence of gender-based violence overall, and its separate forms. International staff and students were overall as likely to experience gender-based violence as domestic ones. The only exceptions were economic violence and sexual violence where international staff/students were more likely to disclose incidents.

Specifically, among staff respondents, including both academic and non-academic staff, the overall prevalence of gender-based violence was lower among non-academic staff, as well as across all forms of

gender-based violence with the exception of physical violence. The prevalence of gender-based violence was higher among staff with permanent contracts for overall gender-based violence compared with staff on fixed-term contracts. This applies to all forms of gender-based violence, apart from sexual violence. Staff working on a full-time contract (35 hours a week or more) disclosed more gender-based violence overall, compared with staff working on a part-time basis. This is also the case for economic violence, psychological violence, and sexual harassment. Academic staff in Grade A, Grade B, or Grade C were more likely to disclose having experienced gender-based violence, compared to academic staff in Grade D, progressing with seniority. All grades (A, B and C, compared with D) were associated with higher prevalence of psychological violence and sexual harassment. Economic violence, however, only affected Grades B and C compared with Grade D. These findings may reflect the time period spent at the institution which may be longer for higher grade staff.

Specifically, among student respondents, postgraduate students were more likely than undergraduate students to disclose in the survey incidents of any form of gender-based violence since they started at their respective institutions, with the prevalence highest among doctoral candidates. Doctoral candidates were most likely to report incidents of economic violence and sexual harassment compared to undergraduate students. The prevalence of gender-based violence was higher among students living in university residences. Among the different forms of gender-based violence, it appears that this is particularly the case for sexual violence, sexual harassment, and physical violence.

Main findings on prevalence

Based on respondents' experience within their institution (since starting there)

- **Students vs staff:** students less affected by gender-based violence overall, though more at risk of physical and sexual violence
- **Gender identity:** women most at risk of sexual violence and sexual harassment; men most at risk of physical violence; non-binary people most at risk of sexual harassment, psychological violence and economic violence
- **Trans:** trans people more affected by psychological violence and sexual harassment
- **Sexual orientation:** increased exposure to gender-based violence among homosexual, bisexual or queer people
- **Disability:** all forms of gender-based violence more prevalent among people with a disability or chronic illness
- **Minority ethnic status:** higher prevalence of all forms of gender-based violence among people from a minority ethnic group
- **International status:** international staff/students at higher risk of economic violence and sexual violence
- **Academic vs non-academic staff:** lower prevalence of most forms of gender-based violence among non-academic staff
- **Contract type:** higher levels of gender-based violence among staff on permanent contracts
- **Working hours:** being on full-time contracted hours of work associated with higher prevalence of gender-based violence
- **Academic grades:** higher prevalence of gender-based violence overall among higher grades, as well as of psychological violence and sexual harassment
- **Study level:** doctoral candidates more at risk of gender-based violence overall, and particularly economic violence
- **Campus residence:** living on campus associated with greater prevalence of gender-based violence overall, particularly sexual violence, sexual harassment, and physical violence

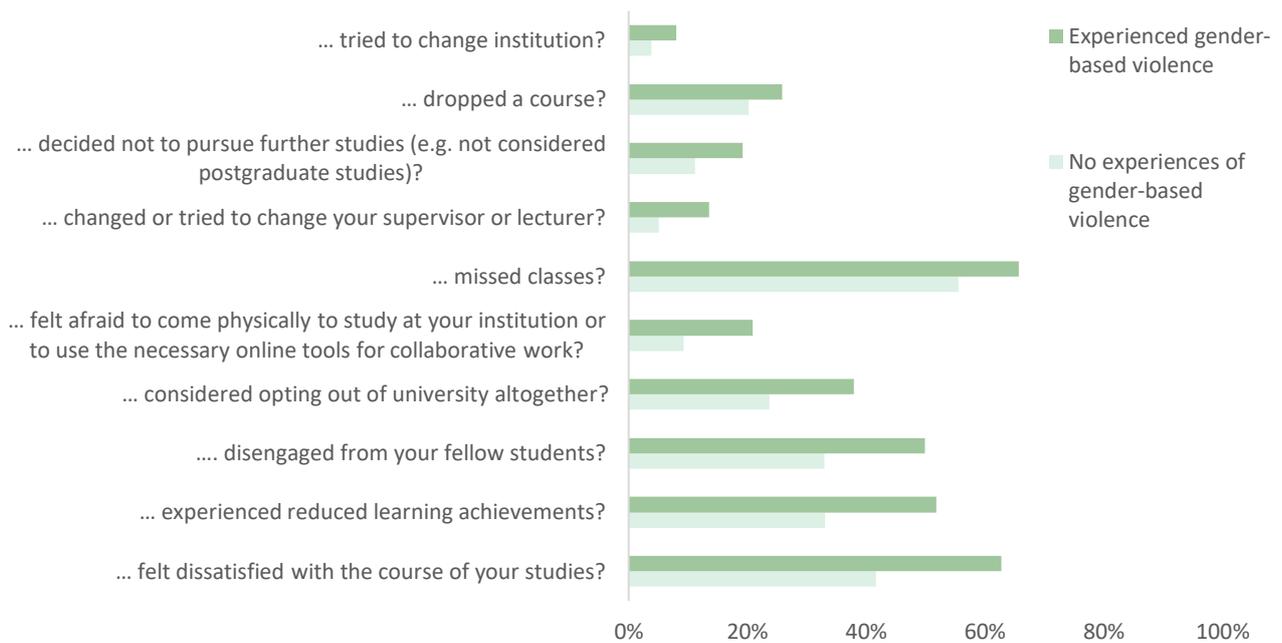
Consequences of gender-based violence

The consequences of gender-based violence in universities and research organisations are clear for both staff and students. People experiencing gender-based violence tend to be more dissatisfied with their job and report reduced work productivity than those who do not report experiencing gender-based violence. Experiencing gender-based violence was also linked to staff wanting out of the academic sector altogether. For students, the results indicate that gender-based violence is detrimental to satisfaction with the course of studies as well as learning achievements.

Figure 2 Consequences for staff by whether or not they experienced gender-based violence



Figure 3: Consequences for students by whether or not they experienced gender-based violence



Reporting gender-based violence

Despite the consequences, gender-based violence is not often reported. Only a small minority of those who have experienced gender-based violence in the context of their institution have reported it. The most often cited reasons were not being sure that the behaviour was serious enough to report, not recognising the behaviour as violence at the time, or not thinking anything would happen if it was reported.

Figure 4: Reasons for not reporting an incident of gender-based violence



Gender-based violence as an institutional problem

The results of the UniSAFE survey show that only 28% of the respondents think that gender-based violence is not a problem at their institution. Although people feel it is their responsibility to intervene when an incident happens (57% always, 41% sometimes), as many as 74% report that they have never intervened when witnessing an incident. Only 36% of respondents are aware of institutional policies; 63% believe that policies are implemented effectively and 78% that policies are clear and explicit. Alarming, 41% agreed or strongly agreed that their institution would suggest reporting gender-based violence might affect the reputation of the institution, though the vast majority agreed or strongly agreed that their institution would support the person making a report (81%) and would take action to remedy the factors leading to gender-based violence (79%).

Institutional policies

This points to a need for better policies, as well as education and awareness raising both among staff and students. The UniSAFE project analysed policies and institutional measures in forty-eight universities and research organisations. Of these institutions, three did not have any policies on gender-based violence at all. Eighteen institutions had general policies, such as anti-discrimination policies or codes of conduct, where gender-based violence was mentioned as one issue among others. Nineteen institutions had a mix of general policies and policies specifically dedicated to gender-based violence and these tend to be the most comprehensive. Eight of the forty-eight institutions had policies dedicated only to gender-based violence.

The relationship between the existence of organisational policies (whether generic or specific to gender-based violence) and the prevalence of gender-based violence is complex. Although there is no direct evidence

to support that the existence of organisational policies entails an overall lower prevalence of gender-based violence, evidence does show that there is lower prevalence of psychological violence, sexual harassment, and online violence when a generic organisational policy exists. This does not mean to say that there is not a need for organisational policies, and particularly dedicated ones, but instead shows that gender-based violence in RPOs is not only massive but also universal. This also points towards the need to better promote existing policies among staff and students, and to ensure that they are implemented effectively.

Organisational policies tend to predominantly address only some forms of gender-based violence: sexual harassment is the most commonly addressed form (88% of the polices), compared to 33% addressing online violence, 39% sexual violence, 23% psychological violence, 22% physical violence and 6% economic violence. Organisational policies specifically dedicated to gender-based violence (84% of the dedicated policies in comparison to 50% of the general policies) also tend to provide a definition of the forms of gender-based violence. Without a clear definition of the problem, combatting it presents a challenge.

Intersectionality: the inclusion of potentially vulnerable groups

Only a small number of institutional policies explicitly address intersectionality or the different axes of inequalities that contribute to prevalence. In particular, the Spanish and Irish institutional policies address this aspect, while the situation in other countries is varied. Importantly, none of the EU13¹ RPOs address intersectionality.

Potentially vulnerable groups are addressed unevenly: while 28 institutions out of the 45 with institutional policies define vulnerable groups, these predominantly include LGBTQI+ staff and students (18 institutions), students and staff with disabilities (16 institutions), students and staff with migrant or ethnic minority status (13 institutions). This is relevant in view of the results of the UniSAFE survey reported above, where these groups shown to be at increased risk of gender-based violence.

Table 1: An overview of forms of gender-based violence by type of policy

GBV-focused policies	General policies
Sexual harassment (100%)	Sexual harassment (81%)
Gender-based harassment (84%)	Gender-based harassment (76%)
Sexual violence (57%)	Sexual violence (29%)
Online violence (51%)	Online violence (24%)
Physical violence (32%)	Psychological violence (21%)
Psychological violence (27%)	Physical violence (16%)
Stalking (19%)	GBV in general (10%)
GBV in general (11%)	Stalking (9%)
Financial and economic violence (5%)	Financial and economic violence (7%)
Organisational violence (5%)	Organisational violence (6%)
Other (3%)	Other (6%)

7Ps: the comprehensiveness of organisational policies

¹ The EU13 are the EU Member States that joined the EU after 2004: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

The policy mapping also investigated the comprehensiveness of organisational policies in terms of the 7Ps (prevalence, prevention, protection, prosecution, provision of services, partnerships, and policies). The most frequently addressed areas are protection and prosecution (addressed by 41 institutions), prevention (addressed by 40 institutions), and provision of services (addressed by 39 institutions). Prevalence and partnerships are less common, with 31 and 22 institutions addressing these respectively.

The preventative measures in place include trainings for students and staff (29 RPOs), awareness raising activities (25 RPOs), having guidance for university units (14 RPOs), having help desks and trust points (11 RPOs) and action to make their campuses safer (2 RPOs). In terms of protection, 40 RPOs have an infrastructure to handle cases, 35 RPOs have detailed procedures for formal and informal case handling, but only 18 contain a comprehensive description of the procedure; 34 RPOs define sanctions. There are also 39 RPOs that include the provision of services for victims such as counselling and healthcare, seven have services for alleged perpetrators. It is noteworthy that only seven RPOs have services for bystanders.

It appears that institutional policies can be significantly supported by a policy framework set by a national authority, as is the case in France, Ireland, and Spain. These three countries have comprehensive national-level policies that mandate the adoption of institutional policies and procedures and cover all the 7Ps. The UniSAFE analysis of the policy mapping shows that at the national level the policies are most comprehensive when solely focused on addressing gender-based violence rather than being a part of a more general policy. Such policies are rarely found in the EU13 Member States where policies tend to be general and gender-based violence tends to receive a cursory mention.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Gender-based violence is perceived as an issue by 72% of respondents but only 36% are aware of policies in place at their institution.
 - This puts a spotlight on the gap between the seriousness of the issue and actions taken at the institutional level on the issue of gender-based violence.
 - This puts the spotlight on the need for awareness-raising actions
- Institutional policies tend to be the most comprehensive in countries where the national policy framework is the strongest (Spain, Ireland, France)
 - National authorities should be encouraged to adopt framework policies for their higher education and research sector to ensure that RPOs take action to end gender-based violence.
- Marked differences exist between the EU14² and EU13 Member States EU13 policies are briefer, and there are very few in place at the national level compared to the EU14.
 - National authorities and RPOs in EU13 should step up their actions to address gender-based violence to ensure safe and respectful study and work environments appropriate for the common European Higher Education and Research Areas.
- The survey results highlight a high degree of uncertainty among the victims and survivors of what constitutes a serious issue and even to identify acts as violent.
 - This underlies the importance of preventive measures and particularly of trainings, induction sessions and awareness-raising campaigns.
- While people understand and on an attitudinal level assume responsibility for intervening when incidents happen, the actual rate of intervention is very low with 74% never intervening when witnessing an incident.

² The EU14 are the EU Member States that joined the EU before 2004, without the UK, which left the EU in 2020: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden.

- This may indicate uncertainty about stepping in. This further reinforces the need for preventative awareness raising and trainings and concrete actions aimed at bystanders.

SUSTAINABILITY AND LEGACY

UniSAFE develops:

- Quantitative and qualitative indicators to enable RPOs to measure and monitor their progress in combating gender-based violence.
- A set of concrete recommendations for various stakeholders, including policymakers, research funding organisations, research performing organisations, and staff and students of universities and research organisations.
- A toolbox covering the 7Ps model for universities and research organisations to develop and implement their own holistic policy responses.
- Capacity-building concepts and capacity-building programmes for research performing organisations, management, staff, and students that support the design and implementation of policies.
- Advocacy actions to promote the uptake of the recommendations, tools and toolboxes and the improvement of policies or the development of new policies by policymakers at all levels.
- A community of universities and research organisations willing to improve or develop policies to eradicate gender-based violence inside their institution. This community involves 46 universities and research organisations throughout the project and is envisaged to extend to the wider community of universities and research organisations, thus facilitating the transfer of knowledge and implementation of policies.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGIES

UniSAFE is a Horizon 2020 project (contract number 101006261) funded under the call topic SwafS-25-2020: Gender-based violence including sexual harassment in research organisations and universities. It has a dual objective: (1) to produce robust knowledge on gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, in universities and research organisations and (2) to translate this knowledge into operational tools and recommendations for universities, research organisations, and policymakers designed to reduce gender-based violence and sexual harassment.

In analysing the prevalence, determinants, consequences, and responses to gender-based violence, UniSAFE is centred on three research pillars that are combined in a holistic research model and multi-level research design to collect, analyse, and synthesise qualitative and quantitative data along these three research pillars:

1. The first one, at the micro level, is the study of the prevalence and consequences of gender-based violence at 46 research performing organisations in 15 member states, a Europe-wide survey, and an interview-based study of researchers at increased risk of gender-based violence.
2. The second one, at the meso level, is a study of organisational responses and infrastructure, using in-depth case studies, interviews, and a strategic mapping of 48 research performing organisations in 15 EU countries.
3. The third one, at the macro level, is an analysis of legal and policy frameworks that focuses specifically on gender-based violence in universities and research organisations, carried out in cooperation with national experts in the 27 EU Member States, four Associated Countries, and two Third Countries.

An ambitious and holistic 7P model, covering prevalence, prevention, protection, prosecution, provision of services, partnerships, and policy, is used to collect and analyse data on each level. The model is better suited

to collect data, analyse their relations, and translate findings into operational tools than the conventional 3P model or the Istanbul Convention 4P model. The same 7P model is used to co-design a comprehensive set of measures and tools to be applied inside universities and research organisations and by other stakeholders, including policymakers and RFOs.

UniSAFE relies on a strong multi-disciplinary consortium of nine European partners. Its strength is based on the partners' in-depth knowledge and extensive track record in researching gender-based violence, translating academic insights into operational tools, including the GEAR-tool, disseminating knowledge, including a direct link to the Gender Equality Academy, developing policy recommendations at the EU level, and empowering stakeholders to exploit project results, with a carefully designed impact plan.

UniSAFE adopts a participatory and co-design approach throughout the project conception and implementation to ensure citizen involvement in understanding gender-based violence (norms and attitudes), with a view to transform the knowledge into tools that will effectively be used. UniSAFE makes research data available on an open access basis where possible, and follows Open Access as standard approach to publications, to ensure maximal reach to the scientific community and that the new knowledge created by the research activities of the project is taken up widely as an input for further research.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME Gender-based violence and institutional responses: Building a knowledge base and operational tools to make universities and research organisations safe (UniSAFE)

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Yellow Window – YW – Antwerpen, Belgium

Örebro University – ORU – Örebro, Sweden

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FURTHER READING

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