



**GenderSAFE**  
ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN ACADEMIA

## Supporting material for trainers: Students as agents of change: Addressing gender-based violence in higher education

### Understanding of gender- based violence

Note for the trainer: Gender-based violence, according to UniSAFE's perspective, is defined as a continuum of violence, violations, and violent behaviours and attitudes on the basis of sex and gender and always intersects with other dimensions of inequalities, such as age, ethnicity, disability, and sexuality (Hearn et al. 2020; Bondestam & Lundqvist 2019; Strid et al. 2021). This is explicitly mentioned to you as you may encounter some counter-arguments for the forms of gender-based violence that are recognised for this exercise.

### List of examples of GBV incidents for the trainer (not to be disseminated):

- A male supervisor is throwing objects and yelling at a female PhD student because they missed a deadline – **Psychological and Physical Violence**
- A professor is inappropriately grabbing body parts of a female student during a conference abroad. - **Sexual Harassment**
- Students are making sexually offensive and racist comments about the new international student. - **Psychological Violence**
- A supervisor is insulting and humiliating a non-binary intern. - **Psychological Violence**
- A female professor threatens a student to not pass their assignment unless the male student goes out one night with the professor and they 'have breakfast' together. - **Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment**
- A male student is making sexual remarks about the body of their female supervisor/professor and asking questions about their private life. - **Sexual Violence and gender harassment**
- A supervisor is dismissing a report of gender-based violence reported to him/her by advising the victim to "handle the situation on their own". - **Organisational violence**
- A male student shares sexually explicit images and videos of another female student, without their consent. - **Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment**
- Colleagues are withholding information and exclude a female new-comer colleague from conversations and meetings. - **Psychological Violence**
- A colleague is commenting on a female colleague's promotion as not fair because her skin colour does not 'fit' in the top management team. - **Gender (and race) Harassment & Organisational Violence**

- A supervisor is exploiting mobility students by paying them less or denying them benefits that they are entitled to. - **Economic and Financial Violence**
- A male colleague is displaying posters, items and screensavers of a sexual nature on their office laptop. - **Sexual Harassment & Organisational Violence**
- A supervisor is taking credit for the work of another female colleague during a meeting. **Gender Harassment & Organisational Violence**
- A manager discourages another colleague from reporting an incident of gender-based violence. **Organisational violence**
- A manager denies a request paying all hours worked because the female employee did not satisfy an inappropriate request with them. - **Sexual Harassment (with consequence) Economic and Financial Violence**
- Colleagues are making jokes about a colleague’s sexual orientation/gender reassignment. - **Gender Harassment**
- A student repeatedly asks a classmate to go out on a date although the invitation was previously declined many times. - **Sexual Harassment**
- A student created a fake social media account to harass a trans-gender student. - **Online violence & Sexual Harassment**
- A group of students is humiliating another group of students who are studying in Gender studies, by undermining the legitimacy or importance of their academic field. - **Organisational violence**
- A student uses his cell phone to film female students undressing in the women’s changing rooms at the university’s sports facility. - **Sexual Violence & Sexual Harassment**

**Definitions of the forms of gender-based violence (for the trainer to familiarise themselves before the training):**

Term	Definition
<p><b>Economic and financial violence</b></p>	<p><b>Economic and financial violence</b> and abuse refer to intentional acts or behaviours that result in financial or economic harm to an individual or make them financially dependent. This can include controlling financial resources, denying access to money, forbidding attendance in education or employment, and withholding support. Economic violence can also take the form of sextortion, where a person abuses their entrusted authority to obtain a sexual favour in exchange for a service, benefit, or economic gain. In research, economic violence may manifest as quid pro quo, denying access to financial resources, restricting employment opportunities or healthcare services, withholding employment contracts, or not fulfilling economic responsibilities.</p> <p><u>Sources:</u> Postmus, J. L., Hoge, G. L., Breckenridge, J., Sharp-Jeffs, N., &amp; Chung, D. (2020). Economic Abuse as an Invisible Form of Domestic Violence: A Multicountry Review. <i>Trauma, Violence, &amp; Abuse</i>, 21(2), 261–283.</p>

	<p>Strid, S., Humbert, A. L., Hearn, J., Bondestam, F., &amp; Husu, L. (2021). UniSAFE D3.1: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework. Public deliverable submitted to the European Commission 30/04/2021. Zenodo. <a href="https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7333232">https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7333232</a></p>
<p><b>Gender harassment</b></p>	<p><b>Gender harassment</b> refers to unwelcome behaviours, actions or comments that create a hostile or offensive environment and are directed towards an individual or a group based on their sex, gender identity or gender expression. These behaviours are not necessarily sexually explicit, but rather can include derogatory or degrading remarks, sexist jokes, exclusion, silencing, stereotypical prejudices or other forms of demeaning treatment that belittle or marginalise individuals based on their gender. Gender harassment can occur in various settings both online and offline, including workplaces, educational institutions, and public spaces, and can have negative impacts on the mental health and wellbeing of those who experience it.</p> <p><u>Sources:</u>                  Cortina LM., Kabat-Farr D., Leskinen EA., Huerta, M., &amp; Magley, VJ. (2011). Selective incivility as modern discrimination in organizations. <i>Journal of Management</i> 39: 1579–1605                  Leskinen EA, Cortina, LM. (2014). Dimensions of disrespect: Mapping and measuring gender harassment in organizations. <i>Psychology of Women Quarterly</i> 38: 107–123.  <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684313496549">https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684313496549</a>.</p>
<p><b>Online violence</b></p>	<p><b>Online violence</b> is a type of violence, abuse, and violation that occurs through the use of information and communication technologies, such as social media, email, text messages, and online forums. It can take many forms, including cyberstalking, cyberbullying, internet-based sexual violence, and the non-consensual distribution of sexual images and text. The instantaneous nature of online communication and the ability to reproduce and distribute images and messages globally create unique challenges for addressing and preventing online violence. The COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted the need to address and prevent online violence as more research and education moves online.</p> <p><u>Sources:</u>                  Strid, S., Humbert, A. L., Hearn, J., Bondestam, F., &amp; Husu, L. (2021). UniSAFE D3.1: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework. Public deliverable submitted to the European Commission 30/04/2021. Zenodo. <a href="https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7333232">https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7333232</a></p>
<p><b>Organisational (Gender-based) violence</b></p>	<p>Organisational gender-based violence refers to the manifestation of gender-based violence at the collective, group, and organisational levels of research performing organisations. This can take various forms, such as weak or autocratic management that allows or condones individual gender-based violence or the existence of</p>

	<p>group/organisational cultures that directly or indirectly promote gender-based violence, including hostile environments and psychological violence. Factors that enable such negative environments can include power imbalances, low perception of costs to the organisation for allowing violence, high stress and dissatisfaction among staff, and the organisation's leadership style in relation to gender-based violence.</p> <p><u>Sources:</u>                  Ågotnes, K. W., Einarsen, S. V., Hetland, J. &amp; Skogstad, A. (2018). The moderating effect of laissez-faire leadership on the relationship between co-worker conflicts and new cases of workplace bullying: A true prospective design. <i>Human Resource Management Journal</i> 28(4), 555–568. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12200">https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12200</a>.                  Hearn, J., &amp; Parkin, W. (2001). <i>Gender, Sexuality and Violence in Organizations</i>. London: Sage.                  MacKinnon, C. (1979). <i>Sexual Harassment of Working Women. A Case of Sex Discrimination</i>. Yale University Press.                  Salin, D., &amp; Hoel, H. (2020). Organizational risk factors of workplace bullying. In: Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf &amp; Cooper (eds), <i>Bullying and Harassment in the Workplace: Theory, Research and Practice</i>. London: CRC Press. Pp. 305–330.</p>
<p><b>Physical violence</b></p>	<p><b>Physical violence</b> and abuse refer to the intentional use of physical force against another person or group including kicking, beating, pushing, slapping, shoving, hitting, blocking. Physical violence is the form of violence most easily measured, often in incidents, and commonly addressed. It is direct and often involves a relatively easily identifiable perpetrator, and the time and space between act and immediate impact is very brief.</p> <p><u>Sources:</u>                  Heise, L. (1998). Violence against women: An integrated, ecological framework. <i>Violence Against Women</i> 4(3), 262–290. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801298004003002">https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801298004003002</a>.                  Hester, M., Kelly, L., &amp; Radford, J. (eds), (1996). <i>Women, Violence and Male Power: Feminist Activism, Research and Practice</i>. Buckingham: Open University Press.                  Strid, S., Humbert, A. L., Hearn, J., Bondestam, F., &amp; Husu, L. (2021). UniSAFE D3.1: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework. Public deliverable submitted to the European Commission 30/04/2021. Zenodo. <a href="https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7333232">https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7333232</a></p>
<p><b>Psychological violence</b></p>	<p><b>Psychological violence</b>, also known as emotional abuse, involves harmful and intentional behaviours that undermine, manipulate, or control a person's thoughts, feelings, and actions. This can include verbal abuse, threats, blackmail, controlling behaviour, and coercion, and can occur in both online and offline contexts. In an academic setting, psychological violence can manifest as public insults, ridiculing</p>

	<p>of someone's work, or humiliating a colleague in public, which can have a detrimental effect on a person's professional and personal well-being.</p> <p><u>Sources:</u>  Council of Europe (2011). Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Council of Europe Treaty Series No 210). Istanbul: Council of Europe  European Institute for Gender Equality (2017). Glossary of definitions of rape, femicide and intimate partner violence. Vilnius: EIGE.  Veinhardt, J. (2019). Psychological violence in the interrelationships between academic community members: the situation of higher education institutions in the pre-reform and reform period. In: International Scientific and Practical Internet Conference Interdisciplinary discourse in the study of the social phenomenon. March 2019, Kyiv, Ukraine.</p>
<p><b>Sexual harassment</b></p>	<p><b>Sexual harassment</b> is any form of unwanted verbal, nonverbal, or physical behaviour of a sexual nature, including but not limited to unwanted sexual comments, jokes, innuendos, stalking, sextortion, bullying, sexual invitations, and demands. It can create an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment, and is a form of sexual violence. Sexual harassment is not the same as sexual assault, although they can overlap. Quid pro quo sexual harassment occurs when studying or employment decisions are based on acceptance or rejection of unwelcome sexual behaviour. The term "misconduct" is sometimes used instead of harassment to capture abuses of power.</p> <p><u>Sources:</u>  MacKinnon, C. A. (1979). Sexual Harassment of Working Women. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.  Council of Europe (2011). Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Council of Europe Treaty Series No 210). Istanbul: Council of Europe.</p>
<p><b>Sexual violence</b></p>	<p><b>Sexual violence</b> is any sexual act that is perpetrated against someone's will, including rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and sexual coercion. It can have physical, emotional, and psychological consequences for survivors, and affects people from all communities. However, certain groups are more likely to experience sexual violence due to their gender or other characteristics and experiences of inequalities.</p> <p><u>Sources:</u>  Kelly, L. (1988). Surviving Sexual Violence. Cambridge: Polity.  Phipps, A. (2018). "Lad culture" and sexual violence against students. In: Anitha &amp; Lewis (eds), Gender based violence in university communities: Policy, prevention and educational initiatives. Bristol: Policy Press. pp. 41–59.</p>

## Facilitation notes

### Creating a respectful learning environment

This training addresses gender-based violence and may be sensitive for some participants. Facilitators should create a respectful and supportive learning environment from the beginning of the session. Participants should be reminded that they are not expected to share personal experiences. If they wish to give examples, they may do so in general terms or in the third person.

Facilitators should present clear working principles, including confidentiality, respectful listening, inclusive language, balanced participation and the possibility to step out or take a break. Participants should also know how to contact facilitators privately during the session if needed.

### Working with students

The session is designed for students who may have different levels of knowledge, confidence and experience. Some may already be involved in activism, student unions or equality work. Others may be new to the topic. The facilitation should therefore avoid assuming prior expertise. The tone should be accessible, practical and empowering. At the same time, facilitators should avoid placing responsibility for preventing gender-based violence on students alone. Student action should be framed as one important part of wider institutional change.

### Working with examples

Examples used during the session should be realistic and appropriate for a student audience. Facilitators may use short examples from existing GenderSAFE or UniSAFE materials or adapt examples to the national or institutional context. Examples should be anonymised, non-graphic and used to support reflection rather than shock or distress. When using examples from student-led initiatives in Europe, facilitators should check that the information is accurate and up to date.

## Content notes for facilitators

### Part 1: Understanding gender-based violence and the continuum of violence

The UniSAFE survey can be introduced as the largest cross-cultural survey in Europe on gender-based violence in higher education and research. Facilitators can highlight that gender-based violence has consequences for students' learning, wellbeing, participation and future academic paths.

Possible study-related consequences for students include:

- missing classes
- feeling dissatisfied with their course of study
- reduced learning achievements
- disengagement from fellow students
- considering leaving university
- dropping a course
- deciding not to pursue further studies
- feeling afraid to study at the institution or use online tools for collaborative work
- trying to change supervisor, lecturer or institution

Possible personal consequences include:

- mental health impacts, such as anxiety, depression or trauma-related symptoms
- economic consequences
- physical health impacts
- social isolation or withdrawal
- loss of self-confidence and self-esteem
- impact on daily functioning and wellbeing

Root causes and enabling factors may include discrimination and biased practices, gender stereotypes, harmful gender and cultural norms, power inequalities, hierarchical relations, systemic inequalities and toxic institutional cultures.

Intersectionality is also important. It helps participants understand that gender-based violence may affect people differently depending on their position and identity. Students who experience multiple forms of inequality may face specific risks and additional barriers to support or reporting.

## **Part 2: Institutional responses and the 7P framework**

After discussing what gender-based violence can look like, facilitators introduce the question: what should institutions do about it?

The UniSAFE 7P framework helps participants understand institutional action in a holistic way:

- **Prevalence:** Do institutions know the scale and forms of the problem? This includes data collection and analysis to understand how gender-based violence affects different groups.
- **Prevention:** Are institutions trying to stop gender-based violence before it happens? This includes awareness-raising, training, communication, education, cultural change and work on norms and behaviours.
- **Protection:** Are students and staff safe when something happens? This includes clear procedures, safety measures and responses that meet the needs of victims and survivors.
- **Prosecution and disciplinary measures:** Are there consequences for harmful behaviour? This includes investigation, disciplinary procedures and other accountability measures.
- **Provision of services:** Are support systems available? This includes counselling, reporting channels, advice, referrals and support for victims and survivors, bystanders and other affected members of the community.
- **Partnerships:** Do institutions work with relevant actors? This includes student associations, staff representatives, civil society organisations, specialist services, trade unions, public authorities and other partners.
- **Policies:** Are there clear rules and do they work in practice? This includes coherent policy frameworks with a clear vision, strategy, responsibilities and implementation mechanisms.

Facilitators can explain that many institutions do have some measures in place, but these may be fragmented, unclear, poorly communicated or not trusted by students. This is why student perspectives are important when assessing whether institutional responses work in practice.

### **Reflection: Looking at my own institution**

Participants can reflect on the following guiding questions:

- What already exists in my institution?
- What is missing?
- Where do things break down?
- What makes change difficult?
- Where could students realistically intervene?
- What information is easy to find?
- What information is unclear or not visible?

Facilitators should reassure participants that uncertainty is useful. If students do not know where to report, where to find support or what policies exist, this may indicate a communication or accessibility gap.

### **Part 3: Students as agents of change**

Facilitators introduce students as important actors in addressing gender-based violence. Students are not only affected by these issues. They can also contribute to awareness, peer support, accountability, policy dialogue and institutional change. At the same time, facilitators should stress that institutions remain responsible for prevention, protection, support and accountability. Student action should not replace institutional responsibility.

Students may contribute in different ways:

#### *Peer support and informal care*

Peer support is often the first point of disclosure for victims and survivors, especially in contexts where trust in institutional systems is limited.

Students may:

- listen, validate and provide informal emotional support to peers
- guide peers towards professional or institutional support services
- create safe spaces or student-led support collectives
- share information on available resources and reporting options

Facilitators should clarify that peer support does not mean acting as counsellors, investigators or case managers. It means listening, supporting and helping peers access appropriate support.

#### *Awareness-raising and education*

Awareness-raising is one of the most accessible forms of student engagement.

Students may:

- organise campaigns, workshops and discussion events on consent, harassment and gender-based violence
- share information on reporting mechanisms and support services
- challenge myths around sexual violence and victim-blaming
- contribute to awareness-raising during orientation weeks or student events
- collaborate with equality offices, student unions or civil society organisations

### *Advocacy, accountability and campaigning*

Students can act as accountability actors when institutional responses are unclear, insufficient or inconsistent.

Students may:

- call for transparent procedures and victim-centred policies
- monitor the implementation of institutional commitments
- organise petitions, public statements or student assemblies
- use media or digital platforms to highlight institutional gaps
- share collective concerns with management or equality bodies
- connect gender-based violence to wider struggles for equality, dignity and safety

Facilitators should discuss the importance of collective action and care when engaging in advocacy. Students should not be left isolated when raising difficult issues.

### *Student representation and governance*

Students can also influence institutional change through formal decision-making structures.

Students may:

- sit on equality committees, ethics councils, student councils or university boards
- contribute to the design, review and monitoring of institutional policies
- ensure that student perspectives are included in institutional decision-making
- raise questions on gender-based violence in formal governance spaces
- advocate for training, better communication and accessible support mechanisms

### *Policy engagement and co-creation*

Students can contribute to policy-making processes at institutional, national and European level.

Students may:

- co-design codes of conduct, reporting systems or awareness materials
- participate in consultations, working groups or EU-funded projects
- contribute to national debates on gender-based violence in education
- provide feedback on whether policies and reporting pathways are clear, trusted and accessible
- support the testing of institutional procedures from a student perspective

### *Coalition-building*

Students can also build alliances with other actors.

Possible allies include:

- student unions and associations
- equality, diversity and inclusion offices
- ombudspersons or trusted persons
- student wellbeing services
- feminist, LGBTQIA+ or anti-racist groups
- disability support services
- trade unions and staff representatives

- civil society organisations and specialist support services

Coalition-building can help students avoid isolation and connect individual concerns to wider institutional change.

### Obstacles and limits

Students may face obstacles when engaging with gender-based violence, including hierarchy, fear of retaliation, lack of resources, lack of access to decision-makers, limited time, emotional burden or lack of institutional trust.

Facilitators should acknowledge these obstacles. Students should be encouraged to think strategically about different levels of action, from small awareness-raising steps to formal policy engagement. They should also be encouraged to work collectively, identify allies and avoid carrying the responsibility alone.

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