

Advancing a zero-tolerance approach to gender-based violence in higher education and research

GenderSAFE is a Horizon Europe project supporting universities and research organisations across Europe to prevent and address gender-based violence, defined as '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 project builds on evidence from the UniSAFE project, the first large-scale European study to systematically examine gender-based violence in higher education and research.

What the evidence shows

UniSAFE research shows that gender-based violence is widespread in European higher education and research, affecting students, researchers and staff across roles, disciplines and career stages. The evidence also shows that it is not limited to isolated incidents or individual misconduct. It is closely linked to structural features of academic institutions, including power imbalances, precarity, hierarchical working environments, and weak or unclear procedures. It must therefore be addressed as a systemic institutional issue.

What this means for institutions

When gender-based violence is not addressed through clear and coordinated institutional approaches, institutions face tangible risks. It:

- weakens trust in institutional leadership and decision-making
- contributes to under-reporting, silence and repeated harm
- disrupts research, teaching and learning environments
- exposes institutions to legal challenges, reputational damage and loss of institutional credibility

Addressing these risks requires structured, institution-wide approaches supported by clear policies, procedures, and practical tools.

What GenderSAFE offers: A structured pathway for institutional change

This information pack presents practical GenderSAFE tools, guides, and training to help institutions strengthen their response to gender-based violence. It is particularly useful for institutions at an early stage of developing policies and approaches, while also offering structured guidance and resources for those looking to review, strengthen or expand existing frameworks. The resources support institutions to:

- develop clear and coherent policy frameworks
- strengthen internal coordination and capacity
- support consistent, survivor-centred responses
- move from ad hoc case handling to structured, institution-wide practice

Institutions can use the GenderSAFE tools as a step-by-step process to strengthen their response to gender-based violence.

Step 1

Assess your current approach

Institutional Self-Assessment Tool

Step 2

Build knowledge and capacity

GenderSAFE Training Programme

Step 3

Strengthen policies and procedures

Model Policy Framework (forthcoming)

Grounded in research evidence, the tools are adaptable to different national and institutional contexts and can be complemented by the UniSAFE Toolkit to further strengthen and sustain institutional practice. With these tools, institutions can create safer environments for staff and students, increase confidence in reporting, protect research quality and organisational performance, and reinforce credibility and accountability.

Institutional Self-Assessment Tool

for gender-based violence policies and practices

Hosted within the UniSAFE Toolkit, the GenderSAFE Institutional Self-Assessment Tool helps higher education and research institutions review how they currently address gender-based violence. It provides a structured framework to analyse institutional policies, procedures, and support systems, and to identify areas for further development.

Why use the Institutional Self-Assessment Tool?

The self-assessment tool helps institutions to:

- understand how well current policies and procedures address gender-based violence
- identify where changes or improvements are needed
- strengthen the development of clear and coherent institutional policies
- improve the overall institutional approach to preventing and addressing gender-based violence
- monitor progress over time and support continuous improvement

How Does it Work?

01. Get ready

Review the structure and methodology of the self-assessment before starting the questionnaire.

02. Complete the self-assessment

Complete a structured questionnaire. The tool is designed for collaborative completion and typically takes 2 to 3 hours, depending on the size of the institution and level of consultation involved. You can pause, save, and return at any time.

03. Receive a report

Upon completion, receive a detailed report including a spider graph summarising performance, a description of your institution's maturity level for each assessed area, and tailored recommendations.

04. Monitor your institution's progress

Track progress over time by repeating the self-assessment periodically (ideally every 12-18 months).

Regular self-assessment is a key step towards building transparent, accountable, and effective institutional responses to gender-based violence.

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[Access the assessment here!](#)



GenderSAFE Training Programme

for strengthening institutional responses to gender-based violence

Institutions play a central role in preventing and addressing gender-based violence, yet many lack the internal capacity to translate policy commitments into practice. The publicly available GenderSAFE training programme helps institutions build the knowledge and skills needed to implement clear, coordinated trauma-informed and victim/survivor-centred responses to gender-based violence. This means placing the needs and priorities of victims/survivors of violence at the forefront of any response.

What the training programme offers:

- Thematic and introductory training materials on gender-based violence in institutional contexts in different languages (EN, GR, IT, FR, HU, PT, ES, CZ) that can be used and adapted by institutions.
- Training materials cover topics such as institutional policy development, reporting and response pathways, intersectional cases of gender-based violence, awareness-raising campaigns, active bystander intervention, and training for trainers and change agents.
- Participatory formats, such as case studies, group discussions, role plays, stakeholder mapping, and action-planning activities, designed to support reflection, dialogue, and organisational learning.
- Access to selected recordings of GenderSAFE webinars and training sessions.

Who is it for?

The programme is intended for institutional actors working on equality, safety and accountability in higher education and research, including equality and diversity officers, Gender Equality Plan teams, human resources, health and safety officers, leadership, trainers, and others involved in strengthening anti-discrimination and equality structures.

Benefits for institutions:

Build internal expertise

Support the implementation of policies and procedures

Strengthen coordination across roles and services

Move beyond awareness-raising towards concrete institutional change

Contribute to safer, more inclusive and accountable institutions

[Access training materials here!](#)

Model Policy Framework

Guidance for developing comprehensive institutional policies on gender-based violence

Institutional commitment to addressing gender-based violence means little without policies that are clear, comprehensive, and fit for purpose. Yet across higher education and research, policies remain fragmented, incomplete, or insufficiently coherent to provide an effective framework for prevention and response.

The GenderSAFE Model Policy Framework addresses this gap directly. It provides structured, practical guidance for developing or substantially revising institutional policies, so that responses to gender-based violence are consistent, rigorous, and grounded in best practice.

Why use the Model Policy Framework?

This resource supports institutions to:

- develop or revise policies on gender-based violence in a structured and consistent way
- ensure comprehensive coverage across all seven pillars: prevalence, prevention, protection, prosecution, provision of services, policies, and partnerships
- clarify roles and responsibilities across institutional actors and strengthen coordination between leadership, HR, equality bodies, and support services, including students' services
- embed victim-centred and trauma-informed principles throughout all procedures

What does the Model Policy Framework provide?

Guidance

on the essential components of institutional policies on gender-based violence, including definitions, scope, and institutional commitments.

A model structure

that institutions can readily adapt and adopt as a template when developing or revising their own framework.

Examples

of policy structures and procedures, including reporting, investigation, protection measures, and disciplinary processes.

The framework can be used when building new policies from scratch or auditing and strengthening existing ones.

Availability

The GenderSAFE Model Policy Framework is currently being finalised within the project and will be made publicly available through the GenderSAFE website. A draft version is already being tested within the GenderSAFE Community of Practice and has been developed through legal expertise, an intersectional approach, and input from institutions across Europe.

Institutions can already use the GenderSAFE Self-Assessment Tool and training programme to prepare for policy development and implementation.

[Access the Draft Framework here](#)