UniSAFE
ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

From policy to practice: The evidence base for ending gender-based violence in higher education and research

UniSAFE White Paper
for the institutional leadership,
change agents and responsible staff
in Higher Education Institutions
and Research Organisations

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UniSAFE Consortium Partners:

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Introduction

Nearly 62% of the over 42,000 respondents who took part in the survey on gender-based violence in academia and higher education carried out in 2022 in the EU-funded project UniSAFE disclosed having experienced at least one form of gender-based violence, including incidents of physical, sexual violence and harassment, psychological, economic and online violence, in their place of work or study. Among 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 LGBQ+ 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.

7 %

of students having experienced gender-based violence in the context of their institution have reported it

23 %

of respondents working in higher education and research having experienced gender-based violence in the context of their institution have reported it

The research in the UniSAFE project shows that survivors did not report incidents because they were not sure that the behaviour was serious enough to report, they did not recognise the behaviour as violence at the time of the incident or did not think that anything would happen if they reported the incident (Lipinsky et al. 2022).

These findings underscore the high prevalence of gender-based violence, and they hint at the permissiveness of violence in organisational cultures and the failure of institutions to define and address unacceptable behaviours in higher education and research organisations. As supported by other studies conducted as part of the project, they also reveal the continued lack of effective policies, their poor design and the failure to implement them when adopted (Huck et al. 2022; Blazyte and Pilinkaite Sotirovic 2022; Linková et al. 2023; Ranea-Triviño et al. 2022).

About the white paper

The aim of this white paper is to draw attention to the roles and responsibilities of higher education and research organisations in addressing gender-based violence. These roles and responsibilities may not be recognised or are downplayed, and this results in institutions failing to take appropriate action to ensure safe environments for students and staff. Secondly, the white paper aims to explicate the essential features and elements of effective policies and actions and lastly, to highlight the critical role of institutional leadership in making the policy frameworks and actions work.

This white paper is primarily intended for: institutional leaders and top management; staff responsible for the design, adoption and implementation of institutional policies; staff appointed to support victims and survivors; and any other member of the academic community committed to ending gender-based violence. It builds on the results of the UniSAFE research, including the prevalence study (Lipinsky et al. 2022, Humbert et al. 2022), the institutional policy analysis (Huck et al. 2022), case studies (Ranea-Triviño et al. 2022), interviews (Blazyte and Pilinkaite 2022), and stakeholder and expert workshops (Yellow Window 2023a, 2023b), the purpose of which have been to gain insight into and test emerging policy solutions.

> Building on these state-of-the-art insights, the white paper is a distillation of critical issues that should be addressed when designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating institutional policies.

The white paper first defines gender-based violence and its specificities in the sectors of higher education and research. It then addresses the consequences of gender-based violence and goes on to identify the roles and responsibilities of higher education and research organisations in ending gender-based violence. The document then continues with the definition of the main components of institutional policies and their implementation, including evidence related to the consequences of gender-based violence and the roles and responsibilities of institutions. These institutional responsibilities are addressed in relation to the needs of the victims/survivors, the needs of the responsible staff, in terms of the policy design and implementation and in terms of the policy content according to the 7P model theorised in UniSAFE (Mergaert et al. 2023). The paper concludes by first recognising the pivotal role that leadership plays in ensuring the success of institutional policies that help victims and survivors and prevent gender-based violence in organisational settings and finally, by emphasising the need to move to a proactive approach when creating safe working and study environments.

Definition of gender-based violence

Gender-based violence is "any type of harm that is perpetrated against a person or group of people because of their factual or perceived sex, gender, sexual orientation and/or gender identity" (Council of Europe). The European Commission defines gender-based violence as acts that "result in, or are likely to result in physical harm, sexual harm, psychological or economic harm, including threats of such acts." Gender-based violence occurs in both the private and public spheres, and higher education and research institutions are no exception.

The specificities of gender-based violence in higher education and research organisations

Some of the features of gender-based violence may make its occurrence even more probable in higher education and research environments.[1] These features include, in particular, the unequal power relations and hierarchical structures which, in academic settings, are manifested in three ways:

1. in the organisation of the academic career with organisational and cognitive dependence,
2. in the relations between (older) teaching staff and (younger) students and
3. in peer contexts where power acts as an intrinsic part of interactions (Strid et al. 2021).[2]

These power relations are structured not only by gender but also other characteristics such as age, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, class or disability, which interact with gender. This hierarchical nature of higher education and research institutions leads to underreporting due to fear of retaliation.

Furthermore, gender-based violence is not primarily an expression of the failure of a single individual but instead of an organisational culture that allows such behaviour to continue unabated. It is a systemic problem, related to power positions and structural inequalities.

Gender-based violence occurs along a continuum (Kelly 1987; Walby et al. 2014; Hearn et al. 2022) where clear-cut delineations between different forms are hard to make and where seemingly 'innocent', 'mild' and subtle forms of misconduct and transgressive behaviours, when not addressed, gradually escalate into more severe and grave forms of violence.

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[1] These features are addressed in more depth in the UniSAFE White Paper Harnessing Institutional Accountability: Ending Gender-Based Violence in Higher Education and Research (Linková et al. 2023).

[2] For example, the UniSAFE survey reveals that students were much more likely to report physical violence by another student (53%) than staff (16%).

Violence as a continuum is further reflected in the uncertainty as to what constitutes violence among students and staff.

When gender-based violence occurs in higher education and research organisations, it harms the purpose, legitimacy and integrity of the knowledge-making domain by:

- jeopardising the future of students and staff by negatively impacting their health, well-being and study and career outcomes;
- negatively impacting research and teaching excellence by failing to provide conditions in which people and institutions can thrive and excel;
- precipitating institutional reputation loss, and related economic costs, due to the failure to provide a safe and respectful environment;
- negatively impacting on the future of society as higher education and research institutions train people who take up leadership roles in society.

Consequences of gender-based violence in higher education and research institutions

Gender-based violence has severe consequences for victims, survivors as well as bystanders (Humbert et al. 2022; Blazyte & Pilinkaite Sotorovic 2022). These consequences can include or lead to trauma. Trauma makes it difficult for people to feel safe, even after the original danger has passed (Centre for Mental Health, 2019). The UniSAFE survey (Schredl et al. 2022) shows that on the individual level, respondents who have experienced gender-based violence, compared to those who have not, are more likely to feel socially excluded, feel unsafe and feel unwell: In total, 70% of those who had experienced gender-based violence felt socially excluded compared to just 20% of those who did not experience gender-based violence.

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Respondents who had experienced gender-based violence were also much more likely to feel unsafe, 39% compared to 11% for those who did not disclose experiences of gender-based violence. Having experienced gender-based violence is also associated with a slight increase in feeling unwell, with 73% of those who experienced gender-based violence having been unwell six times or more at least once in the past three months, compared with 58% of those who did not experience gender-based violence. (Humbert and Strid in preparation)

**Figure 1: Percentage of respondents who feel socially excluded, unsafe or unwell,
by whether or not they have experienced gender-based violence**
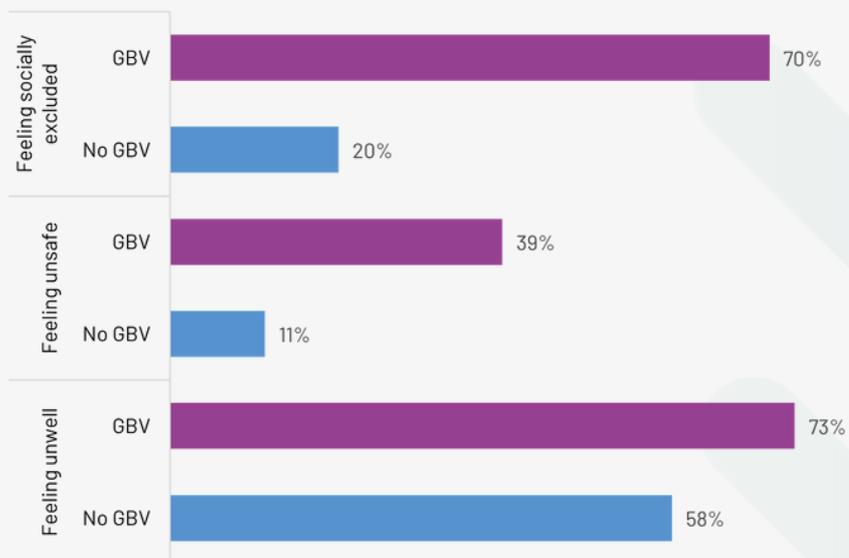
Source of data: Humbert and Strid (in preparation)

The graphs below disaggregate these findings further by different groups, providing a more nuanced perspective. What is clear is that **groups that are minoritised are not only more likely to experience gender-based violence, but are also much more likely to deal with adverse consequences as a result.**

**Figure 2: Percentage of respondents who feel socially excluded,
by groups and experience of gender-based violence**
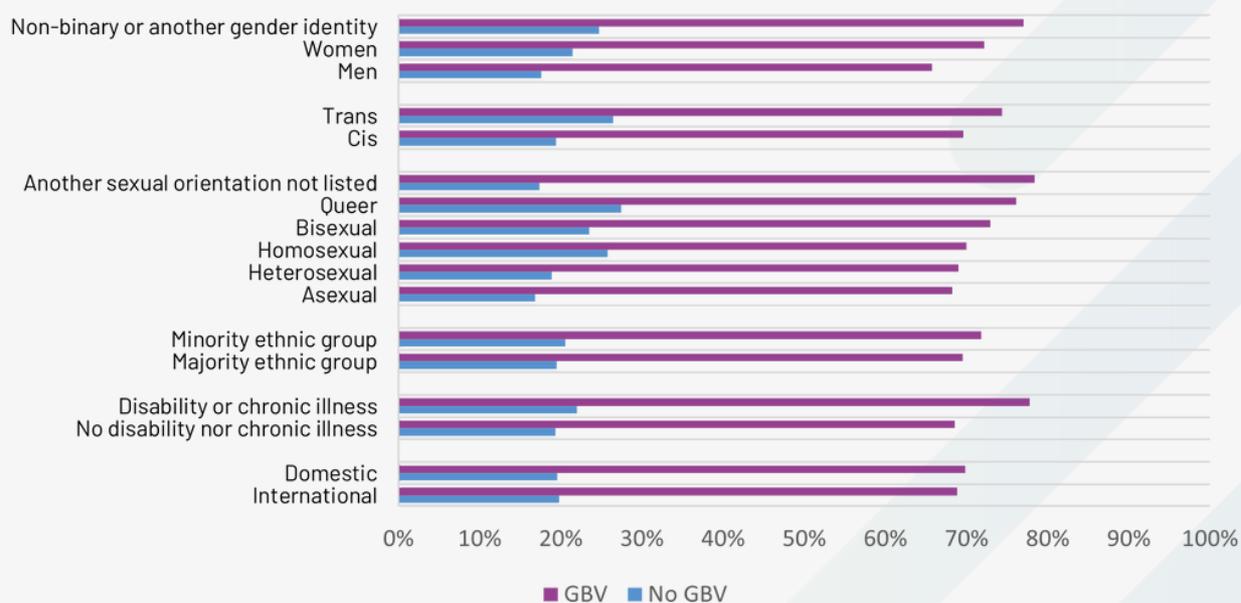
Source of data: Humbert and Strid (in preparation)

Figure 3: Percentage of respondents who feel unsafe, by groups and experience of gender-based violence
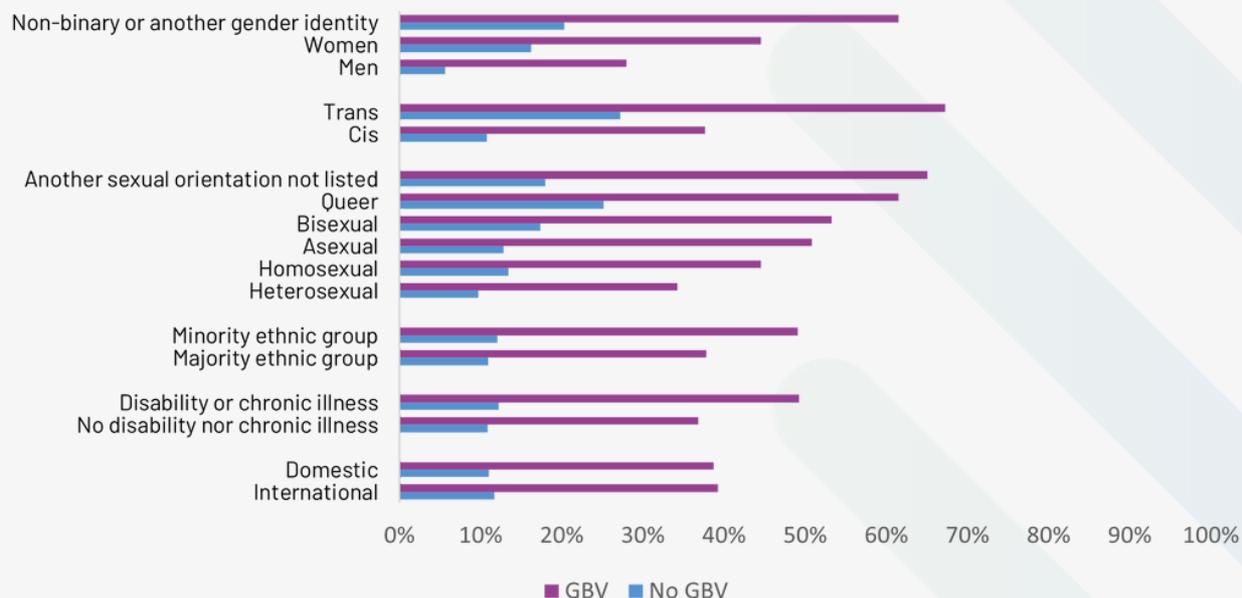
Source of data: Humbert and Strid (in preparation)

Figure 4: Percentage of respondents who feel who feel unwell, by groups and experience of gender-based violence

Source of data: Humbert and Strid (in preparation)

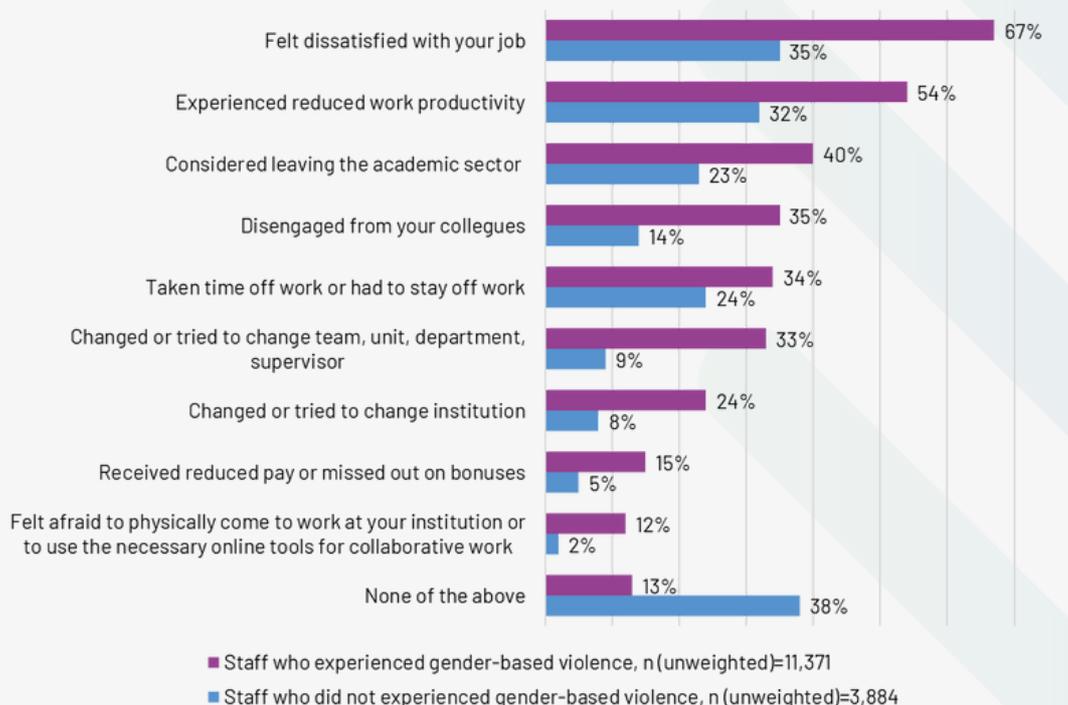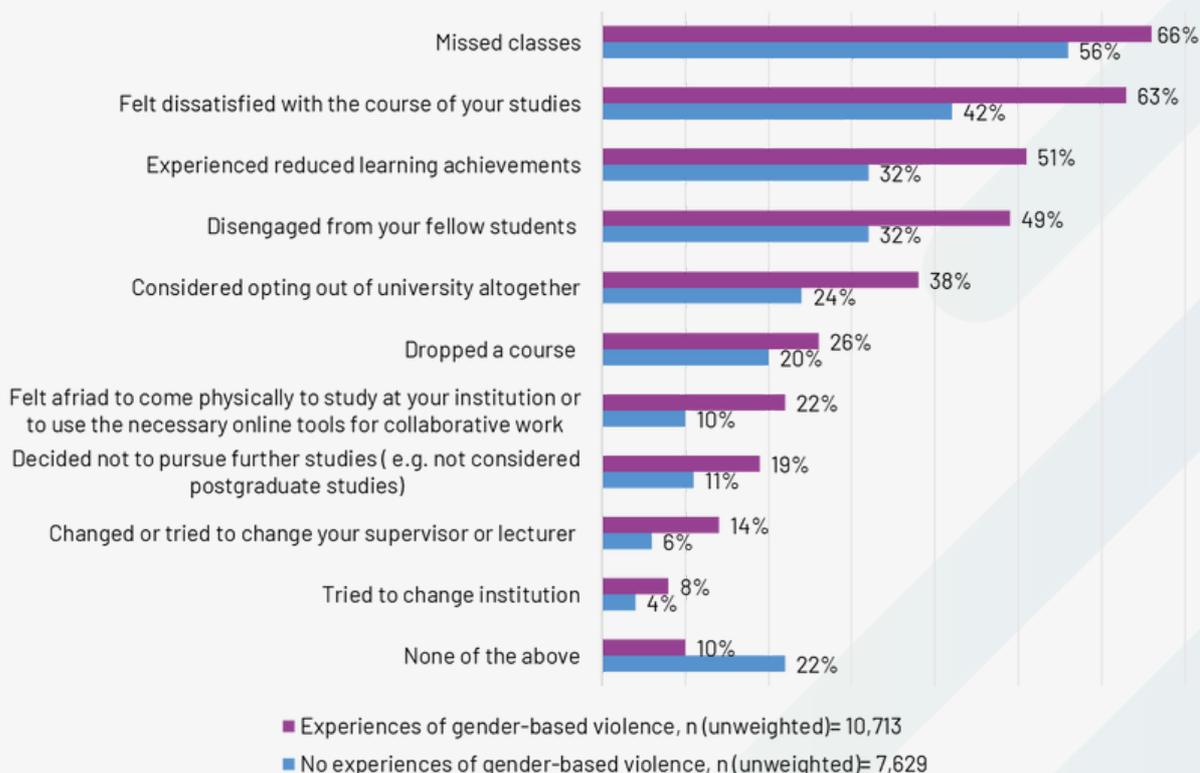Furthermore, the experience of violence impacts not only feelings of safety and well-being—
it also has work-related and study-related consequences.

Figure 5: Work-related consequences for staff, by experiences of gender-based

	Staff who experienced gender-based violence	Staff who did not experienced gender-based violence
Felt dissatisfied with your job	67%	35%
Experienced reduced work productivity	54%	32%
Considered leaving the academic sector	40%	23%
Disengaged from your collegues	35%	14%
Taken time off work or had to stay off work	34%	24%
Changed or tried to change team, unit, department, supervisor	33%	9%
Changed or tried to change institution	24%	8%
Received reduced pay or missed out on bonuses	15%	5%
Felt afraid to physically come to work at your institution or to use the necessary online tools for collaborative work	12%	2%
None of the above	13%	38%

■ Staff who experienced gender-based violence, n (unweighted)=11,371
■ Staff who did not experienced gender-based violence, n (unweighted)=3,884

Source of data: Lipinsky, et al. 2022

Figure 6: Study-related consequences, by experiences of gender-based violence

	Experiences of gender-based violence	No experiences of gender-based violence
Missed classes	66%	56%
Felt dissatisfied with the course of your studies	63%	42%
Experienced reduced learning achievements	51%	32%
Disengaged from your fellow students	49%	32%
Considered opting out of university altogether	38%	24%
Dropped a course	26%	20%
Felt afriad to come physically to study at your institution or to use the necessary online tools for collaborative work	22%	10%
Decided not to pursue further studies (e.g. not considered postgraduate studies)	19%	11%
Changed or tried to change your supervisor or lecturer	14%	6%
Tried to change institution	8%	4%
None of the above	10%	22%

■ Experiences of gender-based violence, n (unweighted)= 10,713
■ No experiences of gender-based violence, n (unweighted)= 7,629

Source of data: Lipinsky, et al. 2022

The roles and responsibilities of higher education and research institutions in working to end gender-based violence

Higher education and research organisations have a critical role in ending gender-based violence due to their unique position as hubs of knowledge, learning, and community influence. Not only do they have a duty of care towards their students and staff and[1] a duty to uphold the values of academic integrity and ethics, but they also possess the capacity to generate knowledge. They can influence societal change by shaping the minds of future generations. Their active involvement in addressing gender-based violence is thus crucial for creating safer and inclusive academic communities.

Duty of Care

As educational and training institutions, employers and important social actors, higher education and research institutions have a responsibility to provide a safe and supportive environment for their students, faculty, staff as well as visitors. Addressing gender-based violence is part of fulfilling this duty of care, by ensuring that individuals can pursue their education and academic training or work without fear of violence, harassment or discrimination. Gender-based violence can also be classified as a violation of fundamental human rights, including the right to safety, dignity and equality. Given their societal mission, higher education institutions in particular should uphold and protect these rights and foster a respectful learning and working environment. In some countries, this duty is directly embedded in the legal framework of research performing organisations (Fajmonová et al. 2021).

Research and Teaching Excellence

The primary driving force of higher education and research institutions is excellence, related to both knowledge production and teaching. Cases of gender-based violence jeopardise excellence in multiple ways by impacting the wellbeing and health of individuals who cannot perform at their best and by leading to attrition of talented researchers and students. As the UniSAFE research presented above shows, people belonging to minoritised groups are at a particular risk of gender-based violence, which further impacts their underrepresentation in higher education and research institutions. This underrepresentation limits the diversity of perspectives and experiences, which is crucial for robust and innovative research.

Intellectual Integrity

Higher education and research institutions can be characterised – more than any other institution – by their quest to understand the world, by valuing the truth and following evidence. They have a responsibility to engage in rigorous research, generate knowledge and disseminate evidence-based information.

They are perfectly positioned to create knowledge and data on various aspects of gender-based violence, including its prevalence, consequences and effective interventions, and they therefore create the evidence base for policies, programmes and practices. Academic research can shed light on the underlying factors that perpetuate gender-based violence and inform strategies for prevention and systemic change. Given this knowledge-making expertise, a lack of involvement in data collection, analysis and data-driven approaches is contrary to academic culture.

Gender Equality and Social Justice

Gender-based violence is deeply rooted in unequal power dynamics embedded in the organisational culture of higher education and research. By addressing gender-based violence, these institutions demonstrate their stand against gender inequality. In their policies and actions, they can and should recognise that violence disproportionately affects marginalised communities (Lipinsky et al. 2022).

Health and Well-being

Gender-based violence has severe physical, emotional, and psychological consequences for victims, survivors as well as bystanders (Humbert et al. 2022; Blazyte & Pilinkaite Sotorovic 2022). Adequately addressing gender-based violence in higher education and research institutions implies providing individuals who have experienced violence with adequate support, counselling and resources they need to heal.

Influencing Societal Change and Future Generations

As influential actors, higher education and research institutions have the potential to shape societal attitudes, behaviours and policies. They have a role in educating and shaping the minds of future generations of leaders, policy makers and professionals, researchers and engineers and community members. Through education and the integration of gender-based violence as a study topic in curricula across various disciplines (including medicine, social work, teacher education and others); research; and internal work to end gender-based violence, these institutions impact the future workforce and send a strong message to the wider society, thereby effecting social change beyond their own organisations.

To effectively fulfil these roles and responsibilities, higher education and research institutions must design, adopt and implement robust policies. At the current moment, many institutions do not live up to this mission.

> The UniSAFE research shows that policies are not consistently adopted, but when they are in place, they are key to ensuring higher levels of comprehensiveness of institutional approaches and to having better strategies that guarantee a victim-centred approach (Huck et al. 2022; Ranea-Triviño et al. 2022).

Making policies work:
Key features of institutional policies

For policies towards ending gender-based violence in the academic environment to be effective, they must reflect the needs of those concerned. These are, first and foremost, the needs of the most vulnerable members of the academic community, and especially the needs of victims/survivors, whose well-being the institutions shall protect. Furthermore, the institutions must address the needs of the staff members responsible for the implementation of the institutional policies, in terms of their resourcing, capacity building, institutional reach and transparency of processes. The content of the institutional policy on gender-based violence should be built on the 7P model, which entails Policies, Prevalence, Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, Provision of services and Partnerships. This comprehensive framework has been theorised and tested in the UniSAFE research, and its validity, relevance and usefulness for analysing existing policy frameworks at national and institutional levels and for identifying their strengths and weaknesses have been proven. This makes the model exceptionally interesting for practical purposes, as it pinpoints areas where improvements in policy frameworks are possible (Mergaert et al. 2023). In the sections below, critical features of institutional policies are explicated, addressing first the needs of victims and survivors, second the needs of the institutional change agents, third the policy cycle of successful implementation, and fourth looking at each P specifically.

Needs of victims and survivors

Victim-centred approach

Institutional policy on gender-based violence should be guided by a victim-centred approach. This means placing the needs and priorities of victims/survivors of violence at the forefront of any response (UN Women, 2019). This entails "prioritizing listening to the victim(s), avoiding re-traumatization, and systematically focusing on their safety, rights, well-being, expressed needs and choices, thereby giving back as much control to victim(s) as feasible and ensuring the empathetic and sensitive delivery of services and accompaniment in a non-judgmental manner" (UNHCR, 2020). It is important to bear in mind that bystanders are also victimised and may feel unable to act; it is therefore important to ensure bystander training to ensure that they are equipped to take an active role in addressing gender-based violence and can act as agents of change at their institutions.

In certain cases and at certain stages of an incident investigation, the application of a victim-centred approach may appear to be at odds with what is perceived as the interests of the institution (issues of reputation, avoiding negative media attention). It needs to be recognised that such an approach will be detrimental to the institutional in the long run; instead, addressing gender-based violence through a victim/survivor-centred approach is beneficial to building a safe and respectful academic environment and hence long-term trust in institutional functioning and processes.

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Trauma-informed approaches

Any victim-centred approach to addressing gender-based violence has to be trauma-informed. Experiencing gender-based violence has severe adverse consequences both on well-being and work- and study-related aspects, as outlined above. Trauma-informed care is therefore critical in that it is a way of providing support and care that takes into account the potential impact of trauma on a person's life and well-being. It entails using expert knowledge on the effects of trauma to create an environment that is safe, empowering and respectful and to ensure that procedures are fair. It also avoids re-traumatisation and ensures that holistic support and services are provided, that the context in which the violence occurred is taken into account and that attention is paid to building trusting relationships during the case handling procedure, including the protection and confidentiality of information.

Intersectional view on gender-based violence

The incidence of gender-based violence is higher among people who belong to marginalised groups. In academic settings those are defined not only by socio-demographic factors but also functional differences (referring to positions, types of contracts and job profiles). Quantitative research shows that all forms of gender-based violence are more prevalent among people with a disability or chronic illness and people from a minority ethnic group. Interviews with victims/survivors of gender-based violence identify as particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence doctoral candidates, early-career researchers and researchers and teaching staff who sought promotion to a higher position (Blazyte & Pilinkaite Sotirovic 2023). However, the institutional responses examined through the case studies showed a difficult implementation in this regard. Even when an intersectional approach is mentioned, both in the design and in the implementation process, the existence of discrimination based on different grounds is acknowledged, but the interaction among factors is not tackled (Ranea-Triviño et al. 2022).

Needs of responsible staff

The creation and successful implementation of institutional policy on gender-based violence is contingent on the activity of the staff responsible for implementing the policies. Those are, first and foremost, the gender equality bodies and/or officers, but also others: social and support services, working groups set up specifically to respond to a reported case, decision-makers (including top and mid-management), Human Resources units, the legal departments or the Ombudsperson and ethical committees (Ranea-Triviño et al. 2022).

Resources

The majority of the case studies conducted by UniSAFE in 15 European countries show that a large share of implementation work is carried out voluntarily by key implementers, who are often sustained by their personal beliefs in equality and activism. Therefore, efforts should be made to recognise and support the work done by key actors (Ranea-Triviño et al. 2022). Support should take the form of endowing various resources, including appropriate budget, staffing, space and time allocations.

Capacity building

For the change agents to be able to properly fulfil their institutional roles, they must have at their disposal access to continuing education and capacity building in relation to gender-based violence knowledge and victim-centred, trauma-informed and intersectional approaches as well as cultural competency. In addition, they also require access to capacity building related to the processual aspects of policy implementation, including participatory approaches, communication strategies and counselling skills, management of resistances, conflict prevention and resolution and relevant legal and policy frameworks. Institutions are responsible for creating the conditions for change agents to build their competences so that they are equipped to take up their respective roles.

Protection of mental health and prevention of burnout among staff responsible for implementing policies

Being the bearer of institutional policy addressing gender-based violence is extremely emotionally and mentally demanding. Hearing the stories of harm takes a toll and can lead to vicarious trauma resulting from exposure to the experiences and stories of others. The responsible units are often understaffed and under-resourced, which can contribute to feelings of institutional under-recognition and disavowal.

The difficulty of the topic, the need to navigate complex dynamics and institutional resistance can lead to a sense of helplessness. Responsible staff must also navigate high expectations which they may not be able to fulfil, caught between the rock of institutional allegiance and the hard place of victim orientation. Due to this complex position of the staff responsible for implementing policies, institutions must ensure the protection of their mental health and wellbeing. In addition to the two previous aspects of resourcing and capacity building, institutions should also ensure regular supervision and intervision and other forms of support.

Inter-institutional mutual learning and exchange

Mutual learning and exchange are crucial, not only for higher education and research organisations that have recently started to develop measures to end gender-based violence, but also for institutions with a longer history of action. Mutual learning and exchange create opportunities for responsible staff from diverse institutional contexts to come together **and** share their experiences and knowledge. They allow staff to exchange information about effective strategies, new initiatives and emerging practices and procedures that have yielded results. They provide an opportunity for responsible staff to identify areas for improvement and gaps of their policies but also a source of collegial support and emotional sustenance for dealing with a difficult topic. By exchanging ideas and working together, change agents may become a force that drives policy development, research and policy implementation, leading to collective action and greater impact.

Policy design and implementation

This section addresses the elements that are critical for the successful design and efficient implementation of policies to counteract gender-based violence.

Transparency

Addressing gender-based violence in higher education and research institutions continues to be a contentious task, and the way the policies are developed and designed, and cases handled, contributes to the success of the policies. Transparency relates to a wide range of aspects, including prevalence and incidence data collection and publication, measures adopted, knowledge generated and support structures in place. Internal transparency is vital in that it contributes to trust building, accountability and the ability to assess the effectiveness of policies. Clear and transparent communication across the entire community also contributes to a sense of fairness in how cases are handled. Transparent systems also encourage reporting and reduce barriers, such as fear of reprisal or scepticism about the institution's response. It should also be kept in mind that low prevalence does not indicate that incidents of gender-based violence do not occur. An increase in the number of cases reported after policy adoption is not bad per se since it may, in fact, be a sign of emerging institutional trust. This is another reason why transparency in data collection and publication is so vital.

Societal and institutional context

The policy cycle evolves within a broader, ever-evolving societal and institutional context. Events within the society and the institution serve as windows of opportunity to coordinate and collaborate with other internal units or external stakeholders, increase the sensitivity of key actors and overcome resistance from target groups to the issue of gender-based violence. The societal context also entails the legal framework that governs potential institutional disciplinary actions and prosecution of gender-based violence more broadly. This does not entail only the national policy context but also developments at the EU level, for example, the inclusion of gender-based violence among thematic building blocks of the gender equality plans that are mandatory in Horizon Europe. Therefore, it is vital for the responsible staff to monitor policy developments at the national level, including potential sources of funding, as a resource to reinforce institutional policies. Staff should also establish links with relevant departments and units within the organisation in order to ensure that the actions and policies to address gender-based violence are embedded and speak to other institutional policies from the early stages of the design process.

Combining top-down and bottom-up approaches

Top-down approaches provide a structure and framework, while bottom-up approaches create space for customisation and adaptation based on the needs and experiences of the community. This combination increases the likelihood of policy uptake, implementation success and long-term sustainability.

Working top down reflects the commitment and recognition of the issue and should facilitate the availability of resources, including staffing. It can also reinforce the importance of accountability by fostering the processes of monitoring and evaluation. Bottom-up lines of action foster the empowerment of individuals in the academic community to actively contribute to addressing gender-based violence. These can take the form of student-led campaigns, awareness events, peer education programmes and support networks. Bottom-up approaches build a collective sense of responsibility for preventing and addressing gender-based violence.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are critical features of the policy cycle and allow the assessment of whether an adopted policy and concrete actions are effective in achieving the set goals. Regular monitoring ensures that policies are being implemented as intended and that the necessary actions are being taken. Evaluation helps to assess compliance with legal requirements, internal policies and external standards. Monitoring and evaluation also help to identify gaps and provide insights into the need to revise and modify policies and procedures. The process supports institutional learning, contributes to internal transparency and creates buy-in among the academic community. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms also hold institutions accountable for their commitment to addressing gender-based violence. Finally, monitoring and evaluation can be used for advocacy or demonstrate commitment to responsible national or regional authorities, as relevant.

Policy content
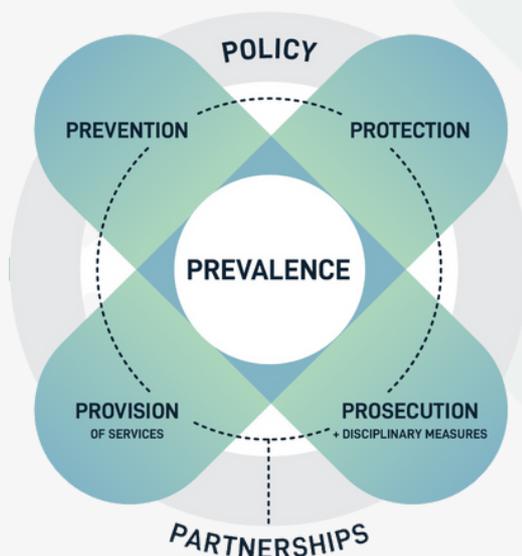
Figure 7: The 7P model and the inter-relations between the Ps.

Policy: *Policy is the foundation and refers to a coherent set of measures with a clear vision and strategy or to specific documents detailing such measures.*

The institutional policy defines the institutional framework and the vision of the institution on addressing gender-based violence. It permeates all activities in the academic environment, especially in actions both active and passive by those representing the institution. Policy condoning and tolerating certain kinds of actions creates institutional culture. Institutional policy can take the form of written documents. They are in practice adopted either directly in relation to gender-based violence (e.g., student sexual harassment policy), or more broadly to gender equality (e.g., a gender equality plan) or academic ethics (e.g., codes of conduct). It is important that the policies do not focus only on the regulated behaviour but also on the process of reporting breaches of such conduct. Policies should be accompanied by action plans where implementation is foreseen and carefully planned (Ranea-Triviño et al. 2022).

A useful tool for the design of complex policies on gender-based violence is the 7P framework. Each of the Ps represents an essential element which intersects with other Ps; however, none of them should be omitted. The UniSAFE research shows that while most institutional policies prescribe preventative and protective measures, few address prevalence and partnerships (Huck et al. 2022).

Prevalence: *Prevalence and incidence estimates contribute to evidence-based policymaking. Importantly, prevalence must apply an intersectional approach that takes into account people's ethnicity and origin, gender identity, sexual orientation and their position within the organisation.*

At the core of the effort to end gender-based violence stands awareness of the scope of the problem. However, data-driven and informed policies are rare. It is one of the Ps that is least covered in a systematic way. Data collection is usually fragmented—for example, only data on reported incidents are gathered, and if so, only some of them are made public (e.g., when the perpetrator is a student). Prevalence studies in the form of surveys are lacking. Only very recently can surveys be found. When surveys are conducted, they are not tied to monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (Ranea-Triviño et al. 2022).

Prevention: *Prevention refers to measures that promote changes in social and cultural behaviour. In academia, this may include induction materials for both staff and students, internal and external publicity and training and public statements and visuals.*

Higher education and research institutions have the responsibility to educate and raise awareness about gender-based violence among their students, faculty and staff, as well as the wider community. By fostering a culture of understanding, community building and inclusiveness, they can promote a respectful and safe environment and help challenge harmful attitudes and behaviours, thus contributing to the changing of organisational culture.

Prevention is the most common aspect covered by institutional policy documents in the form of awareness-raising campaigns and mostly voluntary training. However, these are less often implemented in practice (Ranea-Triviño et al. 2022). What seems to be completely missing in terms of prevention are actions aimed at structural change. These could include efforts to promote alternative leadership models in academic institutions that are proactively challenging gender inequality, reflecting on power imbalance and the role of leadership in addressing gender-based violence, or paying attention to specific situations common in academia such as long-term dependency relations in doctoral supervision (Ranea-Triviño et al. 2022).

Protection: *Protection aims at ensuring safety and meeting the needs of potential victims and survivors. This includes clear processes, procedures and infrastructure for reporting incidents, supporting victims and survivors and providing training for those responsible for handling cases.*

Protective measures are aimed at assisting victims/survivors and avoiding retraumatisation. The achievement of this goal is dependent firstly on the availability of any kind of processes, secondly on the awareness of them, and thirdly on the skills of the personnel responsible for handling cases. The protective measures should be built on the victim-centred, trauma-informed approaches presented above.

Prosecution: *Prosecution and disciplinary measures cover legal proceedings against suspected perpetrators and related investigative measures and disciplinary proceedings. This includes — as legally appropriate — possible warnings, suspension, rehabilitation and termination of employment and study, as well as liaison with legal, police and criminal justice organisations and professionals.*

While Prosecution is among the most commonly addressed aspect in institutional policy documents (Huck et al. 2022), it is also the least commonly implemented (Ranea-Triviño et al. 2022). Transparent disclosure of potential sanctions has a positive effect in two ways. First, it acts as a preventative measure and a deterrent to potential offenders. Second, it motivates victims/survivors to report incidents. Currently, in the absence of information about potential sanctions, victims/survivors fear that while retaliation may come against them, perpetrators will not be sanctioned.

Provision of services: *Provision of services refers to the services offered to support victims, families, bystanders, whistle blowers, perpetrators and affected members of the community. In academia, it can include counselling and psychological and medical support. Importantly, staff, students, managers and supervisors need to be made thoroughly aware of the availability of these support services.*

It is essential for services provided to form a coherent set, aligning with the specific needs of victims/survivors and the overall objective of creating a safe and inclusive academic environment. Recognising that not all expertise or capacity may be available within the institutions, creating partnerships can be a valuable solution to ensure a comprehensive range of support is accessible and available. Additionally, the importance of training for the staff members providing the services cannot be understated, particularly in tailoring it to the specific skills required to effectively address gender-based violence. By equipping staff and stakeholders with the necessary knowledge and tools, academia can foster a culture of prevention, support and accountability, ultimately creating an environment that is free from gender-based violence and conducive to the well-being and success of all its members.

Partnerships: **Partnership relates to the involvement of relevant actors at all levels, such as governmental agencies, civil society organisations, trade unions and staff and student associations.**

Partnership is a means of creating and implementing an institutional policy. Partnerships facilitate the involvement of key actors at different stages of the policy-making process, starting from policy design and extending to the provision of essential services such as counselling, as outlined in the policy. Through collaboration and engagement with relevant stakeholders, partnerships ensure a comprehensive approach to policy development and service delivery, promoting inclusivity, expertise sharing and a more effective response to the needs and challenges surrounding gender issues within academic institutions.

The role of institutional leaders

To make institutional policies work, the steps outlined above have to be clearly supported by institutional leaders. First of all, leaders should accept that creating a safe environment for studying and working is an inherent part of their responsibilities and shows a visible commitment to the steps to be taken. To guarantee a smooth implementation of the policies, they should actively communicate the benefits to the community and beyond. The committed stance of institutional leaders and their active communication are important for building a common understanding of the issues to be addressed and changes to be implemented.

However, concrete measures should not be 'imposed' from above. To make the changes successful, leaders should make their design as participatory as possible. Different groups of actors working or studying in higher education or research institutions may bring a unique set of experiences and knowledge into the process. Their suggestions regarding the change process formulated from different organisational positions may contribute to developing solutions suitable for the whole community. The support of a participatory approach respectful of different groups' perspectives and contributions will also build a sense of ownership and help to eliminate possible resistances. As the UniSAFE collection of case studies focusing on institutional responses to gender-based violence in research performing organisations has shown, even though students are targeted by a majority of institutional responses as the primary beneficiaries, they do not take part in the policy design and implementation in many cases (Ranea-Triviño et al. 2022).

Moreover, as resistances among staff members are often the most significant barrier to change, the staff responsible for the implementation have to be visibly supported by institutional leaders to counteract these resistances and improve the outcome of the changes. The case studies in the UniSAFE project (Ranea-Triviño et al. 2022) have revealed that, very often, a substantive part of the implementation is based on voluntary work and the personal commitment of key implementers. Therefore, efforts should be made to recognise this work and to create favourable conditions that further support its development.

Last but not least, it has been shown that not all stages of the policy cycle, including those necessary for the successful implementation of changes and possible adjustment of the design of the measures, are addressed sufficiently. In particular, there is a gap in mechanisms that ensure accountability and enable monitoring and evaluation (Ranea-Triviño et al. 2022). The role of leaders is also of key importance in these processes: leaders should insist on monitoring the effectiveness of the measures introduced, reflect on the results and communicate what could be improved with the information at hand. As part of this reflection, the feedback of the actors involved in the implementation process should be collected to further inform possible adjustments to the measures.

All the contributions that institutional leaders can make towards ending gender-based violence require a clear vision and strong commitment embedded in responsibility towards all members of the community, including the ones in less powerful or marginalised positions. Only then will institutions be able to manage, and emerge from, the disruption caused by cases of gender-based violence and embark on a path of rebuilding institutional trust.

From reactive to proactive approaches
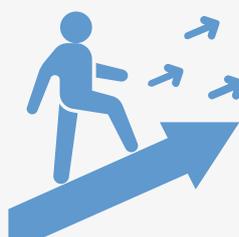
To make policies to end gender-based violence effective, it is important to change the approach from addressing cases when they emerge (reactive case-driven approaches) to an approach of actively monitoring and assessing the situation as part of preventive work (proactive culture-change approaches), which helps organisations identify potential risks and intervene before situations arise. The top management and leaders of institutions have a crucial role in steering the institutional response in this direction. The proactive approach sends a strong message about what types of behaviour are supported and which ones will be sanctioned. The proactive approach also recognises that gender-based violence is deeply rooted in systemic issues such as gender inequality, power imbalances and social norms. In contrast to reactive approaches, which often treat cases as the failure of a single individual, the proactive approach contributes to changing the institutional culture overall.[3] A proactive approach also enables early intervention and support for individuals who may be at risk.

[3] For more on the underlying causes of gender-based violence, see UniSAFE White Paper 1 (Linková et al. 2023).

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About UniSAFE

UniSAFE is an EU-funded project (contract number 101006261) that aims to produce better knowledge on gender-based violence and sexual harassment in research performing organisations and to translate this knowledge into operational tools for universities, research organisations and policymakers to reduce gender-based violence.

More outputs from UniSAFE available at https://unisafe-gbv.eu
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