

# Gender Equality in Academia and Research

## Measures against gender-based violence including sexual harassment

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The field of research and innovation (R & I) is not immune to sexual and gender-based violence, but this issue tends to be underestimated in research organisations and research funding bodies. There is evidence that gender-based violence and sexual harassment are widespread in public institutions and universities, but this is not based on systematically collected data. For this reason, the European Commission has supported initiatives such as [UniSAFE](#) [↗](#) to improve knowledge about the extent of the problem and ways to address it. Recent analyses and reviews carried out in the framework of EU-funded projects on structural change, among others, show that there is an urgent need for action on this problem.

All organisations are subject to relevant national or regional laws and regulations, and numerous organisations are likely to have existing employment policies that cover dignity and harassment at work. Organisations may find it sufficient to treat gender-based violence under existing policies and procedures. Increasingly, however, institutions consider it necessary to set up dedicated structures and/or to issue specific procedures and instruments. In any case, the institution must make clear that it does not tolerate abuses.

Measures are needed in this area, such as providing information regarding sexual and gender-based harassment and offering attention and support to victims and witnesses of misconduct, with a commitment to putting an end to such behaviour. A gender equality plan (GEP) may consider **what measures the organisation takes to combat gender-based violence and sexual harassment**, including behaviour that violates any individual's dignity or that creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. Please have a look at the videos and webinars in tab 2 and further resources in tab 3, which provide more details and practical information for the implementation of measures against gender-based violence including sexual harassment (e.g. guide, toolkit).

## **Consider these measures for addressing the issue in your gender equality plan**

Through a GEP, organisations can **examine the prevalence** of sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence and implement organisational policies and measures against sexual harassment, such as the following.

A **code of conduct** clarifies whether relationships are (or are not) considered harassment, but it should also ensure that potential victims or witnesses of harassment are not deterred from reporting incidents. It may clarify how the interpretation of these behaviours depends on differences of power or authority within different relationships, such as between junior and senior staff, or thesis advisors and PhD candidates.

A **reporting** policy should outline how all members of the organisation can report incidents of sexual harassment, including when they are the victim of harassment or witness harassment. This includes clear, visible and robust reporting channels. These channels would address barriers to reporting, including concerns that reports may not be taken seriously, and make clear what can be done to investigate anonymous reports.

An **investigation** policy sets out visible and easy-to-understand information for all staff and students about the investigatory and decision-making process, including associated time frames. The policy specifies arrangements to ensure investigations are independent and fair, and clarifies the range of measures that may result from the investigation, as well as information about appeal processes and how they can be accessed.

**Victim support** measures can be implemented to provide counselling and information to victims or witnesses about their options following a report, including pastoral support and psychosocial counselling / psychotherapeutic care, both within the organisation and through external organisations such as non-governmental organisations.

**Disciplinary measures for and prosecution** of perpetrators can be implemented at organisational level and may also cover guidance and support for reporting to the police, and legal proceedings against suspected perpetrators or harassers, including court cases.

**Educational programmes** about sexual and gender-based harassment may prove useful in preventing its occurrence. Activities may include training – including through interactive ‘forum theatre’ – for all staff on expectations, policy and processes, as well as practical advice on how to deal with different situations, such as through ‘witness’ training.

A GEP can also consider how the whole organisation can be mobilised to **establish a culture of zero tolerance** towards sexual harassment and gender-based violence. This includes communication activities that identify the problem, but also measures to ensure that all members of the organisation are empowered to change attitudes, intervene when necessary and create an inclusive and safe culture for the whole organisation. In addition, broader campaigns and awareness-raising may also be developed to communicate these issues and expectations to the wider organisation, for example a student community. In internal and external communication, the senior management should acknowledge gender-based violence including sexual harassment, clearly state that the organisation does not tolerate such behaviour and express their support for victims.

### **Get some tips on what to consider when implementing measures**

The European Research Area and Innovation Committee (ERAC) Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation produced the following recommendations on gender-based violence in R & I.

The following apply to all organisations in R & I.

Acknowledge gender-based violence in research and higher education as an unacceptable problem.

Step up the work for gender equality through GEPs, in line with the [EU gender equality strategy 2020–2025](#) 

Build alliances with key stakeholders, both nationally and transnationally.

Devote at least the same level of attention and volume of resources to gender-based violence as to research misconduct.

Cultivate sensitivity to the issue and awareness of measures through communication campaigns. Where relevant, these can be funded, for example, in synergy with the structural funds.

The following apply to funding bodies in particular:

fund research on gender-based violence in higher education and research through specific calls at national and international levels;  
progressively introduce the requirement that policies against gender-based violence have to be in place as a condition for higher education and research organisations to

apply for research funding;

consider sexual harassment just as important as research misconduct in terms of its effect on the integrity of research;

in funding schemes where international research travel is funded, the receiving institution should be required to have a policy and infrastructure in place to address gender-based violence.

### **Get inspired by what other organisations have implemented**

Here are some **examples of measures** implemented in other organisations (note that they will open in a new window):

**active consent programme**, National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland,  
**code of ethics and deontology**, Transilvania University in Brasov, Romania,  
**guidelines for equal treatment**, University of Tartu, Estonia,  
**'It starts with ME, together WE can'** – **annual innovative campaign and public intervention in cases of violence against women**, Frederick University, Cyprus,  
**protocol against gender-based violence**, University of the Basque Country, Spain,  
**protocol on gender-based and sexual violence**, Network of the Gender Equality Committees of Greek Universities, Greece,  
**zero tolerance**, Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium

You can find further inspiring examples in the following sources: [🔗](#)

the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) provides a section on [good practices](#) for various relevant topics;

these sustainable measures were already mentioned in the first version of the gender equality in academia and research (GEAR) tool and are still in place.

If you want to learn more about how you can adjust these measures for your own purposes and how to implement them through a GEP, read the step-by-step guide for [research organisations, universities and public bodies](#), or the step-by-step guide for [research funding organisations](#).