ECHOES OF CHANGE:

Advancing Gender Equality in Higher Education in the Balkans

Zilka Spahić Šiljak
Jasna Kovačević
Anita Dremel

TPO Fondacija
www.tpo.ba

IMPRESUM

Echoes of Change: Advancing Gender Equality
in Higher Education in the Balkans

Publisher:
TPO Foundation

Authors:
Zilka Spahić Šiljak
Jasna Kovačević
Anita Dremel

Reviewers:
Snježana Vasiljević
Nerzuk Ćurak
Gordana Lalić-Krstin
Anisa Avdagić
Merima Jašarević

Proof-reading:
Patricia Hannam

Cover design and layout:
Neven Misaljević

Print:
Amos Graf d.o.o.

Sarajevo, 2025

ISBN 978-9926-422-50-9
CIP zapis dostupan u COBISS sistemu Nacionalne i univerzitetske biblioteke BiH pod ID brojem 63900422

British Embassy Sarajevo

This publication was produced through the project "University and Gender Mainstreaming (UNIGEM)" supported by the UK Government. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent the views of the UK Government

ECHOES OF CHANGE:

Advancing Gender Equality in Higher Education in the Balkans

Zilka Spahić Šiljak
Jasna Kovačević
Anita Dremel

Sarajevo, 2025

TABLE OF
CONTENTS

List of Charts

List of Tables

Preface to Follow-up

As we publish this follow-up study on gender equality and gender-based violence in universities across Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro, we are confronted with significant global and local challenges, as well as persistent resistance to gender equality. These challenges highlight the complexities of institutional and societal transformations in the field of gender mainstreaming.

Following four years of implementing the **UNIGEM (Universities and Gender Mainstreaming)** project across 19 universities in the region, we present here an analysis and synthesis of our findings. In the light of this research we maintain an optimistic outlook, despite the growing influence of anti-gender narratives that disseminate misinformation and promote fear in wider society regarding gender equality. On the one hand, measurable progress has been achieved: students, academic faculty, and administrative staff have demonstrated increased awareness of gender equality and gender-based violence; universities have adopted **Gender Action Plans (GAPs)** and other strategic documents; and gender-related content has been integrated into curricula. On the other hand, the long term sustainability of these advances remain precarious, threatened by the rise of **global moral panic and the mobilisation of anti-gender movements**, which challenge and seek to undermine institutional commitments to gender equality.

In navigating this complex socio-political landscape, we remain cognisant of the historical and contemporary challenges shaping gender discourse in the Balkans. While the region faces numerous political and economic constraints, these conditions simultaneously present opportunities for bold and transformative action in advancing gender equity.

As scholars and researchers, but also as advocates for institutional and social change, we remain committed to strengthening the **regional network of educators, researchers, and students** established through the UNIGEM project. Beyond improving

institutional frameworks for gender equality, one of the most significant outcomes of this initiative has been the formation of **sustainable, cross-border collaborations**, fostering continued dialogue and reinforcing mechanisms of academic and social support.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all UNIGEM project coordinators across partner universities for their invaluable contributions to this research. We are equally appreciative of the faculty members and students who participated in the survey and interviews, as well as the dedicated team of researchers who conducted the interviews, together with the leading researcher **Dr. Zilka Spahić Šiljak and her colleaugues Ivana Kulić, and Nejra Džananović** from the **TPO Foundation**. Alongside with them a cohort of researchers from the region conducted interviews: **Biljana Radić Bojanić, Ana Đorđević, Milan Urošević, Lana Bobić, Anita Dremel, Nebojša Zelič, Daria Glavan Šćulac, Sanja Grbović, Milica Kovač Orlandić, and Ljiljana Bujas**. We also acknowledge the contributions of **proofreader Patricia Hannam** and **designer Neven Misaljević** in refining and presenting this work.

Finally, we express our profound gratitude to the **Government of the United Kingdom**, whose unwavering support has been instrumental in facilitating the realisation of the UNIGEM project and its broader mission of institutionalising gender equality within higher education.

Authors: Zilka Spahić Šiljak, Jasna Kovačević, Anita Dremel

Chapter 1.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework for Comparative Analysis of Baseline and Follow-up Studies on Gender-Based Discrimination and Violence in Universities Across the Western Balkans

Introduction

Understanding gender-based discrimination and gender-based violence in universities, particularly in the context of the Western Balkans, involves examining the multifaceted nature of these issues as well as their implications for educational environments. Gender-based discrimination manifests in various forms, including sexual harassment, unequal treatment in academic settings, and systemic barriers that hinder women's participation and advancement in higher education. Research indicates that higher education institutions often perpetuate traditional gender norms, which can lead to discriminatory behaviors such as sexual harassment. Without explicit counter-education aimed at challenging these norms, universities may inadvertently reproduce existing inequalities, despite expanding opportunities for women (Loots & Walker, 2015). This is particularly relevant in the Western Balkans, where cultural and societal norms may exacerbate the prevalence of gender-based discrimination and violence.

The intersectionality of gender with other social identities further complicates the experiences of individuals, as noted by Fernandez, who emphasizes the need for policy interventions to address these dynamics effectively (Fernandez, 2023). Moreover, the experiences of women in academic settings are often marked by a hostile environment that can lead to lower job satisfaction and a negative perception of the workplace climate. Women's experiences of gender discrimination significantly correlate with their dissatisfaction in professional environments, suggesting that similar patterns may exist within universities (Settles et al., 2012). This dissatisfaction can be compounded by the prevalence of sexual harassment, which is a critical issue in many educational institutions. Aycock et al. specifically address the impact of sexual harassment on female students in physics, illustrating how such experiences can undermine their sense of belonging and persistence in their fields (Aycock et al., 2019).

1.1. About Research "Mainstreaming Gender Equality at Universities in the Balkans: Fighting Gender-Based Violence"

In the Western Balkans, gender-based violence in educational settings is often underreported, and cultural stigmas may prevent victims from seeking help. The implications of gender discrimination extend beyond individual experiences, affecting the overall educational climate and institutional policies. In 2021, TPO Foundation conducted a piece of baseline research published as "*Mainstreaming Gender Equality at Universities in the Balkans: Fighting Gender-Based Violence*" (Spahić-Šiljak et al. 2023). This was a comprehensive study under the Universities and Gender Mainstreaming (UNIGEM) project, in universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro. The baseline study involved students, as well as teaching and administrative staff, and explored gender inequality, institutional responses to gender-based violence (GBV), and the impact of social, cultural, and institutional structures on gender relations in academia. Key findings from 2021 research can be grouped under the following main themes:

- **Prevalence of GBV:** GBV is widespread at universities in the Western Balkans, yet often unreported due to fear, stigma, and lack of institutional trust. Many students and staff perceive sexist comments, sexual harassment, and discrimination as normalized behaviors. A culture of silence and fear prevents victims from speaking out, while perpetrators often face no consequences.
- **Forms of GBV at Universities: Sexual harassment** is the most common form of GBV, including unwanted advances, inappropriate jokes, sexist humor, and coercive sexual behavior. Verbal abuse and offensive humor towards women and marginalized groups (LGBTQIA+, persons with disabilities) are frequent. Intersectionality factors, such as gender identity, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity, all influence individuals' experiences of GBV.
- **Institutional Challenges in Addressing GBV:** Universities lack effective mechanisms to prevent and respond to GBV. Existing policies are often unclear, underutilized, or unknown to students and staff. Gender-sensitive language and curricula are rarely integrated into academic programs. Reluctance to implement change is influenced by patriarchal norms, religious traditions, and political resistance.
- **Perceptions of GBV:** Many students and staff lack awareness about gender equality concepts, with significant misconceptions about GBV. Women are more aware of gender discrimination compared to men, reflecting their lived experiences. Sexist humor and offensive comments contribute to an academic culture that trivializes gender inequality.
- **Cultural and Social Influences:** The media, family upbringing, and religious beliefs shape attitudes towards gender roles and GBV. Conservative social norms perpetuate stereotypical gender roles, making it difficult to challenge sexism and discrimination. Traditional masculinity norms contribute to an academic environment where men are often reluctant to support gender equality initiatives.
- **Gender-Sensitive Language and Institutional Practices:** The use of gender-sensitive language in academia is still debated, with resistance stemming from traditional linguistic norms. Policies on gender equality exist but are often not enforced or respected. Institutional gender policies are crucial for changing the culture of universities, yet implementation remains weak.
- **Impact of GBV on Academic Careers:** Women academics and students face career stagnation, psychological distress, and professional marginalization due to GBV. Many women in academia experience discriminatory hiring and promotion practices. The lack of safe reporting mechanisms discourages victims from seeking justice.

In line with the key findings of the baseline study, Spahić-Šiljak and colleagues (2023) have proposed that in order to combat GBV and foster a culture of equality and inclusion in universities across the Western Balkans, a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach is needed. This requires institutional, cultural, and policy-level interventions to address the root causes of gender inequality and ensure that higher education institutions become safe and empowering spaces for all.

The authors further elaborate that in order to effectively combat GBV, universities must take a proactive and systematic approach. This begins with clear policies that prevent, address, and penalize GBV while ensuring safe and confidential reporting mechanisms. Establishing ombudsperson offices and gender equality bodies will provide oversight and accountability. Education and awareness are key. There should be mandatory gender sensitivity training for students, faculty, and staff. This training should focus on recognizing, preventing, and addressing GBV. Furthermore gender perspectives must be integrated into curricula and research, fostering critical discussions on power, discrimination, and violence.

Universities must provide survivor-centered support, including confidential counseling, legal aid, and peer networks. Institutional culture must shift from silence and fear to openness and transparency, encouraging survivors to come forward and ensuring whistleblower protection. Gender-sensitive language should be adopted across all official communication, promoting inclusivity. Regular monitoring and evaluation are essential to measure progress and ensure accountability, and policies must align with national and EU gender equality standards, fostering collaboration with external organizations.

Beyond academia, universities should engage with the wider community, advocate for social change, and challenge harmful gender norms. Male allyship and strong leadership commitment are crucial—gender equality must be a shared responsibility, not just a women's issue.

These findings and recommendations from the baseline research served as the foundation for designing and implementing targeted interventions across partner universities within the

UNIGEM project from 2021 to 2024. These interventions were strategically developed to address identified gaps and challenges related to gender-based violence and gender equality in higher education.

Following the implementation phase, a follow-up study was initiated in late 2024 to systematically evaluate the effectiveness and impact of these interventions, provide empirical insights into their outcomes in order to inform future policy and institutional strategies.

1.2. Theoretical Framework of Baseline and Follow-up Studies

Both baseline and follow-up studies are grounded in critical realism, which serves as the overarching epistemological and methodological foundation; facilitating a comprehensive approach to both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Critical realist epistemology recognizes the existence of an objective social reality while simultaneously acknowledging its social construction through the interaction of actors within specific cultural and institutional contexts (Bhaskar, 1978). This approach is particularly useful in studies on gender-based violence and discrimination, as it allows for the analysis of structural, cultural, and individual factors that contribute to the persistence of these phenomena. Furthermore, it recognizes both objective reality and social construction: GBV is both a real, material phenomenon (e.g., documented cases of harassment, violence, and institutional cover-ups) and a socially constructed issue shaped by cultural narratives, power relations, and institutional practices. Unlike purely positivist or constructivist approaches, critical realism enables researchers to analyze structural factors (institutional policies, legal frameworks), cultural norms (gender stereotypes, academic hierarchies), and individual experiences (testimonies of survivors, perceptions of faculty and staff) simultaneously.

Research on GBV in higher education necessitates a multi-layered theoretical approach that can capture the complexity of power dynamics, structural inequalities, and lived experiences.

Hence, both studies are theoretically situated in Feminist Standpoint Theory FST (Harding, 1993) and Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989).

FST asserts that knowledge is socially situated, meaning that the perspectives of marginalized groups—such as women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and other vulnerable populations—offer unique and necessary insights into social reality. This perspective is particularly valuable in research on GBV in universities, as it ensures the voices of survivors are at the heart of everything. Traditional institutional approaches to GBV often rely on top-down legalistic or policy-driven perspectives that may overlook the lived realities of those affected. FST prioritizes first-hand narratives of those who experience violence, discrimination, and harassment. Additionally, FST challenges dominant institutional norms. Higher education institutions are embedded within patriarchal and hierarchical structures that often silence, normalize, or minimize reports of GBV. By positioning marginalized voices as epistemologically privileged, FST enables a critique of institutional responses, or lack thereof. Finally, it examines power relations in academia.

Gendered violence in universities is not neutral but is influenced by academic hierarchies, where power imbalances exist between professors and students, tenured faculty and adjunct staff, and between administrative authorities and those seeking justice. Applying FST in this study helps reveal how gender, academic status, and social norms collectively influence experiences of GBV and how institutional mechanisms shape responses (or failures to respond) to cases of violence and harassment.

In addition, Crenshaw's Intersectionality Theory (1989) is essential for understanding how GBV in universities is shaped by multiple, overlapping forms of discrimination. While gender is a key factor, individuals experience violence and discrimination differently depending on their race, ethnicity, class, disability status, sexual orientation, nationality, and other social identities.

By integrating FST, Intersectionality, and Critical Realism, this research framework enables a holistic investigation of GBV in academic settings through:

- Institutional and Structural Analysis: Understanding how university policies, disciplinary procedures, and reporting mechanisms either facilitate or hinder justice for survivors.
- Cultural and Normative Examination: Investigating how gender norms, academic hierarchies, and disciplinary silencing shape institutional responses to GBV.
- Experiential and Survivor-Centered Research: Elevating the voices of those directly affected by GBV, ensuring that research findings contribute to meaningful policy recommendations and institutional reforms.

Ultimately, this theoretical framework provides the necessary depth and intersectional perspective, whilst remaining sufficiently methodological flexibile to be able to critically examine gender-based violence in universities, identify systemic barriers, as well as advocate for institutional change.

1.3. Research Design and Methodology

In accordance with the theoretical framework, the follow-up study (as well as baseline) was conducted using a mixed-methods design, incorporating simultaneous data triangulation. This approach enables the integration of qualitative and quantitative data, providing a more comprehensive understanding of trends and changes in participants' perceptions and attitudes compared to the baseline study. The research methodology comprised the following elements:

- Quantitative analysis through online surveys (participants invited to participate via their university emails),
- Qualitative analysis using semi-structured interviews (participants were selected on the basis of attendance lists from of UNIGEM activities, or they have been recommended by university coordinators as key informants),
- Comparative analysis in relation to the baseline study by Spahić-Šiljak et al. (2023).

Table 1. An Overview of Research Methodology, Data Collection, Sampling and Analyses in Baseline and Follow-up Studies

	Objective	Methodology	Data collection method	Sampling	Baseline sample	Follow-up sample	Data sources for analysis	Analyses
qual	Research about the individual experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of teachers, administrative staff, and students with regard to gender equality and gender-based violence at universities	Grounded theory with an *a priori* thematic framework	Interview	Purposive sampling	133 interviews	88 interviews	Transcripts of semi-structured interviews with teaching and administrative staff and students	Analysis of constant comparisons; analysis of the occurrence of codes; analysis of narratives
quant	Research on the perceptions and attitudes of teachers, administrative staff, and students with regard to gender equality and gender-based violence at universities	Deductive approach	Survey	Random sampling	A total of 4.754 respondents, which includes 3.224 students, 1.159 teachers, and 371 employees in administration	A total of 5.413 respondents, which includes 3.688 students, 1.261 teachers, and 464 employees in administration	Answers from the survey	Descriptive statistics, parametric/ non-parametric tests

Both studies targeted three key participant groups: students – the primary focus of the research, teaching staff – university professors, assistants, and researchers and administrative staff – heads of administrative offices and other university employees.

The sample in the follow-up study was designed to be comparable to the baseline study to ensure consistent tracking of trends in participants' perceptions and experiences (see table above). Data was collected from 19 universities across four countries, including both public and private higher education institutions. The total sample size in the follow-up study included 5,416 participants, distributed as follows in the table below:

Table 2. Sample Structure by Group and Gender 2024

Group	Gender						Total	
	Men		Women		Other			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Students	821	62.6	2,853	69.8	15	83.3	3,689	68.1
Teaching staff	398	30.4	863	21.1	2	11.1	1,263	23.3
Administrative staff	92	7.0	371	9.1	1	5.6	464	8.6
Total	1,311	100.0	4,087	100.0	18	100.0	5,416	100.0

The table provides an overview of the distribution of respondents by group (students, teaching staff, and administrative staff) and gender (male, female, and other), along with their respective percentages within the total sample. Out of the total 5,416 respondents, students represent the largest group, accounting for 68.1% of the sample (3,689 individuals). Among the students, 69.8% are female, 22.3% are male, and 0.4% identify as "other." This highlights that women form the majority among students, with men and those identifying as "other" making up smaller proportions.

Teaching staff, the second-largest group, comprised 23.3% of the sample (1,263 respondents). Within this group, 69.8% were female, 30.4% male, and 0.2% identified as "other." While women still dominate this category, the proportion of men is notably

higher than in the student group, showing a more balanced gender distribution among teaching staff. Administrative staff, the smallest group, represents 8.6% of the total respondents (464 individuals). Women form the majority here as well, accounting for 9.1% of the total sample, compared to 7.1% for men and 0.2% for those identifying as "other."

Overall, women make up a significant majority across all groups, constituting 75.5% of the total respondents (4,087 individuals). Men account for 24.2% (1,311 respondents), while those identifying as "other" make up just 0.3% (18 respondents). The data underscores the predominance of women in all surveyed categories, with the smallest representation observed among individuals identifying as "other," who are mostly students. This breakdown provides a clear picture of the gender distribution across different university groups, emphasizing the high participation of women and the relatively low representation of men and non-binary individuals in the sample.

Table 3. Sample Structure by Group and Nationality 2024

Group	BiH		Montenegro		Croatia		Serbia		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Students	1,851	64.9	293	80.7	788	79.5	756	62.6	3,688	68.1
Teaching staff	718	25.2	50	13.8	122	12.3	371	30.7	1,261	23.3
Administrative staff	283	9.9	20	5.5	81	8.2	80	6.6	464	8.6
Total	2,852	100.0	363	100.0	991	100.0	1,207	100.0	5,413	100.0

The table illustrates the distribution of respondents across four countries—Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Montenegro, Croatia, and Serbia—by group (students, teaching staff, and administrative staff). It highlights the representation of each group within the total sample and across different national contexts.

Among the total 5,413 respondents, the majority come from Bosnia and Herzegovina, which accounts for 52.7% (2,852 respondents), followed by Serbia with 22.3% (1,207 respondents), Croatia with 18.3% (991 respondents), and Montenegro with 6.7% (363 respondents).

Students, the largest group overall, represent 68.1% of the total sample (3,688 respondents). They dominate the respondent pool in all countries, particularly in Montenegro (80.7% of Montenegrin respondents) and Croatia (79.5% of Croatian respondents). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, students constitute 64.9% of respondents, while in Serbia, they make up 62.6%.

Teaching staff, comprising 23.3% of the total sample (1,261 respondents), have the highest proportional representation in Serbia, where they account for 30.7% of the Serbian respondents. Teaching staff also make up significant portions of the sample in Bosnia and Herzegovina (25.2%), Croatia (12.3%), and Montenegro (13.8%).

Administrative staff, the smallest group at 8.6% of the total sample (464 respondents), have their highest proportional representation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (9.9%), followed by Croatia (8.2%), Serbia (6.6%), and Montenegro (5.5%).

This data demonstrates that students consistently make up the largest group across all four countries, with significant variations in the representation of teaching and administrative staff. Bosnia and Herzegovina stands out as the country with the highest overall contribution to the respondent pool, while Montenegro contributes the smallest number of participants.

1.4. Data Collection Methods

Survey: For the purpose of the baseline study, customized survey questionnaires were developed on the basis of Gender Analysis Framework (GAF) to assess social structures, gender equality, and gender-based violence in universities (for more information on GAF elements and the baseline see Spahić-Šiljak et al. 2023). Key questions from the baseline were retained

in follow-up study to enable direct comparison of results. The questionnaires in both studies consisted of five sections:

1. General questions – level of awareness regarding gender equality and GBV.
2. Attitudes – perceptions of gender roles and gender discrimination.
3. Experiences – personal experiences of gender-based violence.
4. Measures and prevention – existing institutional practices for GBV protection.
5. Sociodemographic data – age, gender, academic status, and professional position.

The questionnaires were adapted and translated into Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian, and were made available in both Latin and Cyrillic scripts. Data was collected using the CAWI method (Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing) via the QuestionPro[1] platform, which enabled automated response validation and minimized the risk of data entry errors. Data cleaning and processing were conducted using STATA[2] software, following these key steps: elimination of incomplete questionnaires, consistency checks for responses, outlier and extreme value analysis. For analytical purposes, the study employed descriptive statistics, parametric and non-parametric tests, and multivariate statistical methods to identify trends and significant differences among participant groups.

Interviews: A total of 88 interviews have been conducted with students, teachers, and administrative staff in both public and private universities in B&H, Montenegro, Croatia, and Serbia. A total of 22 men and 66 women participated in the interviews, of which 18 students, 3 research and teaching assistants, 6 assistant professors, 7 associate professors, 22 full professors and 15 members of administrative staff. The average duration of the interview was between 60 and 90 minutes. All interviews were recorded with participants permission, and transcribed using QDA Miner[3] software to prepare for further analyses which

1 QuestionPro is an online survey platform, often used in social research: https://www.questionpro.com/

2 STATA is a statistical software for data analysis: https://www.stata.com/

3 QDA Miner is a computer-assisted qualitative analysis software: https://provalisresearch.com/products/qualitative-data-analysis-software/

included frequency analysis, coding co-occurrence and analysis of narratives.

1.5. Comparative Analysis of Findings from Baseline and Follow-up Studies

The comparative analysis in this study is a cornerstone of understanding the evolution of perceptions, attitudes, and institutional responses to GBV in partner universities over a three-year period (2021–2024). By comparing results from the baseline study in 2021 and the follow-up study in 2024, researchers aimed to uncover trends, identify key factors influencing these changes, and assess the effectiveness of interventions implemented during this time. This involved examining how project interventions influenced institutional culture (e.g. whether universities became more inclusive, safer, and responsive to GBV-related issues), behavioral changes (e.g. increased reporting of GBV incidents and greater trust in institutional mechanisms) and policy alignment (e.g. the extent to which universities adhered to international and national standards on gender equality and violence prevention).

The comparative analysis focused on determining whether participants' perceptions of GBV and related attitudes shifted between the baseline and the follow-up studies. This included assessing:

- Awareness levels regarding GBV, gender equality, and institutional policies, such as whether respondents became more knowledgeable about their rights and reporting mechanisms.
- Attitudinal shifts toward gender roles, discrimination, and the normalization of certain behaviors, helping to determine if social norms within the academic environment evolved.
- Engagement and participation in discussions or initiatives related to GBV, reflecting increased openness and willingness to address the issue.

These comparisons highlighted progress in awareness and attitudinal change while also identifying areas where attitudes may have remained stagnant or even regressed; pointing to

ongoing cultural and structural barriers. The follow-up study also evaluated whether universities implemented new measures for preventing and addressing GBV during the three-year period. This included investigating the participants' perceptions of:

- Policy changes: Introduction of codes of conduct, complaint mechanisms, or support systems for survivors.
- Institutional practices: Establishment of GBV committees, training programs for staff and students, or collaborations with external organizations to combat GBV.
- Monitoring and evaluation efforts: Mechanisms to track the effectiveness of implemented measures and adjust approaches as needed.

The comparative analysis assessed the extent and effectiveness of these interventions, determining whether they led to measurable improvements in survivors' experiences as well as for institutional accountability.The following chapters of this book provide a detailed insight into the comparative analysis of data from baseline and follow-up studies, following implementation of the interventions in order to offer a comprehensive understanding of the shifts in perceptions, attitudes, and institutional practices related to gender-based discrimination and violence, in light of persistent challenges within universities in the Western Balkans. The analysis underscores the importance of sustained interventions, consistent monitoring, and a commitment to transforming institutional cultures to ensure gender equality and a safe academic environment for all.

Chapter 2.

Sexist Humour and Jokes

Introduction

This chapter examines the role of sexist comments, unwanted compliments and remarks, humour and jokes, that reveal underlying attitudes, that demean and derogate women, gender and sexual minorities as targeted groups. These behaviours directly or indirectly contribute to the justification, silence, and normalisation of gender-based violence (GBV). In interactions between women and men, sexist humour is strongly associated with negative sentiments, hostile attitudes and aggressive behaviour intended or otherwise to intimidate women. Women tend to internalize sexist humour to the extent that they recognise it as problematic only when it is explicitly directed at others. Rarely do they acknowledge their own exposure to humour with sexual connotations. This internalisation of sexism serves as a defence mechanism developed by individuals who are subjected to such derogatory treatment (Ryan and Connell, 1989, 752).

Sexist humour significantly impacts women's self-perception and fosters self-objectification (LaFrance & Woodzicka, 1998; Greenwood & Isbell, 2002; Ford, 2008, Ćeriman and Spahić Šiljak, 2023). In societies where women are often objectified in the media and in public discourse, repeated exposure to such

humour reinforces internalised objectification and lowers self-worth (Calogero & Pina, 2011). Additionally, it influences men's attitudes, increasing their likelihood to justify GBV, accept rape myths, and tolerate misogynistic behaviour (Ford & Ferguson, 2004; Malamuth et al., 1995).

This research highlights internalised sexism as a prominent feature of social interactions. It demonstrates that sexism is culturally ingrained, widely accepted, and seldom questioned as a serious issue or an indicator of violence. Normalisation of sexist humour reflects broader societal attitudes that perpetuate gender-based inequalities, making it imperative to critically examine and address such behaviours to foster more equitable and respectful environments.

Sexist humour has a dual nature. Some perceive it as a benign social practice, while others recognise its deeper implications as an expression of gender-based violence and discrimination. By analysing these perceptions, the follow-up research contributes to a broader understanding of the mechanisms through which sexism operates and is tolerated in academic contexts. Moreover, it underscores the importance of addressing sexist humour as part of a larger effort to combat GBV and promote equality in organisational cultures.

In Balkans society, across many communities, values of authoritarianism and patriarchy remain highly prevalent (Pešić, 2017), and the 1990s saw a re-traditionalisation of gender roles (Tomić-Koludrović and Kunac, 2000; Spahić Šiljak, 2007). Alongside this, humour plays a significant cultural role in these regions, often revolving around ethnic, religious, and gender themes. It is therefore unsurprising that the academic sphere is also contaminated by sexism. Social constructs of masculinity and femininity, rooted in the binary nature of gender roles, are perpetuated through humour, which is often derogatory and conveys messages of women's inferiority compared to men or the inferiority of certain groups of men compared to others and/or women (Shifman and Lemish, 2010).

Perpetuating gender stereotypes through humour is particularly concerning as it operates subtly, yet powerfully, to maintain hierarchical social structures. Research suggests that humour

is not only a form of entertainment but also a medium for transmitting and reinforcing social norms (Shifman & Lemish, 2010; Martin, 2007). **Derogatory humour, especially, conveys implicit messages of women's inferiority compared to men or the subordination of certain groups of men relative to others. Such messages not only contribute to a hostile environment for women but also normalize exclusionary practices that marginalize diverse identities.** Addressing these issues requires a critical examination of the role humour plays in reinforcing or dismantling harmful social constructs, particularly in settings that aim to promote equity and inclusivity.

This analysis compares some of the data from 2021 and 2024 and integrates findings from both qualitative and quantitative research, drawing on the paradigmatic framework of critical realism to understand the causal structures underlying gender discrimination (Fletcher, 2020, p. 209). Critical realism provides a robust theoretical lens for unpacking the complex interplay between structural, cultural, and individual factors that perpetuate discriminatory practices, offering a deeper insight into the mechanisms through which gender inequalities are maintained and reproduced.

The analysis is focused on examining data by country, status at the university and gender. In the quantitative section, the findings on the frequency and prevalence of sexism are presented within the academic community, alongside observations and comments with sexual connotations, whether expressed in personal interactions, via social networks, or through electronic correspondence.

These findings are supplemented by qualitative data drawn from interviews with faculty members, students, and administrative staff, detailing their experiences with gender-stereotyped and sexist remarks, as well as unwanted compliments or vulgar comments. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data provides a deeper insight into the extent to which sexism has been normalised in everyday communication and the organisational culture of universities.

2.1. Unwanted Compliments and Sexual Objectification

Who doesn't enjoy compliments? People naturally appreciate praise. However, the issue arises when compliments are used to divert attention from academic achievements and expertise, focusing instead on physical beauty and appearance. This is particularly problematic for women, who are most frequently subjected to such remarks. In the context of Balkan culture, the objectification of women extends into academic settings, reflecting broader societal norms that prioritise physical appearance over intellectual or professional merit. The problem is particularly pronounced in higher education environments where women, regardless of their qualifications and achievements, are frequently subjected to unsolicited compliments or comments about their physical appearance. These remarks often undermine their intellectual contributions and diminish their professional identity, reducing them to objects of aesthetic appreciation rather than capable individuals.

Normalisation of such behavior is deeply rooted in traditional patriarchal values, where women's worth has historically been tied to their beauty and adherence to conventional gender roles. In academic institutions, this manifests as a subtle but pervasive form of gender bias. Women are often judged or evaluated based on their looks, which can create a hostile or uncomfortable environment, particularly when male colleagues or superiors make inappropriate remarks under the guise of compliments.

This dynamic not only marginalises women but also perpetuates a culture of inequality, as it shifts the focus away from their academic and professional competencies. Instead of being recognised for their skills, knowledge, and achievements, women are often placed in a position where they must navigate the dual burden of proving their intellectual worth while combating objectification. Unwanted compliments and objectification contribute to a broader pattern of gender-based discrimination in academia. They reinforce power imbalances and discourage women from fully participating in academic life, especially in leadership or high-visibility roles.

During the interviews female students reported they have often been objectified, particularly in early stages of their careers.

Sexual objectification treats women as objects for male gaze or pleasure, stripping them of agency and reducing them to their physical attributes. This dehumanisation contributes to a lack of respect for their intellectual contributions and capabilities and it happens more often towards younger women and students.

> *For example, when someone introduces me before a presentation or lecture at an event, particularly if the person introducing me is a professor from my faculty, they often highlight my physical appearance first. They might comment on how nice I look or how well I speak, focusing more on the physical aspect of my presence. When they say things like, 'You know how captivating she is with her appearance, and now you'll hear her fantastic lecture,' it somehow diminishes the second part, which is much more important—the content of my presentation. (T37_BA_UES_FS)*

> *There was a situation while I was in the office nearby. A lecture was supposed to take place, and a male colleague made the comment, 'Come on, ladies, join us to make the space more beautiful and pleasant. (T92 CG UDG FS)*

Sexual comments make women uncomfortable, and their strategy is to avoid those persons that also may lead to avoid tasks and opportunities for advancement just to protect themselves. Even when they are in the company of these men they avoid being in close contact and especially in informal settings.

> *It's uncomfortable for me because that person still makes inappropriate sexual compliments, even though I've clearly said, 'Hey, stop.' It doesn't sit well with me, it's not, how should I say, it's not comfortable, and I want it to stop. So, I don't like being alone with that person. (T43_BA_SSST_FN)*

> *A female colleague who worked more closely with him, often in situations requiring various field activities, travel, and staying in hotels with relaxation facilities as part of project activities, mentioned that she never dared to go to the pool. She felt extremely uncomfortable because of his comments about women. He would comment on secondary female characteristics, the build of women, the size of their breasts, buttocks, and waist… (T64_SR_UNBG_FN)*

This objectification creates an environment where women are not seen as equals but as objects to be evaluated, discussed, or demeaned based on appearance. Sexual comments can create an intimidating or hostile environment, making women feel unsafe, undervalued, or anxious. This fear may discourage them from fully participating or asserting themselves in that environment. Sexual comments used to intimidate women are a manifestation of deep-seated power imbalances, societal norms, and toxic masculinity. Beyond being disrespectful, such behaviour has profound psychological, professional, and societal consequences, undermining equality, safety, and trust in shared spaces. Addressing this requires systemic and cultural changes, alongside robust policies and accountability mechanisms.

2.2. Sexist Humour and Jokes

Sexist remarks and jokes are often dismissed as "harmless humor," particularly in patriarchal cultures where gender stereotypes are deeply entrenched. This normalisation minimises the perceived severity of such incidents, leading individuals to view them as trivial or unworthy of formal complaints. The pervasive belief that "boys will be boys" fosters an environment where sexist behavior is tolerated rather than challenged. Many women hesitate to report sexist comments or jokes due to fears of being labeled as overly sensitive, humorless, or confrontational. In hierarchical university structures, power dynamics further discourage reporting, especially when the perpetrator holds a

position of authority, such as a professor or senior colleague. Victims may also fear academic or professional repercussions, including damage to their reputation or future opportunities.

One of the female teachers from Sarajevo reported in her interview that her male colleagues still use sexist comments, and instead of professional communication they treat her as a sexual object and greet her inappropriately:

> *I mean, is it normal for someone to address me as 'doll' or' babe? (T2_BA_UNSA_FN)*

Of course, it is not normal, and it is not acceptable to use these words. Academic environment demands a standard of professionalism where individuals are addressed respectfully, typically by their name or title, such as "Professor," "Dr.," or a colleague. Using terms like 'doll' or 'babe' trivialises the professional relationship and disregards the formal context of academic work, undermines their authority and credibility, especially if they hold a professional or academic role. It sends a message that their contributions are not being taken seriously. This is particularly problematic for women in academia, who may already face challenges in asserting their authority in male-dominated spaces. Such greetings can contribute to a hostile or uncomfortable work environment, and it may signal a lack of respect and inclusivity and it is also a sign of microaggression or harassment, creating unnecessary barriers to communication and trust. (Hall and Sandler, 1985, pp. 503–510)

Female students confirm that most of them experienced stereotypical sexist comments at least once in their lives, but that most of them do not react.

> *As for messages or similar comments and calls, it has certainly happened to me and my female colleagues. I wouldn't say it's an everyday occurrence, but unfortunately, it has happened to every girl at least once. We simply ignore it. (T20_BA_UNIBL_FS)*

According to the survey results conducted in 2024, the prevalence of comments and remarks with sexual connotations, including jokes and humour offensive to women or the LGBTQIA+ community, reveals gender disparities in how these incidents are perceived and experienced within academic environments.

The data from 2021 show that these comments and remarks were higher earlier, before the UNIGEM project (8.1% of men reported experiencing such remarks *often*, and 42% sometimes), while women reported experiencing these comments *often* (15.8% often and 43.3% them *multiple times)*.

Table 4. Comments and Remarks by Gender 2021

Comments and remarks with sexual connotations, including jokes and quips directed at you or made in your presence	Male %	Female %	Other %
Sometimes	40.2	43.3	36.4
Often	8.1	15.8	18.2
Never	51.7	40.9	45.5

Table 5. Comments and Remarks by Country 2021

Comments and remarks with sexual connotations, including jokes and quips directed at you or made in your presence	BiH %	Montenegro %	Croatia %	Serbia %
Sometimes	47	28.5	52.7	55.1
Often	12	10.6	5.4	9.6
Never	41	60.9	41.9	35.3

The data from 2024 in the three charts below illustrate the decrease of these comments and remarks in comparison with 2021, but the percentage is still significant. Male respondents experienced these comments (**once 3.60% and multiple times 20.80%)** in comparison with female respondents who reported that they experienced such comments or jokes **(once 7.10% and multiple time 22.20%). A notable 38.9% of respondents**

from other gender identities reported frequent or multiple experiences and once 16.70%. The data underscores that other gender identities are disproportionately affected by sexually connotative comments or jokes and also more women than men report that they heard these comments.

The analysis of the answers by country demonstrates that **respondents in Serbia report that 26.30% of them have experienced these comments multiple times. Croatia falls slightly lower than Serbia at 23.7% but is still high. In third place is BiH with 20.2% of respondents who experienced these comments. Montenegro with 16.5% is the lowest among the countries**. Serbia shows the highest prevalence of both direct experiences and witnessing of such comments, suggesting a more normalised or tolerated culture of offensive remarks in public or professional settings. Montenegro has the lowest percentage, indicating fewer reports of such behaviour. When it comes to female and male colleagues at the university, the percentage across all three groups (by gender, status, and country) indicates that respondents report that female colleagues are more frequently exposed to sexist humour than their male counterparts.

These charts suggest that sexually connotative remarks and offensive jokes directed toward women and the LGBTQIA+ population across genders, status and countries still exist, and it is hard to eradicate them. Women and individuals of other gender identities disproportionately face such behaviour. Regionally, Serbia and Croatia exhibit higher frequencies of incidents, potentially reflecting cultural or societal norms that enable such behaviour. The findings highlight the need for targeted awareness campaigns and stricter enforcement of anti-discrimination policies, especially in countries and demographic groups where the issue is most prevalent.

The percentage of such sexist comments is similar to that found in the 2021 study, indicating cultural norms are resilient to change. This suggests that gender stereotypes, particularly those embedded in humour, remain deeply ingrained and resistant to transformation. Jokes and remarks that are often gender-specific, not only reflect but also reinforce traditional gender roles, making it especially difficult to challenge and shift societal perceptions regarding gender equality.

Chart 1. Comments and Remarks by Gender 2024

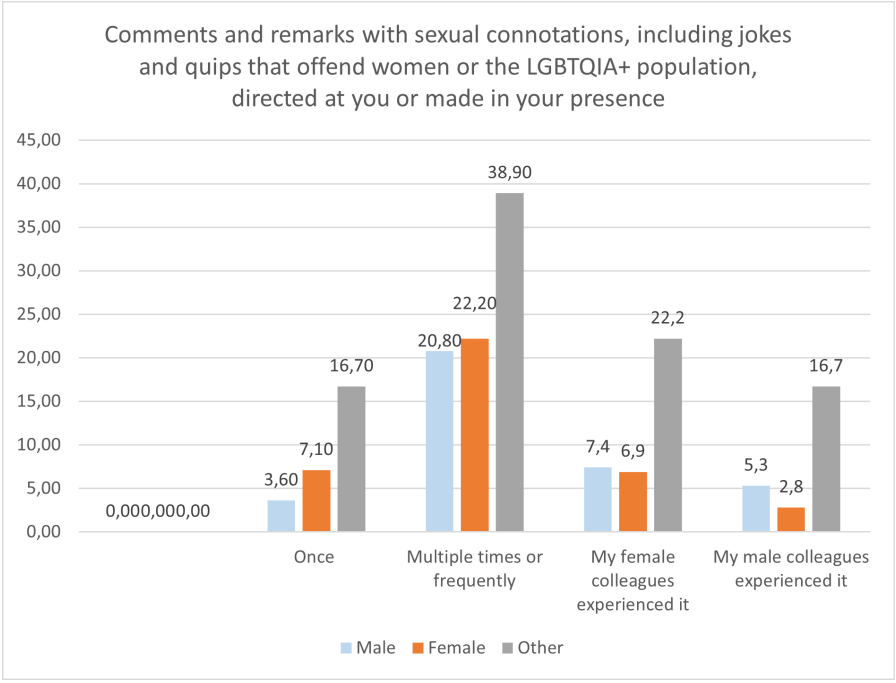


Chart 2. Comments and Remarks by Country 2024

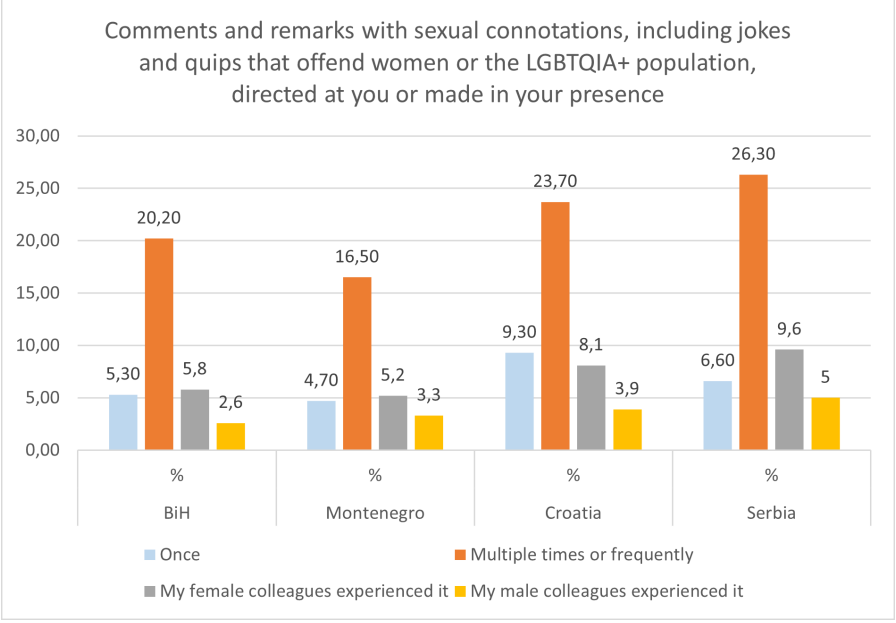
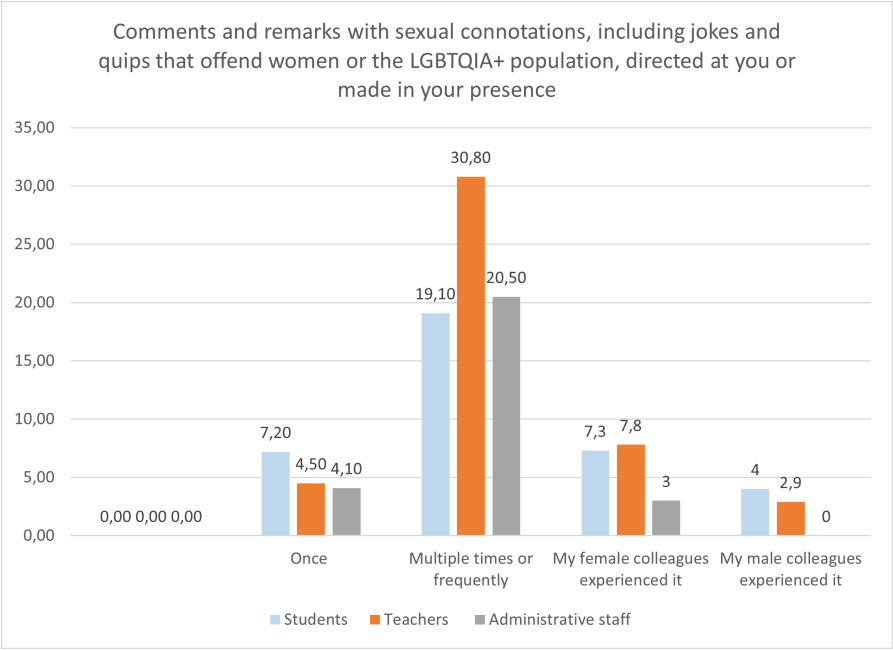


Chart 3. Comments and Remarks by Status 2024



When the data is analysed according to the status at universities**, it is teachers who report the highest frequency of repeated exposure to sexist comments (30.80%).** This could reflect their vulnerability to ingrained cultural norms or power dynamics in academic settings. Their professional role might also expose them to broader interactions with students, colleagues, as well as other staff, increasing the likelihood of encountering inappropriate remarks. The data analysis reveals that administrative staff (20.50%) and students (19.10%) report lower percentage of exposure to sexist comments than teachers.

These findings underscore the normalisation of sexist behaviour and humour in academic contexts and highlight a stark difference in how such experiences are distributed between genders. Other genders and women are disproportionately affected, not only by direct exposure but also by their heightened recognition of these issues among their peers. Addressing such disparities requires a concerted effort to create safer and more inclusive academic spaces where discriminatory behaviours are neither tolerated nor normalised.

When quantitative data is compared and analysed alongside qualitative data obtained from interviews with teachers, students, and administrative staff, the results align. Specifically, in the interviews, female students spoke most frequently about sexism and verbal abuse they are subjected to. Female teaching assistants shared their experiences of career advancement and interactions with senior colleagues who often exhibit patronising behaviour and unwanted touches and offensive comments.

Some of the teachers reflected on the situations where in the past they have not reacted against sexism, but how years later when she feels empowered and encouraged, she would react. This is in part because of a raised awareness of how these comments create an atmosphere of acceptance of this kind of violence.

> *I believe this happens much more often than I can notice... there was an interesting situation that deeply affected me. At the time, I didn't react, but now I definitely would... We had professors from Italy. And one of my male colleagues was joking, making subtle sexual innuendos—not overt but very subtle—about a female student who was a model or something like that. I found it so distasteful, and I regret not reacting at the time and not reporting them in some way. (T15_BA_UNIBL_FN)*

Another teacher from Belgrade reported how a younger (male) junior colleague felt able to use a situation to entertain other colleagues, who in turn did not react because they accept sexist jokes as an integral part of informal communication.

> *I am currently facing significant gender inequality imposed by a younger colleague, who is junior to me in terms of experience, position, and knowledge. However, his sexist jokes, which he does not censor even in the presence of female professors, and his approach to work contain elements of toxic masculinity. I now find myself in the position of defending gender equality, not just for myself but*

> *also for all the other women I know who have suffered because of him. (T64_SR_UNBG_FN)*

Sexist comments may also often lead to questioning women's academic skills, particularly in the field of STEM, because there remains a prevalence of segregation of jobs by gender and feminisation of occupation. This is an example of microaggression that undermines women's confidence and ambition (Hall and Sandler, 1985, 503–510). In some fields of science, it's often said, even if women are in those areas, that they are not smart enough or not capable enough, or in other ways they don't reach the levels required to work on significant scientific projects.

Students experienced more sexism, because filters are different when sexist comments are made in front of teachers and students. An example of this comes from the engineering faculty in Osijek where a respondent noticed that her female colleague was deliberately embarrassed by her teacher, in front of two male colleagues.

> *The teacher ridiculed her and her academic skills explaining to her that her work wasn't academically written, that the male colleagues had done it much better, and that she couldn't ask for more as a woman that is more than enough for her to get that grade. (T98_HR_SVEOS_FS)*

A female student from Rijeka also reported that her academic skills were questioned based on her gender; the insinuation was that pretty women get better grades and pass exams. Independently, teachers from Zagreb and Belgrade both confirmed that female students still face stigma when they apply to so-called 'male' fields (STEM). From an early age girls are faced with discriminatory practices in STEM fields and even when they achieve places on such courses, at college they once more face stigma that influence their self-evaluation (Rodogno and & Teroni, 2012).

Yes, exactly, during exams, I experienced it. I didn't experience it from women, of course, but from men, yes. Those comments that I am pretty enough to pass the exam. (T75_HR_UNIRI_FS)

In the classroom, female students come and tell me that they were asked why they even enrolled in this faculty since they are girls. There is so much of this, it's just horrifying. Horrifying. It comes from professors, colleagues in the industry, and unfortunately, even among the students themselves. (T79_HR_UNZG_FN)

That example from the Faculty of Architecture showed us that after one girl reported it, one hundred and something others also came forward. I was aware of how many comments there were from professors... but no one dared to report anything. Back in those days when I was studying, it was, so to speak, a current topic, and we didn't know who we could turn to. (T68_SR_UNBG_FS)

Some women in academia also use sexist jokes and humour as a form of entertainment and see nothing problematic about it when doing so among themselves or with male colleagues they are friends with. **This indicates that sexism has become so internalised that women no longer perceive it as a form of violence or part of a repertoire of violent communication.** When normalised, such communication becomes a tool for controlling and stigmatising women and minorities. When women oppose it, they are often perceived as those who ruin the fun and disrupt spontaneous communication.

As for those sexist jokes from colleagues... we women among ourselves... a person makes a joke about that, but I think it's all within some limits because, after all, sex is an integral part of human life... What else will people talk about, if not about that? (T28_ BA_ UNMO_ FA)

Men also say that when they are in male-only company, sexist jokes are common, and no one sees a problem with it. Sexually charged jokes and stories (Lyman, 1987), serves to establish boundaries and reinforce standards of masculinity. Through sharing exclusive perceptions of what defines masculinity, such as views on sexuality and attitudes toward women and male groups, has been shown to be about fostering male bonding (Tuzin, 2004, 488–489). However, this often involves expressing discriminatory and sexist attitudes toward marginalized groups

> *Well, it happens... if you're in an all-male company, it's completely normal that you'll hear such jokes, such comments. In a female company, perhaps less so, and similarly, but in a mixed group... it's somehow accepted as a part of it, just to make people laugh a little. (T25_BA_UNMO_MN)*

Sexist jokes targeting sexual and gender minorities are also common; they serve to express a non-supportive attitude toward such individuals or worse to indicate exclusion. The following statement reflects how humour is often weaponised as a form of subtle or overt discrimination against marginalised groups, particularly sexual and gender minorities. These sexist jokes are not merely harmless attempts at humour; rather, they perpetuate stereotypes and serve as a vehicle for expressing prejudice. By normalising such jokes in social settings, they create an unwelcoming and hostile environment for these individuals, undermining their dignity and reinforcing societal biases.

> *To be honest, at universities, people whisper about gay individuals, make jokes—often vulgar ones—but the majority stick to politically correct language. When it came time to choose an assistant for a particular subject, they jokingly told another colleague what it would be like if he was chosen and they had to share an office. It's awful, but that's how it is in our culture. (T1_ BA _UNSA FN)*

2.3. Sexist and Vulgar Remarks About Physical Appearance

Offensive comments do not always carry a sexual connotation but are often intertwined with jokes and humour alluding to sex, someone's sexuality, or mocking an individual's sexual orientation, or body size or appearance. The three following charts illustrate perceptions and experiences regarding inappropriate and offensive comments about physical appearance across various demographics, providing insights into the prevalence of such incidents in different contexts. The "Other" gender category reports the highest incidence of experiencing offensive comments, with **22.2%** experiencing it "once" and **16.7%** stating it occurred "multiple times or frequently." Female respondents report much higher occurrences compared to male respondents, with **11.3%** of men experiencing such comments multiple times versus **20.8%** of women.

Respondents from Croatia and BiH report slightly lower percentages of repeated occurrences **(10,7% multiple times)** but still acknowledge that female colleagues are more frequently targeted than male colleagues. Among **teachers**, **17.8%** report experiencing inappropriate comments "multiple times or frequently," which is notably higher than the responses from students (**8.7%**) and administrative staff (**10.1%**).

Teachers and administrative staff, however, show higher awareness or acknowledgment that such behavior impacts **female colleagues (9,9% multiple times)**, reflecting the perception that this issue disproportionately affects women in the workplace or educational settings. The acknowledgment of such behaviors being directed at male colleagues is relatively low across all groups, reinforcing the gendered aspect of this issue.

The data highlights that **women and gender minorities experience more frequent and pervasive instances of offensive comments about appearance** compared to men. This reflects what Connell (1987) describes as the **"hegemonic masculinity" framework**, which permits men to assert dominance over women and minorities through both overt and subtle means. Offensive remarks about physical appearance can be understood as microaggressions that serve to reinforce traditional power

hierarchies; to further undermine women's confidence in themselves, as well as undermine their professional status.

Chart 4. Comments About Physical Appearance by Gender 2024

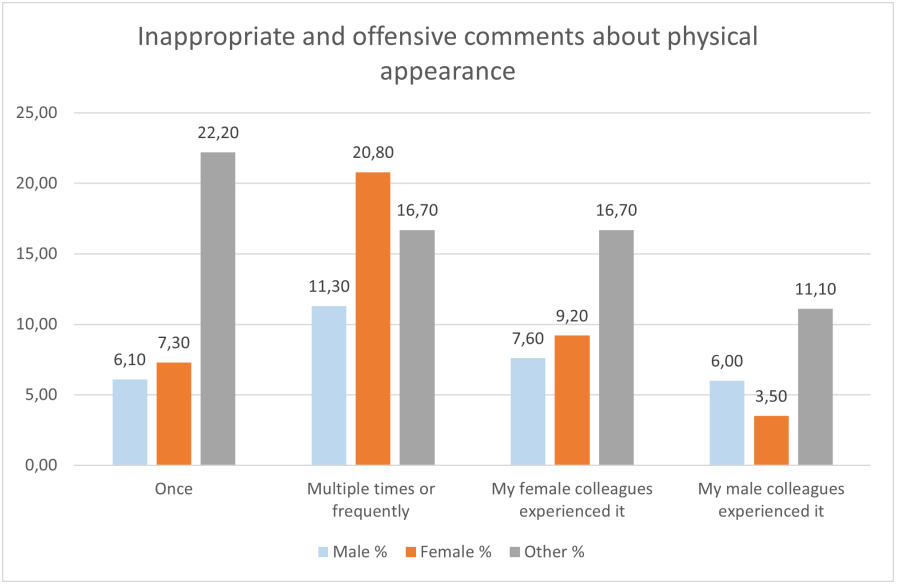


Chart 5. Comments About Physical Appearance by Country 2024

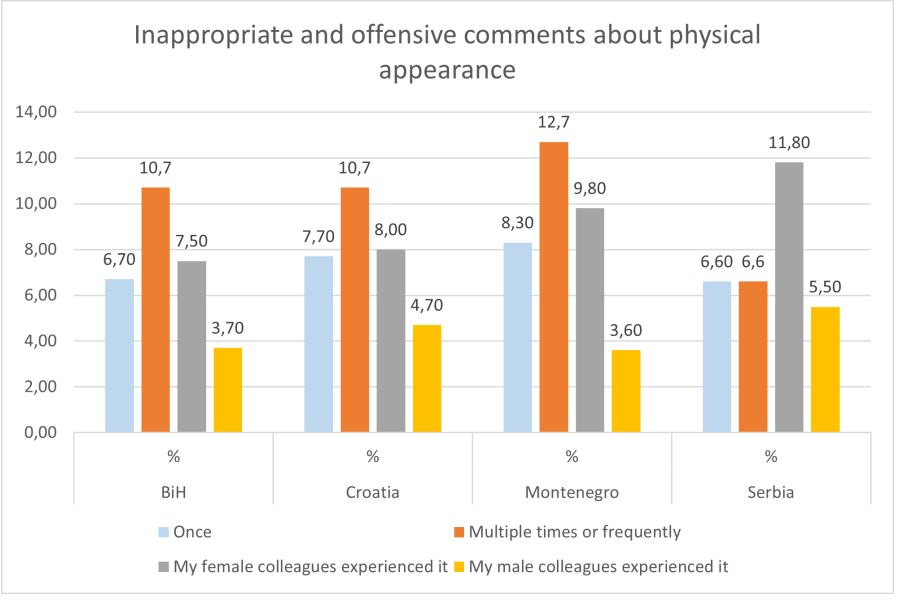
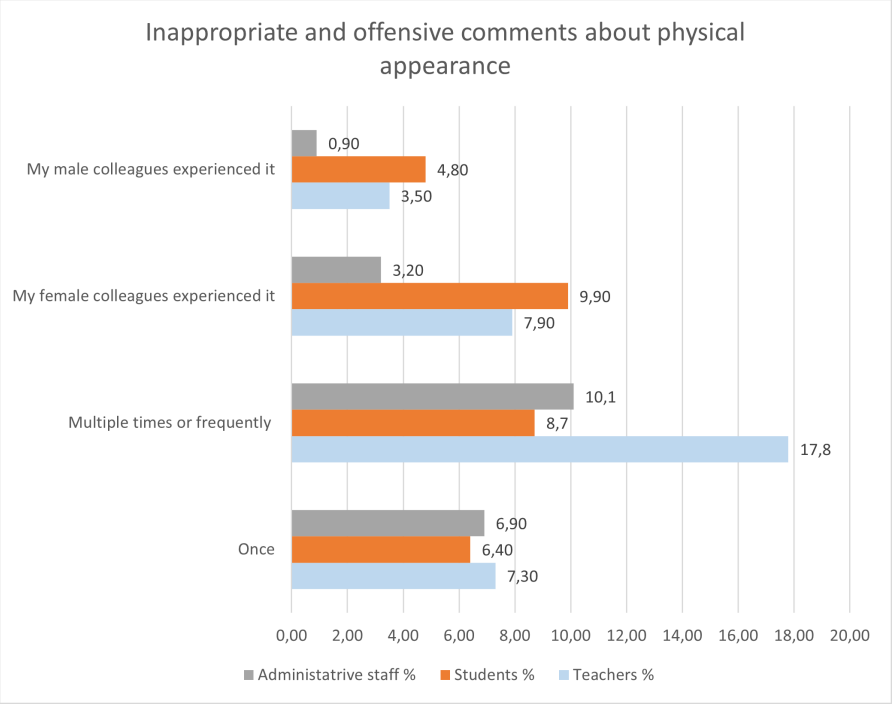


Chart 6. Comments About Physical Appearance by Status 2024



Respondents in interviews confirmed that sexist and vulgar comments still exist, and they are sometimes used to threaten and offend women and minorities. These comments are not just a lingering issue but actively used as tools of intimidation and offense, as a means of directly targeting women and minority groups. This behaviour reflects deeper systemic biases and perpetuates an environment of inequality and hostility, emphasising the need for proactive measures to address and combat such harmful practices. One of the teachers from Banja Luka explained that she and other women receive comments about their appearances, body and gender.

> *Oh, there was plenty of that, ranging from inappropriate comments, comments about appearance, comments about my gender… (T15_BA_UNIBL_FN)*

Some respondents mentioned that women who wear the hijab and women who wear more provocative clothing are most exposed to vulgar comments. This observation highlights a concerning double standard in societal perceptions of women. **Women on both ends of the spectrum, those wearing the hijab, a symbol of modesty and religious expression, and those opting to reveal their bodies, often seen as a means of embracing personal freedom, are both targeted by vulgar comments.** This suggests that such behaviour is less about the clothing itself and more about a pervasive culture of judgment and control over women's choices. It underscores the broader issue of how women, regardless of how they choose to present themselves in public, face harassment rooted in deeply ingrained biases. This pattern reveals the need for societal introspection and a shift toward respecting individual autonomy and reducing gender-based harassment.

> *Most often, in the context of girls who wear hijab, there were comments like 'wrapped up' or even one comment about the way she walks ... regarding clothing, there were some comments about how certain attire was inappropriate, revealing too much... (T14 BA UNTZ FS)*

> *If someone is overweight or if a girl has larger breasts, comments and mockery follow, accompanied by gestures pointing to specific parts of the body. And this, how should I say, is considered a joke among students, but it destroys the self-confidence of such individuals. (T68_SR_UNBG_FS)*

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the profound harm caused by sexist humour and unwanted compliments that continue to perpetuate gender-based stereotypes and discriminatory practices within institutional communication. Such behaviours, often trivialized or dismissed, create an environment where individuals, particularly women and minorities, experience significant damage to their self-esteem and sense of belonging. While there has been a slight decrease in openly sexual and vulgar comments reported by women in the last four years, the persistence of sexually charged jokes, whether dismissed as harmless or used to intimidate, remains deeply problematic. These behaviours, normalised in both male and female social groups, reflect a lack of understanding of their detrimental impact.

Sexist humour and unsolicited remarks are not just offensive but also erode the confidence of those targeted, fostering feelings of alienation and reducing their ability to engage fully in academic or professional settings. These actions are unacceptable in any environment, let alone in institutions meant to uphold respect and equality.

Follow-up research demonstrates the continuous need for systemic changes within academic institutions to address these issues. Initiatives must prioritise raising awareness of how such behaviours harm self-esteem and mental well-being, particularly among women and LGBTQIA+ individuals. Efforts should be directed at creating inclusive, respectful environments that actively challenge and dismantle entrenched gender biases. It is essential to make it unequivocally clear that discriminatory humour and unwanted comments have no place in a just, equitable, and supportive society.

Chapter 3.

Gender-Inclusive Language

Introduction

Language is power and the one who names has power. Throughout history and even today, this power is predominantly held by men. Men also determine patriarchal policies that do not allow language to evolve and adapt to changes, social and otherwise, which are happening around us. Language is constantly evolving, but the most challenging area to ensure that change occurs is in the realm of gender policies. Because of this, it is difficult to eliminate stereotypes, labelling, and stigmatization based on gender. Those who control language and the means of communication possess the power to create and shape discourses, influencing how knowledge, norms, and values are constructed and understood(Foucault, 1972, 49). Language not only mirrors societal attitudes, behaviours, and norms but also actively influences and reinforces them. It helps define what is acceptable or politically correct in public discourse, as well as what is deemed inappropriate. (Spahić Šiljak, 2019, 150). Therefore, it is important who speaks, what they speak, from which position they speak; this makes a difference as to how the messages are interpreted and how each context shapes, legitimises and authorises what has been said.

Discourses are not limited to spoken or written communication; they are also embedded in daily practices and institutional frameworks. Institutions such as education systems and the media are key sites where discourses are produced, circulated, and reinforced. Language plays a crucial role in sustaining or challenging power relations, influencing interactions both within institutions and across broader dimensions of life, including culture, gender, sexuality, and age.

This approach highlights the dynamic nature of language as a tool for either maintaining or disrupting existing hierarchies, as it was confirmed in the first UNIGEM research on gender inclusive language. “Specifically in the context of higher education and academic community language is known as an extremely effective tool that can be used to perpetuate, but more importantly, to prevent various forms of gender inequality.” (Čaušević et.al. 2023, 67)

By determining what is communicated, how it is framed, and who has the authority to speak, language becomes a mechanism through which power operates, shaping societal norms and individual identities. Institutions that govern the production and dissemination of discourse thus have a profound role in either reinforcing dominant ideologies or fostering social transformation. Educational institutions and as well as all the various forms of media, including social media, play crucial roles in the production of gender insensitive discourses.

The habitual use of masculine nouns as universal references, along with the subsumption of women under male linguistic norms, distorts perceptions of their roles and achievements. These linguistic practices subtly perpetuate gender inequality by diminishing the visibility of women and undervaluing their contributions. To counteract this, it is imperative to adopt gender-inclusive language that not only reflects the reality of women’s participation but also acknowledges and celebrates their impact. By moving away from exclusive linguistic norms, society can challenge entrenched biases and foster a culture that promotes equality and inclusivity.

Educational institutions, schools and universities in particular, promote and reinforce marginalization of women in language

and at the decision-making positions. School textbooks continue to perpetuate gender stereotypes, discriminatory language, and the invisibility of women's contributions to society. These materials predominantly glorify prominent statesmen, military leaders, and male scientists, while the efforts of women who struggled to make a mark in androcentric societies remain largely overlooked (Flinders & Thornton, 2004). This invisibility is further compounded for women belonging to racial and class minorities, leading to double or even triple marginalization.

Some researchers also indicate that by the end of secondary education, when students begin planning for higher education, school counsellors and advisors provide career guidance that reflects gender biases. Boys are often encouraged to pursue fields such as mathematics, engineering, and construction, while girls are directed toward education, healthcare, and economics (Persell et al., 1999; Perez-Felkner, 2018). Why does this disparity persist? While more women are entering the fields of science and mathematics, statistics reveal that boys continue to outperform girls in these areas. This systemic bias highlights the pervasive influence of entrenched stereotypes within educational systems and societal structures, which shape the career aspirations and opportunities available to young men and women. In late 20 c. in American contexts researchers (Hall and Sandler, 1985, 503–510) identified 35 micro-discriminatory practices that disproportionately affect undergraduate female students, subtly yet systematically perpetuating gender inequality in academic environments. Among these practices, several stand out as particularly emblematic of the broader cultural and institutional biases:

- Male students are consistently afforded more opportunities to speak in class, with professors interrupting them less frequently compared to their female counterparts. This disparity reinforces a gendered imbalance in classroom dynamics.
- Professors often employ gender-insensitive language, defaulting to masculine pronouns when discussing certain professions (e.g., referring to doctors as "he" and nurses as "she"), thereby perpetuating traditional gender stereotypes and limiting perceptions of professional roles.

- Men are addressed with formal terms such as “man” or “gentleman,” while women are referred to using diminutive or colloquial terms like “girl” or “young lady.” Furthermore, the generic use of the pronoun “he” to represent both genders implicitly marginalizes women.
- Women’s physical appearance is frequently commented on instead of their intellectual contributions. Remarks such as “Your eyes sparkle when you talk about this topic” or “What does this beautiful lady have to say?” trivialize their expertise and reduce their presence to superficial attributes.
- Demeaning comments further undermine women’s confidence and ambition, such as, “Old maids or spinsters wouldn’t understand this,” “You girls probably won’t grasp this concept,” or “Why would someone as beautiful as you bother with engineering or mathematics?”. (quoted in Spahić Šiljak, 2019, 87)

This pattern of micro-discrimination underscores the entrenched nature of gender bias within academic spaces. Addressing these issues requires more than isolated efforts; it necessitates systemic reforms, including the integration of gender-sensitive pedagogies, institutional accountability, and ongoing education aimed at dismantling implicit biases. By doing so, academic institutions can move toward creating equitable and inclusive environments that empower all students to reach their full potential and the language is crucial. The uncritical use of language, shaped by androcentric worldviews, often marginalizes women and perpetuates negative stereotypes.

Refusal to use gender-sensitive language, subsuming women under the norm of the male gender, and insisting on the neutral use of the masculine gender ensure and maintain gender inequality, i.e., women’s invisibility. At the same time, sexist language patterns very easily grow into a form of gender-based harassment and violence. This issue within institutions of higher education still exists, as shown by the results of the UNIGEM research that will be discussed more in the central part of this work. (Čaušević et al. 2023,66)

Over the past decade, and particularly during the last four years of the UNIGEM project's implementation (2021-2024), many universities have adopted gender-inclusive policies and guidelines, allowing students and academic staff to incorporate them into official communication and diplomas. However, at some universities, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, there is open resistance to the introduction of gender-inclusive language, which is also reflected in political pressures directed toward language and history departments, as these departments are often seen as bastions for the protection and preservation of national identities.

Universities also have provisions within their internal regulations addressing the prohibition of discrimination, alongside state protocols and anti-discrimination laws, as well as Gender Action Plans (GAPs). However, anti-gender proponents often target university or state regulations as driven by so-called "gender ideology" or even as an attack on the integrity of language itself and the national identity.[4] By positioning language within the ideological framework of defending identity, nation, and state, anti-gender advocates manipulate public opinion and instil fear, suggesting that any linguistic changes would lead to the dissolution of national and cultural identity—a claim that is entirely unfounded. Language is a living, evolving entity, and when it becomes confined within a rigid ideological framework—particularly in the ethno-nationalist context of the Balkans—it merely perpetuates those ideological narratives. This confinement reinforces the invisibility of women in official histories and their exclusion from public narratives, except in cases where their roles serve the purposes of the dominant ideology.

4 The law has come into effect in Serbia in 2021, among other provisions, mandates that state authorities use gender-sensitive language "in the titles of job positions, ranks, designations, and professions," and it also requires the use of feminine forms for professions and titles in the media. However, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, as the proposer of the law, has postponed the implementation of certain provisions. In public debates, the Serbian Orthodox Church has aligned itself with opponents of gender-sensitive language. https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/rodno-senzitivni-jezik-srbija-zakon/32809505.html

3.1. Resistance to Gender Sensitive Language

This analysis demonstrates the critical need for a more nuanced understanding of how language reforms intersect with broader socio-cultural and institutional structures. The resistance to gender-sensitive language reforms within academic institutions highlights the enduring influence of patriarchal norms on language and discourse. Therefore, this issue demands a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach that not only critiques existing linguistic practices but also advocates for reforms that can foster inclusivity and challenge systemic inequalities.

The data from the following table highlight differences in the understanding of the term "gender-sensitive language" across time periods (2021 and 2024).

Regarding the perception of this term as "language corruption," there is a slight increase in negative attitudes among teachers, students and administrative staff. The biggest changes occurred among students from 11.75% (2021) to 18.27% (2024). Regarding the perception of gender-sensitive language as an "artificial construct and violence against linguistic norms," the proportion of teachers and administrative staff show slight increase, while students holding this view significantly increased (11.75% in 2022 and 18.27% in 2024). This means that anti-gender influence is higher among students who are not equally sensitized as their teachers.

Table 6. Understanding of the Term "Gender-Sensitive Language" by Status 2021 and 2024

Gender Sensitive Language is:	Teachers %		Students %		Administrative Staff	
	2021	2024	2021	2024	2021	2024
"Corruption of language"	4.27	5.30	8.73	12.06	5.41	6.03
An artificial construct and violence against linguistic norms	7.29	11.48	11.75	18.27	9.01	10.13

The following two tables demonstrate changes in perception among women and men and between the four countries in which this research has been conducted. The data reveals significant differences in the perception of the term "gender-sensitive language" among women and men. The resistance is higher among men and their views that gender sensitive language is "corruption of language" increased from 12.47% to 14.42%, indicating a growing negative perception in this context, while women also showed slight increase in negative perception from 7.55% (2022) to 8.54% (2024). This means that men who control language and knowledge production in academia still define what is politically correct in public discourse (Foucault, 1972, 49).

Table 7. Understanding of the Term "Gender-Sensitive Language" by Gender 2021 and 2024

Gender Sensitive Language is:	Male (%)		Female (%)	
	2021	2024	2021	2024
"Corruption of language"	12.47	14.42	7.55	8.54
An artificial construct and violence against linguistic norms	16.37	23.49	11.80	13.60

There are also differences among countries in the periods 2021 to 2024. The view that gender-sensitive language is "corruption of language" remains higher in Serbia from 9.20% (2021) to 23.0% (2024) and Croatia from 8.78% (2022) to 16.1% (2024). In Bosnia and Herzegovina there is also an evident slight increase in negative perception, from 9.77% (2021) to 10.38% (2024), as well as in Montenegro from 6.3% (2021) to 12.40% (2024). This indicated a growing negative perception in this context of the Balkans, which can be explained by the public debates on gender sensitive language, particularly in Serbia after the specific legislation on gender inclusive language was adopted in 2021. It was put on hold due to harsh critics from the Orthodox Church and some scholars from the Academy of Art.

Table 8. Understanding of the Term "Gender-Sensitive Language" by Country 2021 and 2024

Gender Sensitive Language is:	BiH (%)		Montenegro (%)		Croatia (%)		Serbia (%)	
	2021	2024	2021	2024	2021	2024	2021	2024
"Corruption of language"	9.77	10.38	6.3	12.40	8.78	16.1	9.20	23.0
An artificial construct and violence against linguistic norms	14.35	16.87	6.95	17.36	11.67	14.33	12.47	14.91

Similar resistance to gender sensitive language is also reflected in interviews in which some female respondents attempted to explain why they do not accept gender sensitive language. They expressed more negative perceptions than men who were interviewed.

> *That is not in the spirit of our language; it sounds awkward and clunky...for instance the term "psychologist" in the feminine form, psihološkinja, it is…how to say, it is weird. (T17 BA UNIBL FA)*

> *It somehow seems to me that more emphasis is placed on form rather than substance. So, fine, let them call me 'dekanica' (female dean), but what do I gain from that? Isn't it more important to change awareness? (T31 BA UNIBI FN)*

The quantitative analysis above indicates that men more than women resist gender-sensitive language due to deeply ingrained societal norms. Patriarchal cultures often reinforce traditional gender roles, making linguistic changes feel unnecessary or even threatening to the societal power dynamic. However, women felt more pressure to explain why they either resist gender sensitive language or do not find it so relevant. Women may perceive less direct personal benefit from such changes if

they believe structural inequalities (e.g., wage gaps, education access) are more pressing. Their resistance may also be tied to generational divides or cultural conservatism. Older women, in particular, may be less likely to embrace changes that disrupt familiar linguistic patterns, viewing them as an overreach or irrelevant to their lived experience. Some women perceive gender sensitive language just as a symbolic gesture and not as a genuine solution to systemic gender inequality. If they disproportionately experience the effects of structural sexism, they might see language reform as less impactful compared to tangible policy changes.

When women become tired and see that the results are barely visible, they become disappointed and lose the motivation to continue advocating for gender-sensitive language, instead focusing on their own work. The fight against gender-insensitive structures is exhausting, so some women choose not to expend all their energy on it, as one professor from Bosnia and Herzegovina elaborated:

> *Personally, I see it as an important cultural shift on a broader scale. However, as someone who has been engaged in gender equality since 1999, I don't see a significant impact. Personally, not the institution as such, I introduced the use of gender-neutral terms at our faculty council. As someone who was once a big advocate for gender-sensitive language, I no longer see its practical effects. I find more impact in tangible examples that are universal enough for everyone to understand, those related to everyday life. Sometimes, out of principle, it's still important to me to emphasize that I'm not "professor," but "profesorica" (female professor). However, I've reached a point where it doesn't bother me anymore when I'm addressed as "professor," as long as I know that's who I am. (T46_BA_IBU_FN)*

Those who work in social science and humanities and have background in linguistics, literature and similar disciplines might

resist because they view these changes as cumbersome, impractical, or confusing due to complex, extensive grammatical gender.

> *It's difficult when writing to constantly repeat 'student and studentica' (female and male student) or 'profesor and profesorica,' (female and male professor), and in the Serbian language, you also have to adjust verb forms and cases, which makes the text look clunky. I don't know, I'm not completely against it, but constantly adding a slash and 'ica' at the end doesn't seem like a solution either. (T64_SR_UNBG_FN)*

Although it may be understandable that "certain words or phrases may seem difficult to adopt, and insisting on the feminine form of a word might appear overly meticulous to some. However, it is a matter of personal choice and a way to make women and other minorities more visible in the language (Spahić Šiljak, 2019, 160). Men's resistance is higher in general, but they are not affected by gender inequality as women. However, over time, as gender-sensitive language gains visibility and new legislation is adopted, men's resistance increases, because they perceive it as challenging to cultural or linguistic norms. For men adopting or resisting such language may feel like a neutral or less personally significant issue.

3.2. Support to Gender Sensitive Language

Although there is still resistance to gender sensitive language in the Balkans region, the analysis has shown that support for it has been increasing in the last couple of years. Many respondents believe that gender sensitive language is necessary and serves as a crucial tool in promoting gender equality, the visibility of women, and their achievements in society.

Regarding the perception of gender-sensitive language as "a way of expressing gender equality", all countries experience a significant increase, particularly in Croatia from 50.14% (2021) to 75.58% (2024) and Serbia from 32.29% (2021) to 73.65% (2024).

Similar trends are shown by responses to the question that a gender sensitive language is "a way to increase women's visibility and emphasize equality for all people." The highest increase occurred in Serbia from 14.35% (2021) to 41.76% (2024).

Table 9. Understanding of the Term "Gender-Sensitive Language" by Country 2021 and 2024

	BiH (%)		Montenegro (%)		Croatia (%)		Serbia (%)	
Gender Sensitive Language is:	2021	2024	2021	2024	2021	2024	2021	2024
A way of expressing gender equality	44.48	69.74	32.96	67.49	50.14	75.58	32.29	73.65
A way to increase women's visibility and emphasize equality for all people	20.83	28.40	15.92	27.82	22.92	32.80	14.35	41.76

Similar increase is visible among teachers, students and administrative staff. Teachers responses indicated an increase from 58.79 (2021) to 81.47% (2024), administrative staff from 51.80% (2021) to 79.09% (2024) and students from 40.70% (2021) to 67.17% (2024) regarding agreeing that gender sensitive language is a way of expressing gender equality. There is also an increase in perception that gender sensitive language increases women's visibility and emphasises equality for all people.

Table 10. Understanding of the Term "Gender-Sensitive Language" by Status 2021 and 2024

Gender Sensitive Language is:	Teachers %		Students %		Administrative Staff	
	2022	2024	2022	2024	2022	2024
A way of expressing gender equality	58.79	81.47	40.70	67.17	51.80	79.09
A way to increase women's visibility and emphasize equality for all people	22.74	36.03	19.31	31.09	21.62	29.74

Difference between women and men is also significant, since more women perceive gender sensitive language as empowering and that it helps women to be more visible and recognized in society for their achievements. **However, what is encouraging is that both women and men seem more sensitized to gender inclusive language as compared to the data from the initial research in 2021.**

Table 11. Understanding of the Term "Gender-Sensitive Language" by Gender 2021 and 2024

Gender Sensitive Language is:	Male (%)		Female (%)	
	2021	2024	2021	2024
A way of expressing gender equality	31.64	61.17	47.31	74.85
A way to increase women's visibility and emphasize equality for all people	14.26	26.39	22.30	33.86

Qualitative data from this research reveals why a significant number of women still believe it is important to advocate for gender sensitive language and incorporate it into official communication at universities, as well as in documents, policies, and public appearances. Initially, the resistance was significant, but as some respondents note people gradually become accustomed to the use of gender sensitive terms.

It is very important. Language is not just language or merely a means of communication. The language we use describes the world as it is and as we wish it to be. It is crucial for educators to teach students and encourage them to use expressions that reflect this understanding. (T39_BA_UNZE_FN)

Well, we've been working on that for some time now. The last time I came across the rules of the Ethics Committee, they weren't written in gender-sensitive language, so I immediately sent them back for correction. (T43_BA_SSST_FN)

When we started with the UNIGEM, there was a lot of discussion about introducing gendered forms of nouns, particularly for titles like "dekanica" (female dean) and "profesorica" (female professor). Initially, people were somewhat hesitant to accept these terms, but over time, I see that it has now become a very normal thing. I believe these small changes that we can influence will, over time, create a positive environment for addressing larger issues. Therefore, we must never give up and remain consistent in implementing such policies. I think any approach that is overly aggressive in our context might have a counterproductive effect. Instead, we should focus on continuous workshops, training sessions, and helping people gradually adapt to gender equality. (T11_BA_UNTZ_FA)

Some respondents noted that they have observed an increase in the use of gender sensitive language in public discourse and that attention is being paid to it, even though these issues have not yet been fully regulated within institutions. They view this as progress, despite all the resistance, and believe it to be inevitable, considering that language is dynamic and changes will occur regardless of political pressures.

> *I am glad that this topic is being discussed more openly and prominently and that men are slowly starting to get involved in talking about it more. I have also noticed that decision-makers are increasingly present at events related to these topics and that they often, or rather more frequently, use gender-sensitive language in their speeches. Whether this is for political gain or not, I cannot say, but it is certainly a positive example for citizens in our region. (T89_CG_UCG_FS)*

> *This morning, I had a meeting at an elementary school with a female pedagogue (pedagogica), female psychologist (psihologinja), female special education expert (defektologinja), and female speech therapist (logopedica), and I'm proud to say that the language used was gender-appropriate. However, when I was finishing university, those same roles were referred to as pedagogue, psychologist, special educator, and speech therapist, even though the individuals holding those positions were women. So yes, there is certainly a shift happening, not only in verbal communication but also in written documents. (T53_ BA_ SVEHER _MN)*

However, as female students observe—and they tend to be more critical on these issues than female professors—the use of gender-sensitive language is being introduced in a limited and controlled manner. Most specifically they see this happening only to the extent that it suits male elites who otherwise dominate the fields of language, literature, and history, which are considered key disciplines of national significance in the Balkans.

> *Well, we already use gender-sensitive language, but only for those gender-sensitive terms that men have approved. For example, it's normal to say "učiteljica" (female teacher), but it's not acceptable to say, I don't know, something else. (T67_SR_UNBG_MS)*

Discussions are still ongoing at universities where policies and guidelines for the use of gender-sensitive language have been adopted, as there are numerous issues that need to be addressed after the documents are implemented. This particularly applies to writing in both masculine and feminine forms, as well as determining which words to use for non-binary individuals.

> *Sometimes, members of the older generation reject this language, believing it ghettoised them, and so they continue to use standard masculine terms for themselves—for example, calling themselves "professor," "teacher," or "expert." Personally, I don't mind if they choose to refer to themselves that way, but I always try to use gender-sensitive language. I know that, as an institution, we have made the decision to issue all possible documents under our control with consideration for the sex or gender of the person they are being issued to. Of course, this opens up a new set of questions—how to account for non-binary individuals or others who don't fit into male or female categories. (T80 HR UNZG MN)*

> *Well, honestly, sometimes I feel like it might be a bit overdone, but when you consider that some people might be hurt by it, it seems like a good idea. The only thing is that perhaps there should be a clear stance—for instance, when writing an official document, whichever term is used, whether in the masculine, feminine, or neutral form, it should simply apply to everyone in general. I think we should start adopting such a practice. (T70_HR_UNIRI_MN)*

As far as the law is concerned, I respect it, and I address people accordingly. However, as a linguist, I lean more toward terms related to academic titles and positions. I don't use those terms in practice, but when it comes to written communication, I adhere

to them—I write and use them. Yes, it is awkward; there is a large number of neologisms and inconsistencies in the formation of feminine nouns, and believe me, these terms sometimes end up in a terminology with a negative connotation, where the meaning gets lost and leads to a completely different interpretation. For example, if we have an award for the best student, and she receives the award as the "best female student," then I believe it is understood that there is the "best female student." (T90 CG UDG FN)

When reflecting on the ideological battles and uncertainties of gender sensitive language a feminist scholar in the Balkans explains:

> Although everyone can refer to themselves any way they wish, naming in the feminine gender is important for blocking the discursive power of the masculine gender. Otherwise, men would gladly agree to say, using the female variant, 'I am secretary!' We know that it sounds completely different when one says that a man is a secretary (male form). At this level – the difference is important. (Kašić, 2000)

The irritation and resistance some individuals express over the use of feminine nouns reflects the depth of resistance to embracing inclusive linguistic practices. This hyperbolic reaction underscores the entrenched opposition to adopting a language of equality, revealing how language, as a tool of power and social structure, can evoke strong emotional and ideological resistance when challenged. The intensity of this backlash illustrates not only the reluctance to accept change but also the broader struggle against shifting deeply rooted norms and hierarchies in society.

Conclusion

Gender sensitive language has emerged as a critical tool in promoting equality and challenging entrenched gender biases, particularly within educational and institutional contexts. Despite initial resistance and perceptions of awkwardness, it has proven to be a powerful mechanism for recognizing the contributions and identities of women and other marginalized groups. The evolution of gender sensitive terminology reflects broader societal shifts toward inclusivity, though these changes often encounter cultural, linguistic, and ideological barriers, particularly in regions where language is tied to national identity. Critics frequently dismiss such linguistic reforms as unnecessary or disruptive, yet their implementation in official documents and communication practices has already had a significant positive impact on students, staff, and institutions.

The gradual adoption of gender-sensitive language demonstrates the potential for language to shape perceptions and normalize equality. It fosters recognition of women's roles in academia and society, providing them with visibility and acknowledgment that has been historically lacking. While some members of older generations resist these changes, viewing them as restrictive or even ghettoizing, younger generations and progressive decision-makers are increasingly embracing inclusive language. This shift is evident in the growing presence of gender sensitive practices in universities, where both written and spoken communication are adapting to reflect gender equity.

Moreover, the use of gender inclusive terms in official documents is not merely symbolic; it serves as a foundation for broader cultural transformation. Although challenges remain, particularly in accommodating non-binary identities within highly gendered languages, these discussions open pathways for deeper reflection and systemic change. The self-correction and growing awareness among individuals indicate that these initiatives are moving in the right direction. Ultimately, gender sensitive language is more than a linguistic reform; it is a commitment to creating a fairer, more inclusive society where all individuals are recognized and respected. With sustained efforts, this approach can pave the way for lasting change and equity across all levels of society.

When we compare the data from the first UNIGEM research conducted in 2021 and this research, it is clear that there is still resistance to gender-inclusive language, but the support for it is much higher. It means that the UNIGEM project as well as similar initiatives contributed to positive changes and sensitization of teachers, students and administrative staff. While progress may be uneven, sustained advocacy and institutional efforts remain critical to fostering broader acceptance of gender-inclusive language across the region.

Chapter 4.

Socio-cultural aspects of gender-based violence

Introduction

To adequately address any question or problem, it is necessary to have knowledge about it. Regarding gender-based violence (GBV), it is also important to cultivate awareness and systematically ensure gender issues become mainstream in academic and other institutions. If a person doesn't know what GBV is, and is not aware of how devastating it can be on personal, and societal health and well-being, as well as on an economic level, it is hard to expect them to get engaged and make changes. Everything begins with language, the way certain terms are used and the way a particular phenomenon is understood. If there is resistance to the use of certain terms, as there is in the Balkans regarding the concepts of gender and gender equality, this will serve as an additional obstacle to systematically introducing gender equality and GBV prevention measures in university communities.

GBV refers to harmful acts directed against individuals based on their gender, often stemming from unequal power dynamics and deeply ingrained societal norms. It encompasses a wide range of abuses, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence, and disproportionately affects women and girls worldwide; "Gender-based violence affects gender relations

and problematizes violence based on hierarchical constructions of gender and sexuality" (Anitha and Lewis, 2018, 181). Other forms of gender-based violence include: "domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual violence, rape, paedophilia, homophobia, cyber violence, sexism, etc. The primary victims of gender-based violence are women, while the primary perpetrators are men." (Spahić Šiljak, Kovačević, Husanović, 2023, 10)

This violence can occur in various contexts, including within the family, workplace, schools, and public spaces, as well as in situations of armed conflict, where rape and sexual violence are often used as weapons of war. GBV is widely recognized as a violation of human rights and a significant barrier to achieving gender equality and sustainable development. However, it is not limited to women; men, particularly those who do not conform to traditional gender norms, and individuals identifying as LGBTQ+ also experience GBV, highlighting the intersectional nature of this issue.

Feminist scholars argue that GBV is rooted in patriarchal structures and power imbalances that normalise male dominance and female subordination (Butler, 1990; Walby, 2017; Conell, 2002; Fraser, 2022). They emphasize the role of cultural and institutional norms in perpetuating these hierarchies and examine the intersectionality of GBV, considering how race, class, and ethnicity intersect with gender to exacerbate vulnerabilities. In the first UNIGEM research Merima Jašarević (2023, 94) underlined the connection between culture and violence. Violence against women is often enabled and perpetuated by cultural beliefs and institutional structures. Ensuring protection against such violence requires profound changes in societal attitudes toward gender roles and in institutions governing women's daily lives, such as marriage, divorce, education, and employment opportunities. The goal of protecting women and preserving the institution of marriage frequently stands in opposition. If separating from abusive spouses becomes the primary means of ensuring women's safety, then reducing violence against women may inadvertently undermine traditional notions of marriage. To effectively address and reduce violence and sexual assault, it is essential to transform attitudes and practices related to sexuality, marriage, and family dynamics.

In many societies, including the Balkans, women and men still perceive violence as a private matter, and even when women consider reporting it, they lack trust in institutions. Patriarchal culture, cultivated through various types of myths, emphasises the ideal type of virtuous woman who sacrifices herself for family and nation, and in this way offers understanding for male aggression. Traditional gender roles and expectations require women to pursue moral purity and self-sacrifice. In this way women are taught to tolerate marital violence and coerced sexual relations, conforming to the culture that not only normalises abuse but also entrenches gender inequality within societal structures. (Papić and Skelivicky, 2003; Spahić Šiljak, 2019; Jašarević, 2023)

GBV goes beyond physical acts to include structural violence, such as economic discrimination and social exclusion that is rooted in capitalism. Nancy Fraser underlines the need for revaluation of production and reproduction as the main cause of inequalities:

> With capitalism, by contrast, reproductive labor is split off, relegated to a separate, "private" domestic sphere where its social importance is obscured. And in this new world, where money is a primary medium of power, the fact of its being unpaid or underpaid seals the matter: those who do this work are structurally subordinate to those who earn cash wages in "production," even as their "reproductive" work also supplies necessary preconditions for wage labor. (2022, 10)

The systemic nature of these power imbalances emphasise how institutional structures and cultural norms perpetuate inequality and violence, for example in paying women and men unequally for the same work and acknowledging the worth of their time and other resources differently. By framing the state as a key actor in maintaining these inequalities, both Walby and Fraser make a compelling argument for the role of governance to be rethought in order to address and ultimately dismantle the root causes of gender-based violence through systemic reform. The UNIGEM project tackled these challenges at universities in

the Balkans, dedicating four years to promoting awareness and embedding gender equality norms into curricula. However, genuine acceptance of these changes requires more time, particularly in the face of resistance and opposition from anti-gender movements.

4.1. Knowledge and Awareness

GBV is not a new notion and although it has become more widely used in many contexts during the last two decades, some respondents in this research still did not know what GBV is. When we looked at data from the first UNIGEM research conducted in 2021, 4.83% of men and 9.66% of women did not know how to define GBV. However, three years later, UNIGEM data shows the percentage of those who are not acquainted with the notion of GBV had slightly increased with men 7.89% and women 10.60%. When this data is analysed across the three groups: students, teaching, and administrative staff, the group that has changed most in terms of an increase in familiarity with the notion of GBV, is the student group. A difference of percentage of increase in unfamiliarity is also noticeable between the three countries, which may be as a result of influence of anti-gender campaigns in the region.

Table 12. Knowledge of GBV by Gender 2021 and 2024

I am not acquainted with the notion GBV	Women	Men
%	%	%
2024	5.92	10.60
2021	4.83	9.66

Table 13. Knowledge of GBV by Country 2021 and 2024

I am not acquainted with the notion GBV	BiH	Montenegro	Croatia	Serbia
%	%	%	%	%
2024	7.89	4.13	6.66	6.38
2021	7.24	4.44	1.57	5.65

Table 14. Knowledge of GBV by Status 2021 and 2024

I am not acquainted with the notion GBV	Teachers	Students	Administrative staff
%	%	%	%
2024	8.57%	3.64%	4.74%
2021	2.80%	5.90%	2.30%

Although approximately 7% of those who participated in interviews still do not know how to define GBV, when we compare this data with those who know how to define GBV (women 86.3%, men 78,3%), it is encouraging to see advancement. However, universities need to continue working on raising awareness on GBV and undertake systemic approaches to support these efforts both financially and through institutional measures. The integration of GBV topics in teaching often depends on individual teachers, meaning that students in less progressive or underfunded institutions may miss these lessons entirely. Even when gender topics are included in curricula, they are mostly likely to be included in the fields of social science and humanities, while most other areas remain excluded. In patriarchal or conservative environments such as the Balkans region, these topics may be actively avoided or framed as controversial. This is known to have happened in the last couple of years with open pressure being put upon some departments and state institutions to avoid terms gender and GBV. Societal stigma surrounding discussions of gender, violence, and inequality can discourage open conversations, leaving students underinformed.

Table 15. Definition of GBV by Gender 2021-2024

Gender-based violence is violence against a person because of their gender identity	Women	Men
%	%	%
2024	86.03	78.03
2021	57.72	43.65

Table 16. Definition of GBV by Status 2021-2024

Gender-based violence is violence against a person because of their gender identity	Teachers	Students	Administrative Staff
	%	%	%
2024	92.32	80.67	89.22
2021	68.60	50.10	58.60

Table 17. Definition of GBV by Country 2021-2024

Gender-based violence is violence against a person because of their gender identity	BiH	Montenegro	Croatia	Serbia
	%	%	%	
2024	81.17	80.72	87.29	89.56
2021	55.04	43.05	64.31	40.00

These tables present data indicating the percentage of respondents from each of the four nations, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Montenegro, Croatia, and Serbia, who agree with the statement that "gender-based violence is violence against a person because of their gender identity" for the years 2021 and 2024. There is a **significant increase in awareness across all countries.** Croatia consistently shows a higher level of agreement compared to other countries, both in 2021 and 2024 while Serbia exhibited the most significant increase in agreement, indicating major progress in recognizing gender-based violence as linked to gender identity. Montenegro had the largest relative improvement, nearly doubling the level of agreement between 2021 and 2024. BiH also shows significant improvement, aligning closely with Montenegro in 2024. However, the starting point in

Bosnia in 2021, was higher than Montenegro and Serbia, indicating a more gradual, steady improvement.

The consistent increase across all countries indicates the positive impact of ongoing efforts to raise awareness about GBV and its relation to gender identity. Serbia and Montenegro, which had lower awareness in 2021, experienced the most dramatic increase. This highlights the effectiveness of targeted interventions in these countries. Rising awareness levels suggest a growing recognition of GBV as a societal issue tied to gender identity. **The data reflects the success of educational programs, public campaigns, and regional UNIGEM initiatives addressing gender equality and GBV prevention.** This data also underscores the importance of sustained advocacy, education, and policy change to enhance understanding of GBV across the region.

Knowledge and awareness are crucial preconditions in the prevention of GBV. However, bringing about change in organisational culture takes more time. This change requires the creation of systems, processes and other organisational structures, capable of acknowledging the existence of GBV as well as acknowledging the need for such change.

Although the notion gender is supposed to be accepted in formal documents, this is not used in the same way in all institutions,[5] it therefore remains quite vague. Some respondents were therefore cautious about using it, explaining that they thought the word gender could be understood in relation to transgender or homosexuality.

> *In our society, the concept of gender is still not fully understood as it perhaps should be. It is often equated with certain, how should I put it, value systems that belong to a specific, determination of a person that isn't strictly male or female. It's something that still floats here, remains somewhat fluid, and cannot yet be pinned down or firmly attached to a definition. (T11_BA_UNTZ_FA)*

5 All gender equality laws in the Balkans region in local languages use the word sex, and not gender for example: Zakon o ravnopravnosti spolova, (The Law on Equality of Sexes), but when they translate these laws in English they use word gender, which also suggests that the two words are used simultaneously as some respondents reported in this research.

Apart from the fact that some individuals associate the terms 'gender' and 'gender-based violence' with homosexuality and the LGBTQA+ community, they also explain in interviews that the majority are not open to these issues and tend to ignore them. This is yet another strategy to continue sidelining these topics in educational programs and campaigns, effectively sweeping them under the rug. One of the female teacher from Tuzla explained the climate at the University:

> *I wouldn't say that people in the academic community are not well-informed. But how open are they to issues of gender-based violence and the developments surrounding this problem? That's a different question. We have all received timely information about the research conducted and the acts amended at the University. However, the University is a very conservative community and is resistant to change, especially when the University's structures include people who are not open to change and are unwilling to implement substantive changes. These changes should go beyond merely adopting gender-sensitive language in official documents or distributing questionnaires or organising workshops and lectures. (T10 BA UNTZ FN)*

Another reason for the low level of knowledge about gender and GBV is that it primarily affects women. Furthermore, when it is addressed, it is often linked to violence against women and domestic violence. It is also dismissed as not being a significant issue until the most severe forms, such as femicide, occur. A teacher from Banja Luka explained it in the following way:

> *…unlike other definitions such as violence specifically against women, domestic violence, or peer violence, gender-based violence is perhaps the term that best encompasses various forms of violence rooted in gender and includes those forms of violence that have, until now, largely been overlooked. For instance, when we talk about sexual*

> *harassment, it was until recently considered something insignificant, something no one should complain about, as if it had no particular consequences. (T16 BA UNIBL FN)*

A low level of general awareness, together with GBV within the university community being regarded as a less important issue, results in GBV being discussed only when a femicide occurs. Even then, public attention does not last long, and this was emphasised by several respondents. One of the male teachers from Mostar underlined the lack of sensibility and responsibility of the academic community that undertook many formal steps to mainstream gender equality. Her response portrayed a general apathy among citizens, which also impacts effective prevention of GBV in universities:

> *However, things in our relationships, in our mutual respect, and, let's say, the implementation of certain plans related to gender equality, are different. Paper, as paper, can include indicators, measures, activities, and responsible bodies—paper can accommodate everything, as they say—but it is crucial how do we sensitise ourselves? How do we become more attuned to these issues? Okay, fine, it's not happening to me, but it's happening to the daughter or son of my colleague, neighbour—so why don't we react? (T25_BA_UNMO_MN)*

This research reveals that society remains distinctly polarized. Divisions are rooted in the juxtaposition of conservative/traditional values against liberal ones. Both sets of values are not only perceived as dominant but are also recognized as integral carriers of cultural identity. On the one hand, conservative and traditional values are often linked to the preservation of heritage, social stability, and adherence to established norms, which many view as safeguarding cultural continuity and collective identity. On the other hand, liberal values are associated with progress, inclusivity, and the adaptation of societal frameworks to the demands of contemporary globalized contexts.

Traditional familial roles, which predominantly frame women as caregivers and homemakers and men as breadwinners, perpetuate patriarchal structures. This dynamic is further exacerbated by a culture of silence and tolerance towards violence within family settings, creating significant barriers to transformative change. According to many researchers Michau, et a, 2015, Lomazzi, 2023, Spahić Šiljak, Kovačević, Husanović 2023, FRA, EIGE, Eurostat 2024, the normalization of violence in familial contexts establishes patterns of intergenerational transmission, reinforcing harmful gender norms. The culture of violence, deeply embedded in societal norms, perpetuates the normalisation and justification of violent behaviours. This phenomenon is rooted in historical, cultural, and structural inequalities that shape perceptions of power, gender roles, and acceptable behaviour. Societal norms often trivialize or excuse certain forms of violence, particularly when it aligns with traditional hierarchies or power dynamics, such as GBV, domestic abuse, or bullying.

4.2. Gender Stereotypes and Re-Traditionalization of Gender Roles

Religious and traditional norms also pose significant challenges. In many societies, conservative interpretations of religious teachings and entrenched cultural traditions sustain gender hierarchies. Respondents from Croatia highlight the negative impact of religion on gender equality, while those from Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina emphasize the oppressive role of tradition in sustaining systemic inequalities. Kandiyoti's (1988) the concept of "patriarchal bargains" explains how women navigate and sometimes reinforce these systems for survival.

Global trends such as re-traditionalisation, and the rise of "new conservatism" in the region, have exacerbated stagnation or regression in societal progress (Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017, Anić and Spahić Šiljak, 2020). The interplay between political transitions, the proliferation of globalized media, and evolving educational practices creates additional barriers to addressing these entrenched issues.

Table 18. Level of Agreement on Male-Female Roles and Duties 2024

STATEMENT	Completely agree		Partly agree		Undecided		Partly disagree		Completely disagree		Pearson chi-2
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Women naturally possess a stronger capacity for empathy and compassion	26.4	37.8	42.7	41.9	10.3	6.3	8.4	6.7	12.2	7.4	Pr = 0.000
A man should be more dominant than the woman he is in a relationship with because men are the protectors of women	19.9	10.3	26.6	23.5	8.7	6.9	14.5	17.2	30.4	7.7	Pr = 0.000
It is normal for greater financial responsibility to fall on the man rather than the woman in providing for their family.	27.8	13.1	21.3	21.3	8.4	6.9	12.1	16.0	30.5	42.7	Pr = 0.000
It is natural for child-rearing to be more of a woman's than a man's role.	10.0	3.4	19.6	14.4	9.2	4.6	18.6	18.1	42.6	59.4	Pr = 0.000
Women, as mothers, are the queens of their homes and deserve greater attention and respect than men	19.3	11.2	21.2	16.8	11.8	8.9	17.5	20.7	30.3	42.4	Pr = 0.000

A quantitative analysis of respondents' answers regarding gender roles and societal expectations reveals persistently high percentages supporting traditional gender roles within the academic community. For instance, **71.1% of men and 78.7% of women** agree and partly agree that *women naturally possess a stronger capacity for empathy and compassion,* while **46.5% of men and 33.8% of women** agree and partly agree that *a man should be*

more dominant than the woman he is in a relationship with, because men are the protectors of women. These findings strongly indicate a widespread acceptance of traditional gender roles. While adherence to such roles is not inherently problematic if it stems from personal choice, it has significant implications for broader societal and economic structures. Traditional gender divisions often place women in a position of economic disadvantage, perpetuating their vulnerability and dependence. This dependency can become a key factor preventing women from leaving abusive relationships or partnerships. The internalisation of traditional roles not only limits women's autonomy but also reinforces systemic inequality, creating barriers to achieving gender equality in both private and public spheres. Addressing these deeply ingrained perceptions is crucial for promoting more equitable power dynamics and empowering women to make independent life choices free from economic and social constraints.

Chart 7. Level of Agreement Regarding Female Nature by Gender 2024

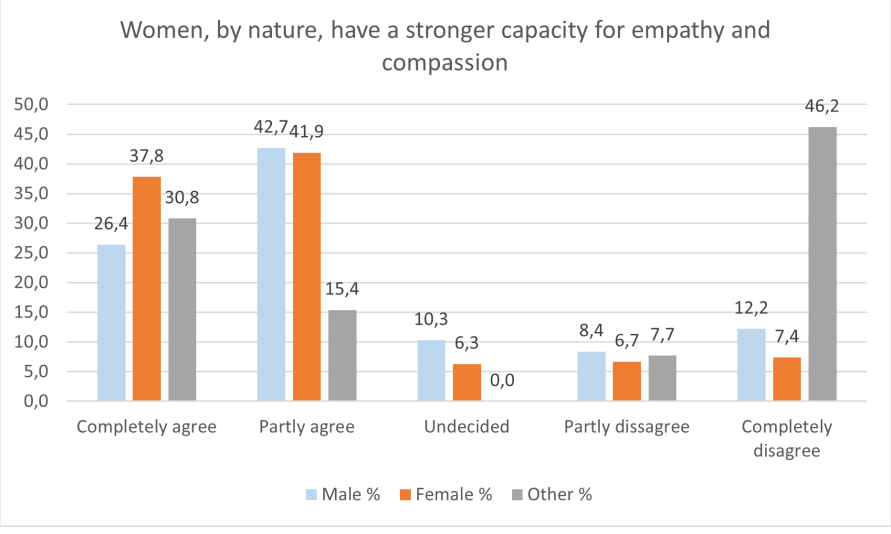


Chart 8. Level of Agreement That A Man should be dominant 2024

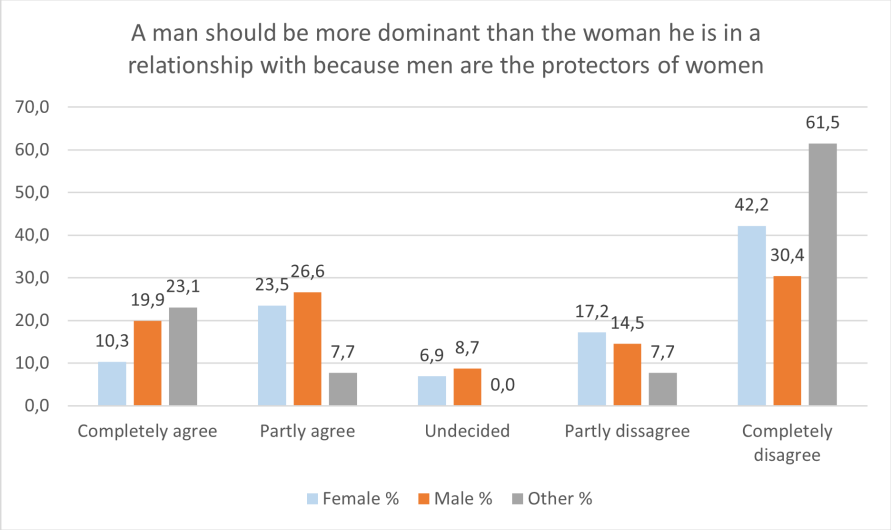
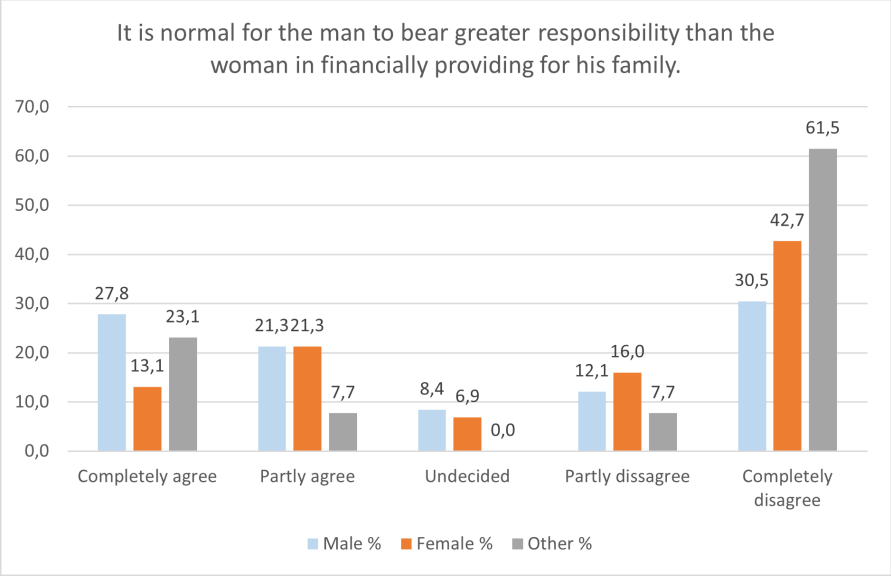


Chart 9. Level of agreement on Man's Financial Responsibility, by Gender 2024



Qualitative data reveal similar patterns and show the majority of respondents describe the Balkans society as patriarchal with traditional gender roles, which is also in line with the quantitative data.

> *Well, it is very important, especially for our patriarchal society where men are dominant... because through upbringing, they are often given many rights to things they shouldn't necessarily have rights to. (T61_SR_UNS_FS)*

Persistence of stereotypical gender roles, such as the belief that women are naturally more empathetic and compassionate, men should dominate and protect women in relationships, and men should bear greater financial responsibility for their families, has significant implications for understanding and addressing GBV. These beliefs contribute to normalisation of unequal power dynamics between men and women and perpetuating such dynamics which are key factors in the prevalence of GBV. These stereotypes uphold patriarchal norms which position men as dominant and women as subordinate. Such power imbalances create an environment where men may feel entitled to control women, and women may be conditioned to accept unequal treatment, increasing the risk of GBV. The idea that men are "protectors" can also justify possessive or controlling behaviours under the guise of care, potentially escalating into abusive situations.

One of the female teachers from BiH explains a growing trend among young men to adopt misogynistic rhetoric and attitudes toward women, rooted in the perception that women asserting their freedom or autonomy is a challenge to traditional gender roles.

> *There are insults directed at girls who dress differently or more freely. Increasingly, among younger boys, there's a narrative that she's a slut, she's easy... This hateful rhetoric against women, particularly among younger boys, is becoming more prevalent, especially in the 18-19 age group. Have women also contributed to this? I believe they have, in some way... It's all a matter of sexuality. It's not just a reaction to patriarchal systems and those repressive mechanisms, but it also happens*

> *in the media and through music, for instance, the case with Puff Diddy. That terrible, misogynistic, toxic attitude toward women... where men perceive themselves as entitled to say, 'I'll show her who I am.' On the other hand, there's this need for control over women, this narrative that women have slipped out of control because women think they've liberated themselves. Should we teach boys to accept that women also have the right to see themselves as equal sexual beings who have their own needs, desires, and want to live freely? Or should we put burqas and hijabs on women and move in that direction? (T96 HR SVEOS FN)*

The statement aligns with theories of gender and power dynamics, (bell hooks, 1990; Connell, 1995) work on hegemonic masculinity. It reflects how patriarchal structures adapt and manifest in both overtly repressive and subtler, socially ingrained forms of control. Beliefs in traditional gender roles can normalise and justify certain forms of violence. For example, if men are seen as protectors, aggressive or violent behaviours may be excused as a means of "discipline" or maintaining control. Women may be less likely to report GBV if they internalize the belief that men are naturally dominant and that they should be submissive or tolerant in relationships. The stereotype that men should be financially responsible reinforces economic dependence for women. This dependency can make it difficult for women to leave abusive relationships, as they may lack the financial resources or societal support to live independently. Stereotypes that emphasise women's emotional strength and men's dominance, may trivialize emotional and psychological forms of GBV, focusing only on physical violence. For example, emotional manipulation or controlling behaviour may be overlooked because it aligns with traditional expectations.

In the following charts women, men as well as teachers, students and administrative staff respond to the statement that in their countries women and men enjoy equality in all areas of life. The majority of women, 66.1%, completely or partly disagree while only 34.8% men completely or partly disagree. This shows that

how men and women perceive the situation, regarding women's equality is unequal. When the comparison is analysed by country, there is a further difference. Women in Croatia (60.5% completely and partly disagree) whereas women in Serbia (67.2% completely and partly disagree). Whereas less than 50% women respondents in Montenegro and BiH disagree.

Chart 10. Level of Agreement that Women and Men are Equal by Gender 2024

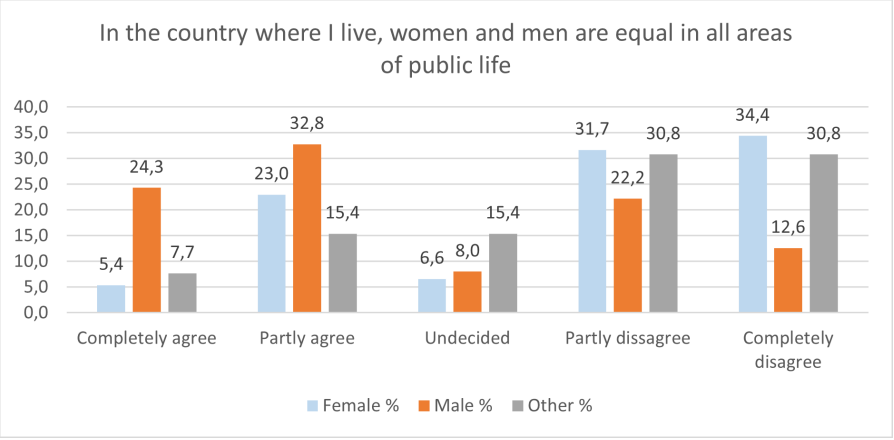


Chart 11. Level of Agreement that Women and Men are Equal by Country 2024

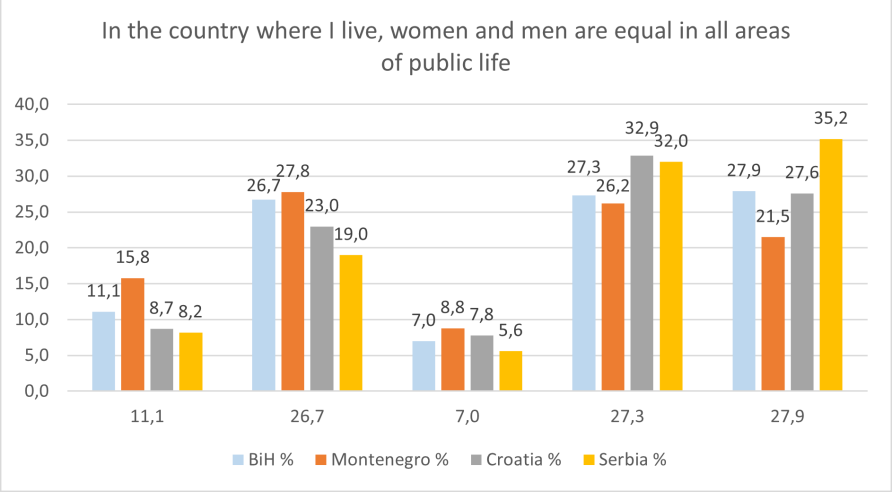
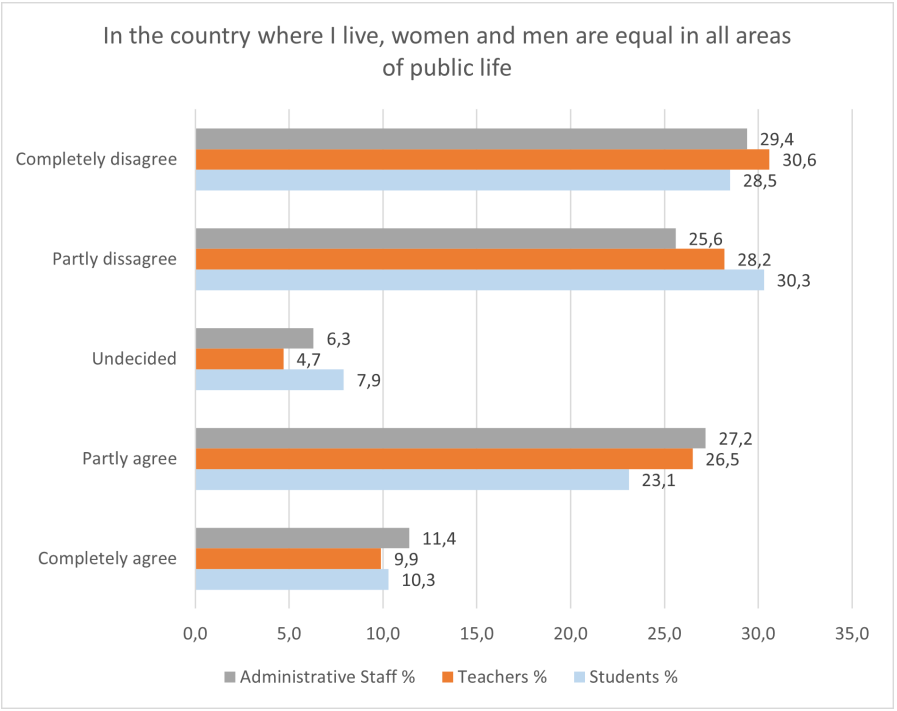


Chart 12. Level of Agreement that Women and Men are Equal by Status 2024



Traditional gender roles are reflected in the feminisation of occupations and jobs that women choose to undertake. Although women have broken the 'glass ceiling' in recent decades, they are still navigating a labyrinth where it is challenging to find a way out and reconcile family life with their careers. Research shows women still choose careers, which are considered to be female occupations. These trends also exist in academic careers as some respondents explained:

> *For example, at our faculty and in the Medical Faculty, there is a prevailing stereotype that men are more suited to being doctors, while women are seen as more suited to being pharmacists. Nobody openly states this, but it's an opinion that exists. T19 BA UNIBL FS*

> *So, it's a situation of unequal power, where the side that holds greater power—whether physical or metaphorical—and abuses its position, exerting violence on the individual who is weaker, both physically and in terms of status, and so on. (T56_SR_UNS_FN)*

> *I've also noticed that people tend to categorise even faculties as male or female. For example, they consider electrical engineering to be a male faculty, while pedagogy is seen as female. (T38_BA_UES_FS)*

The division into so-called female and male occupations is also reflected in salaries and decision-making positions, which predominantly favour men. Socially categorised and assigned gender roles, along with cultural norms, influence not only the choice of professions and jobs but also contribute to the economic dependency of women.

> *In our societies, the distribution of power tends to revolve around men. For instance, certain roles and professions are privileged for them, leading to noticeable disparities in salaries, which are then reflected across all sectors. (T50_BA_IUT_MN)*

The respondents in the study also noted that men are resistant to change, and that gender equality does not suit them. This is evident in new trends among younger generations, who are increasingly turning to traditional gender roles. However, such trends, popularised through platforms like 'tradwives' in the United States, primarily appeal to a smaller number of privileged women who romanticise the 1950s where the primary role of women was perceived as caring for the home, raising children, and supporting their husbands as the breadwinner. However, some women within this movement use their role as traditional housewives to create content and earn income on digital platforms, monetising homemaking and lifestyle advice.

There have been certain changes, but a clear division and rift remain between those who adhere to tradition and religion and those striving to change gender roles. Such individuals often encounter resistance, and women frequently give up. Among the younger generations, trends of 'tradwives,' traditional homemakers, are emerging. It's considered trendy now. (T63_SR_UNBG_FN)

What patriarchy and gender inequalities actually do, is to work to their (male) advantage. They feel this way because, as highlighted in existing research, men often feel threatened when a woman advances before them. It bothers them, and they are uncomfortable with the situation as it stands. (T6 BA UNSA FS)

I believe that is the case. Men are generally more resistant to change and less open to embracing new things, whereas women tend to be more adaptable, proactive in self-improvement, and eager to learn. Of course, there are exceptions, and I don't want to generalize strictly, but I think women have historically been the drivers of change. (T19 BA UNIBL FS)

Conclusion

The persistence of cultural norms and traditional gender roles significantly contributes to the prevalence and normalisation of GBV. Stereotypical beliefs, such as women being inherently empathetic and compassionate, men being dominant protectors, and the expectation for men to bear primary financial responsibility for families, reinforce unequal power dynamics between

the genders. These norms create an environment where control, entitlement, and subordination are normalised, thus perpetuating the systemic conditions that enable GBV.

Socio-cultural norms that promote male dominance and female subordination institutionalise unequal power relationships, making it more likely for violence to be justified or dismissed within intimate and societal relationships. The perception of men as protectors and decision-makers can mask controlling or abusive behaviours under the guise of care and responsibility. Gendered economic roles exacerbate women's dependency on men, limiting their ability to escape abusive relationships and making them more vulnerable to exploitation and control. Traditional roles that associate dominance with masculinity and tolerance with femininity, deter both women and men from recognising, reporting, or seeking help for GBV. Women may internalise these norms, believing that abuse is a part of their role, while male victims may face stigmatisation and disbelief.

Compared to 2021, when the UNIGEM project was launched, there has been a significant increase in the number of respondents at universities who are familiar with the concept of GBV. This indicates that the projects intended outcomes from education and campaigns have been achieved. However, for the practical implementation of legal measures and GAP policies, it is crucial to continue working systematically. Therefore, universities and schools should employ a multidimensional and interdisciplinary approaches to address these complex and deeply rooted challenges, to create sustainable pathways toward equality and justice.

Addressing GBV requires dismantling deeply rooted cultural norms that promote traditional gender roles. This involves engaging communities in conversations about equality, power dynamics and respect in relationships. Effective prevention and intervention strategies must prioritise cultural transformation, education, and the dismantling of harmful gender norms to reduce GBV and promote a more equitable society. Without addressing these cultural underpinnings, efforts to combat GBV will remain limited in scope and impact.

Chapter 5.

Religion and Gender-Based Violence

Introduction

Religion holds a profound importance for people in the Balkans due to deep historical, cultural, and social roots in the region. For centuries, religious institutions have played a pivotal role in shaping national identities, especially in times of political upheaval, war, and foreign occupation. During the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian periods, religion often served as a marker of ethnic identity—distinguishing Orthodox Christians, Catholics, and Muslims—and became intertwined with notions of belonging and community (Fetahagić, 2012).

The fall of communism in the late 20th century further amplified the significance of religion, as it re-emerged as a public force following decades of state-imposed secularisation. (Abazović, 2006; Cvitković, 2016; Vrcan, 2001). In this context, religion provided not only a spiritual foundation but also a means of cultural revival and resistance, symbolising continuity and stability amidst societal change. Today, religious traditions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam remain closely tied to family life, rituals, and festivals, fostering a sense of cohesion and shared heritage. However, the resurgence of religion in the 1990s involved **repoliticisation and movement out of the private sphere,** as religious institutions

began to exert direct influence on socio-political decision-making processes in the public sphere.

In addition to influencing policy decisions, religious communities have played a pivotal role in framing discussions on gender, sexuality, and family values. Their resistance to progressive measures—such as the deconstruction of gender stereotypes and the ratification of international conventions like the Istanbul Convention—demonstrates an ongoing effort to maintain traditional structures of power and morality.

The **repoliticisation of religion** has had a profound impact on public discourse in these countries, fostering a cultural climate where traditional values are often juxtaposed with efforts toward gender equality and human rights. By actively shaping the narrative around key socio-political issues, religious communities have reasserted themselves as powerful stakeholders, blurring the lines between the secular and the sacred in the governance and cultural frameworks of the region.

The follow-up UNIGEM research underscores how religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro continue to shape public and political life, not merely as spiritual institutions but as central actors in the discourse on morality, gender roles, and societal norms.

5.1. Religious and Philosophical Roots of Gender Stereotypes

Religious communities in the Balkans occupy an ambivalent position regarding GBV. On one hand, they openly condemn violence, particularly domestic violence, and offer support to women and children who are disproportionately victims of GBV. In BiH they participate in campaigns against GBV and organize education on these themes (United Nations, 2023) [6]. On the other hand, their theological doctrines and canon often perpetuate gender stereotypes, indirectly sustaining cultural and structural

6 United Nations, Bosna i Hercegovina. 2023. Religious Leaders Stand up to Violence Against Women. https://bosniaherzegovina.un.org/en/190046-religious-leaders-standing-violence-against-women (accessed on December 18. 2024)

violence, which further enables personal violence (Anić and Spahić Šiljak, 2023). Women are frequently undervalued within these religious frameworks, as evidenced by the denial of equal rights compared to men. Religious narratives often attribute qualities to women—such as endurance, unconditional love, and selflessness—tying these traits to their roles within the private sphere and emphasizing their duty to uphold and preserve the family unit. Such narratives reinforce a stereotypical and limiting division of gender roles. (Bobić and Anić, 2023; Kovačević and Spahić Šiljak, 2025).

Efforts to deconstruct these stereotypes are often met with strong resistance from religious leaders and traditional theologians, who argue that such changes threaten theological anthropology, family values, and even the fabric of humanity itself. These perspectives suggest that gender roles are inherently tied to religious teachings, framing any challenge to these stereotypes as an existential threat. However, contemporary theological research refutes these claims, asserting that the deconstruction of gender stereotypes does not dismantle theological anthropology. Instead, it liberates these concepts from their historical metaphysical framing, which has often served specific political and social interests (Anić and Spahić Šiljak, 2023).

Theological anthropology, rooted in sacred texts, is shaped by interpretation. This process has evolved over centuries, influenced by social, cultural, and political contexts as well as discoveries in the humanities and sciences. For example, historical interpretations of Christian and Islamic gender norms have been deeply shaped by Aristotelian philosophy, particularly the theory of the active male and passive female, which became embedded in theology either directly (in Catholic and Islamic traditions) or indirectly through cultural norms (in Orthodox traditions). This Aristotelian philosophical legacy not only defined gender roles within religious thought but also influenced secular fields like medicine and biology, creating a foundation for modern gender stereotypes and biological determinism (Anić and Spahić Šiljak, 2020).

Contemporary scientific literature often describes the gender binary as “agency” (independent, competitive, determine, aggressive, dominant for men and “communality”(amicable, selfless, compassionate and expressive) for women (Eagly et. al. 2003; Eagly and Carli, 2007; Spahić Šiljak, 2021). These traits translate into a division of labor and roles, with men dominating the public sphere while women are relegated to the private. Such stereotypes, identified by international frameworks like the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)** and the **Council of Europe Convention on Combating Violence Against Women (Istanbul Convention)**, are recognized as root causes of gender inequality and consequently GBV.

The intertwined influence of secular and religious arguments on gender stereotypes is particularly evident in the Balkans. Aristotle’s philosophical assumptions about women’s nature—viewing them as inherently subordinate to men—not only shaped ancient theology but also established a foundation for cultural, medical, and philosophical norms that persist to this day. For instance, Prudence Allen (1985) highlights how Aristotelian thought has shaped Western views on gender identity and roles, becoming an invisible yet pervasive framework in contemporary debates. Other scholars emphasise Aristotle’s influence on modern natural sciences, further embedding these stereotypes into societal norms (Bobić and Anić, 2023).

This deep entanglement of religion, culture, and tradition with Aristotelian gender constructs creates a significant challenge for dismantling gender stereotypes and addressing GBV. The cultural and theological embedding of these ideas “makes it difficult to separate the influence of culture, religion and tradition on the continuation of gender stereotypes and the acceptance of gender-based violence” (Bobić and Anić, 2023, 103). As a result, combating GBV in the Balkans requires a comprehensive approach that challenges these intertwined systems, combining efforts in education, religious reform, and cultural transformation to address the structural roots of gender inequality.

5.2. Influence of Religion on Gender Roles

The starting assumption of the UNIGEM research conducted in 2021 was that respondents would recognise the influence of religion on gender stereotypes and gender-based violence, as well as its connection to cultural and traditional practices that collectively shape perceptions of gender equality.

In the following graphical representation, one can see the percentage of respondents from Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina who fully or partially agree with the statement that 'religious traditions promote traditional roles of women and men. Majority of women (87%) and men (84,7%) agree and partially agree on this.

Chart 13. Level of Agreement on Religious Foundation of Traditional Roles of Women and Men by Gender 2024

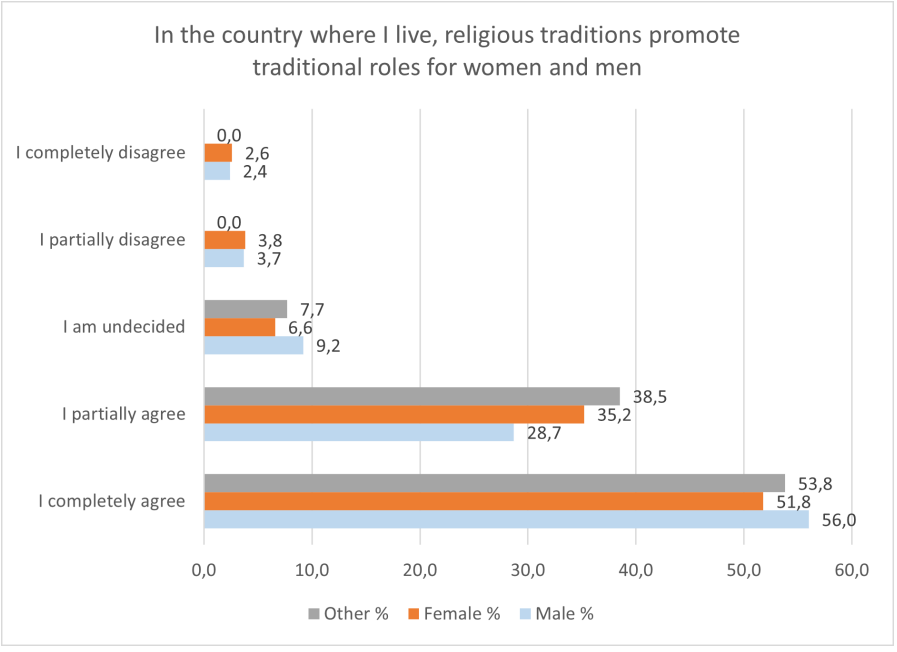
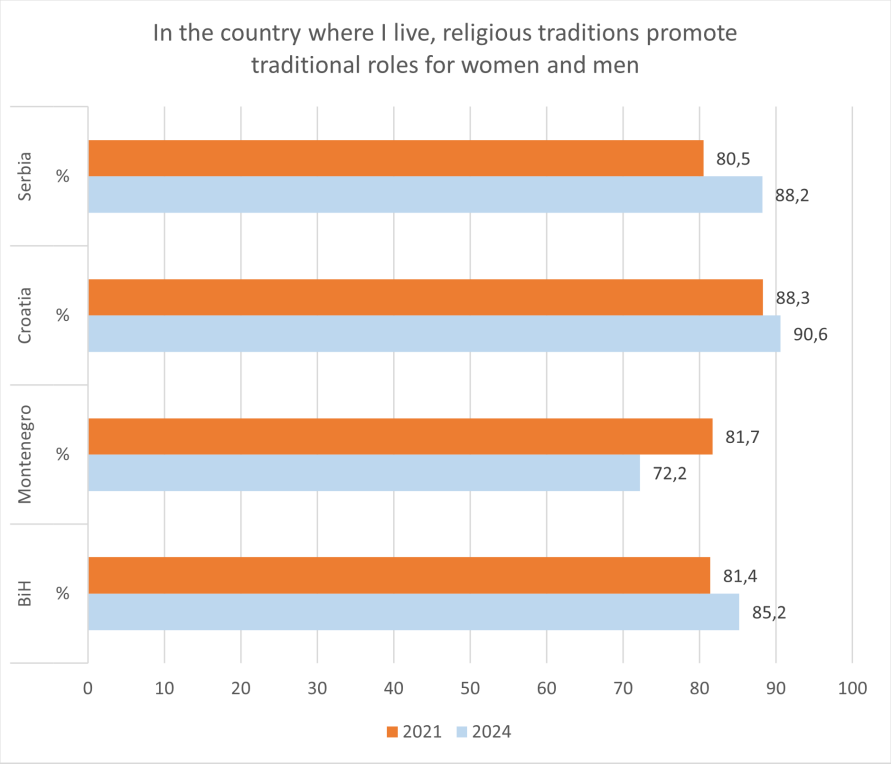


Chart 14. Level of Agreement on Religious Foundation of Traditional Roles of Women and Men by Country 2021-2024



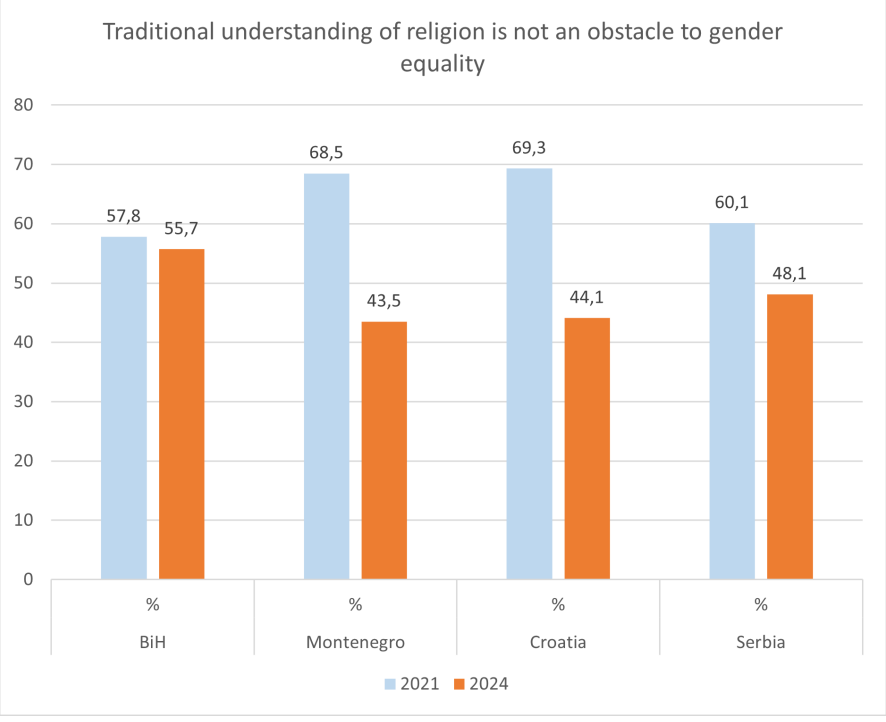
The analysis of data from 2021 and 2024 reveals certain changes in perceptions among respondents from different countries. In Serbia, agreement significantly increased from 80.5% in 2021 to 88.2% in 2024, indicating a growing perception of the influence of religious traditions in shaping gender roles. A similar trend was observed in Croatia, where agreement rose from 88.3% to 90.6%, reaffirming the ongoing perception of the strong impact of religious traditions. Conversely, Montenegro experienced a decline, with agreement dropping from 81.7% in 2022 to 79.2% in 2024. This may suggest that respondents from this country are becoming less inclined to associate religious traditions with gender roles but the percentage is still high. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, agreement increased from 81.4% to 85.2%.

Statistical analyses undertaken by respondent groups, however, reveal significant differences. Among students, the difference

between 2021 and 2024 is highly significant (Pr = 0.000), while for teaching staff, it is also statistically significant (Pr = 0.019). Administrative staff shows a similar trend, with a smaller but statistically significant difference (Pr = 0.031). These results indicate that the perception of the role of religious traditions in promoting traditional gender roles has evolved significantly between 2022 and 2024, with particular emphasis on the differences among respondent groups and the specificities of their social contexts.

The following chart, which illustrates the level of agreement among all respondents with the statement that "the traditional understanding of religion is not an obstacle to gender equality," complements the previous analysis by offering insights into the perception of religious traditions in the context of gender equality in Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina during 2021 and 2024.

Chart 15. Traditional Religion is (not) Obstacle to Gender Equality by Country 2021-2024



In Serbia, a decline in agreement was recorded, from 60.1% in 2022 to 48.1% in 2024. This trend indicates an increasing skepticism toward the claim that traditional understandings of religion do not hinder the achievement of gender equality. A similar pattern is observed in Croatia, where agreement dropped from 69.3% to 44.2% in 2024, suggesting a shift in attitudes toward a more critical perspective on traditional religious norms. Montenegro shows a similar decline in agreement, from 68.5% in 2022 to 43.5% in 2024, while Bosnia and Herzegovina experienced an increase, from 52.8% in 2022 to 55.8%.

Statistical analyses reveal interesting differences among respondent groups. Among students, the difference between the periods is statistically significant (Pr = 0.018), indicating a change in attitudes within this population. In contrast, among teachers (Pr = 0.115) and administrative staff (Pr = 0.109), the differences are not statistically significant, suggesting more stable attitudes within these groups.

These results, combined with previous findings, point to a growing critique of traditional religious norms in the context of gender equality, particularly among students. The perception that religious traditions promote gender roles and that traditional understandings of religion can be an obstacle to equality demonstrates that religion remains a complex and ambivalent factor in perceptions of gender equality in the region.

In the qualitative part of the research, the respondents particularly emphasised their resistance to traditional gender roles, which position the man as the head of the household and dominant over the woman. They also highlighted opposition to machismo attitudes and toxic masculinity, the growing tendency toward re-patriarchalisation of society, and the interconnecting of religion, nation, and patriotism.

> *In my opinion, it's still the heroic image. It's the idea that the man is the main figure, the one who should provide for the family, who is, so to speak, the head of the household and has the final say in everything. So, even though this originates from ancient times, our mentality remains the same, and it has persisted. (T99 CG UDG MS)*

Well, the dominant and most desirable stereotypes of men in our region are the patriot, the nationalist, and the believer. (T68_SR_UNBG_FS)

Yes, toxic masculinity can be the reason behind the emphasis on such ideas…perhaps it is not explicitly stated that aggression is acceptable, but the notion of dominance—that the man is the head of the household, that he decides, that he must contribute financially while the woman is expected to stay at home—remains present even if it is not openly discussed. (T14 BA UNTZ FS)

Well, because this is a highly patriarchal culture, it seems to me that both consciously and unconsciously—because it has been normalised—children are raised differently depending on their gender. Boys, in particular, are often encouraged to develop traits associated with machismo (T56_SR_UNS_FN)

Societies in the Balkans are predominantly patriarchal, with men often viewed as the "head of the household", but women play significant roles behind the scenes. This dynamic creates a balance where men may hold formal authority, but women exercise practical control over key aspects of family life, such as finances and household management. The societal pressure for men to maintain the image of "head of the household" persists, even when their authority is, in practice, dependent on the contributions and sacrifices of women. This points to a fragile construct of masculinity that relies on symbolic power rather than practical leadership. Despite men being culturally positioned as the dominant figures, women are described as the true "enablers" who sustain the family structure. This highlights the invisible labor and emotional burden that women carry, even in systems where men are outwardly perceived as leaders.

A very small number of respondents spoke openly about the relationship between the Church and religious communities, avoiding direct criticism. The reluctance to openly criticise religious institutions often stems from a complex interplay of cultural norms, social expectations, internalised beliefs, and fear of repercussions. This silence highlights the need for safe spaces where individuals can engage in open and constructive dialogue about the role of religion and religious institutions in society, especially regarding issues like gender equality and GBV.

> *The churches and religious leaders mostly remain silent and repeat that women should accept the traditions and roles within the family that God has given, without addressing men to take responsibility. (T68_SR_UNBG_FS)*

Despite the fact that many respondents both in interviews and in the survey concluded that religious traditions in their countries promote traditional gender roles, when asked whether traditional understanding of religion represents an obstacle to gender equality, a significant number of respondents disagree. However, there are differences compared to 2021, as in 2024, the number of those who believe that the traditional understanding of religion is not an obstacle to gender equality has decreased. Only this percentage (57.8% in 2021) remains approximately the same in BiH (2024 55.7%), while in other countries, it has fallen below 50%

It seems that many respondents likely differentiate between religion as a belief system and human interpretations of religious teachings. They may believe that while current societal interpretations of religious traditions reinforce traditional gender roles, the essence of religion itself does not necessarily contradict gender equality.

Some respondents may see traditional teachings as culturally shaped rather than divinely mandated. Throughout history, religious texts have been interpreted in various ways, often shaped by cultural, historical, and political contexts. Progressive religious scholars often argue that the original religious teachings

emphasise justice, dignity, and respect for all humans, including women (Duderija, 2024). For some respondents from the student population, the difference between culture and religion is relevant:

> *For me, religion can serve as an argument for promoting gender equality because, as a believer, I am aware of how various customs and cultural practices have been integrated into religious interpretations. (T41_BA_UNZE_FS)*

> *Looking at it (GBV) from the perspective of faith, religion doesn't support it. (T38_BA_UES_FS)*

> *Some progressive religious education teachers always speak against family violence and that ruins a person's dignity. (T82_HR_UNZG_FS)*

In the last two decades, significant attention has been given to the intersection of religion, culture, and gender equality, with several NGOs focusing specifically on these issues. One such initiative, *Believers and Citizens*, launched by the TPO Foundation from Sarajevo, has educated hundreds of women across the region. In the past four years, this effort has been further strengthened through the *Feminism and Religion* online school,[7] which has promoted these discussions at universities, providing accessible alternatives to mainstream interpretations of religion (Spahić Šiljak and Anić, 2024). While religious institutions may reinforce traditional gender roles, many people still believe that faith itself upholds equality and justice. Some respondents may attribute gender roles more to culture than to religion, since culture and religion are so deeply intertwined in many societies.

7 Feminism and Religion (FER) online school is the first academic program in the region established by TPO foundation in partnership with Ecumenical Women's Initiative from Omis in Croatia. More on: https://ferskola2022.onlinebase.net/en/home/

Finally, some respondents may hesitate to openly declare religion as an obstacle to gender equality due to social pressure or fear of being perceived as anti-religious. Instead, they may choose a more moderate stance, acknowledging traditional gender roles but not directly opposing religious traditions.

Conclusion

The relationship between religion and gender-based violence (GBV) is complex and multifaceted, as evidenced by the qualitative and quantitative data analyzed. While religion can play a positive role in promoting values of equality and justice, its traditional interpretations, when intertwined with culture and patriarchy, often contribute to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and societal norms that sustain and silently accept GBV.

Respondents across different countries recognized that religious traditions often reinforce traditional gender roles, positioning men as dominant figures and women as subordinate, confined largely to caregiving and domestic roles. These roles are deeply rooted in patriarchal interpretations of religious teachings, which uphold ideals of male dominance and female submission. Normalisation of the traditional gender roles perpetuates structural and cultural violence, providing fertile ground for GBV to thrive, particularly in contexts where religious norms are seen as divinely ordained and unchangeable. Intersection of religion with cultural and traditional practices further complicates efforts to address GBV. In many cases, these factors are so deeply intertwined that respondents found it difficult to disentangle them. This intersection creates a societal framework where gender inequality is normalised and justified under the guise of religious or cultural authenticity.

Many respondents avoided directly criticising religious institutions, reflecting the deep social and cultural authority of religion in the countries studied. This silence often stems from respect for tradition, fear of social stigma, or internalised religious norms, which prevent open dialogue about the negative impacts of religion on gender equality and GBV.

While traditional interpretations often reinforce patriarchal norms which perpetuate GBV, religion also holds transformative potential to promote gender equality and dismantle harmful stereotypes. Achieving this requires a collaborative approach involving religious communities, policymakers, educators, and civil society organisations. By fostering progressive theological discourse and addressing the intersection of religion, culture, and tradition, societies can leverage the positive aspects of faith to combat GBV and advance gender equality.

Chapter 6.

Perceptions and Experiences of University Teachers on Gender-Based Violence and Discrimination: Reflecting on Traditional and Cultural Factors

Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a fundamental violation of human rights that encompasses physical, sexual, psychological, and economic harm targeting individuals based on their gender, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life (cf. Council of Europe, 2011). The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE, 2024) expands this definition to include institutional and structural forms of violence, particularly in professional and educational settings, emphasizing that GBV is not an individual or isolated issue but rather a systemic problem rooted in patriarchal power relations and gender inequality. Examples of GBV include domestic violence, sexual harassment, workplace discrimination, cyber violence, and economic coercion. GBV can be studied through various interdisciplinary approaches, including feminist theory, gender studies, sociology, law, and psychology, each of which examines the structural, cultural, and institutional factors that perpetuate violence and discrimination (Ahmed,

2021). Taking the perspective of institutional violence or abuse is of relevance in this chapter, as it focuses on the institutional setting of academia and takes traditional and cultural factors into account.

GBV is particularly pervasive in professional environments, where power dynamics create vulnerabilities for those with less institutional authority. Within the European context, the European Commission and EIGE highlight the persistence of GBV and discrimination in the workplace, academia, and research institutions, noting that sexual harassment remains the most underreported form of gendered violence in professional settings. Furthermore, academic institutions frequently fail to address GBV effectively, allowing patterns of sexism and exclusion to persist (EIGE, 2024a; European Commission, 2020). Universities and research institutions, as hierarchical spaces, often reproduce and reinforce gendered power structures that facilitate discrimination and violence (Acker, 1990; Morley, 2011; Makhene, 2022).

Within academia, GBV takes on distinct characteristics due to power asymmetries, hierarchical structures, and deeply ingrained gender norms (Acker, 1990; Morley, 2011). Universities are often perceived as meritocratic institutions, yet gendered discrimination and violence persist through forms such as sexual harassment, academic sabotage, gendered gatekeeping, and exclusion from leadership and decision-making roles (MacKinnon, 1979).

One of the most prevalent forms of GBV in academic settings is sexual harassment, which includes unwelcome sexual advances, inappropriate comments, and coercion tied to professional advancement (UN Women, 2019; UNESCO, 2020). Studies show that female academics and students experience higher rates of harassment, particularly from male colleagues and superiors who wield authority over research, promotions, and funding opportunities (Conrad, Carr, & Knight, 2010; Ahmed, 2021). Another critical issue is scientific and academic sabotage, where women and marginalized groups encounter the systematic devaluation of their work, exclusion from research collaborations, and the theft of intellectual property (Cole & Hassel, 2017). Additionally, the **“**Queen Bee Syndrome”, where senior female academics distance themselves from junior women to align with

male-dominated power structures, exacerbates gendered exclusion (Derks et al., 2011). Women are often excluded from decision-making processes and are disproportionately burdened with administrative and teaching responsibilities rather than research leadership roles (Morley, 2013).

The culture of silence further entrenches GBV in academia, as victims frequently fear retaliation, damage to their reputations, or professional stagnation if they report abuses (Pyke, 2018). In institutions where reporting mechanisms are weak, perpetrators are often protected by tenure systems, informal networks, or institutional inertia (MacKinnon, 1979). The culture of silence can lead to minimizing or even legitimizing violence, leaving the cases of violence unreported out of fear of stigmatization. This allows GBV to persist in subtle but insidious ways, affecting career progression, mental well-being, and academic freedom. These issues are particularly severe in countries with weaker gender equality policies and lack of institutionalized mechanisms for addressing GBV (EIGE, 2024a). Comparative studies across European universities show that GBV prevalence is higher in institutions without clear reporting frameworks and where gender-sensitivity training is absent or optional (Humbert & Strid, 2024).

The intersection of academic careers and traditional gender norms, presents significant challenges for women in higher education. Hochschild's (1989) concept of the "second shift" is particularly relevant in this context, as it highlights how women, even in highly professionalized settings like academia, are often burdened with disproportionate caregiving and domestic responsibilities. These expectations create a double workload, making it harder for women to compete equally in research, publishing, and career advancement. Furthermore, Bourdieu's (2001) concept of symbolic violence helps explain how entrenched academic hierarchies subtly reinforce gendered expectations, discouraging women from fully engaging in leadership roles. In many cultural contexts, women academics are still expected to prioritise family obligations over professional ambitions, a bias that affects tenure-track opportunities, networking access, and participation in decision-making bodies (Morley, 2013). Additionally, Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organisations underscores

how academia, despite its meritocratic ideals, remains structured around masculinised models of success, privileging uninterrupted career trajectories and devaluing emotional labour, mentorship, and administrative work—roles disproportionately assigned to women. These structural and cultural barriers make it difficult for women to advance within academic institutions, particularly in male-dominated fields such as STEM. As a result, traditional and cultural expectations continue to shape women's experiences in academia, leading to persistent inequalities in career progression and workplace treatment. The perspective of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) highlights how gender-based violence intersects with race, class, ethnicity, disability, and other social categories, making some individuals more vulnerable to discrimination. Institutional betrayal theory (Smith & Freyd, 2014) suggests that when institutions fail to protect victims or actively silence them, they contribute to the perpetuation of GBV, reinforcing a culture of impunity.

The COVID-19 crisis exacerbated gender-based violence (GBV) in academia by intensifying power imbalances, increasing isolation, and reducing access to institutional support systems (Lopes, Ferreira, & Santos, 2023; Nash, & Churchill, 2020). With the shift to remote learning and work, many victims of GBV, including faculty, staff, and students, found themselves more vulnerable to harassment and coercion, particularly in online spaces where surveillance and institutional oversight were weaker (Franklin-Corben, & Towl, 2023). Reports indicate that domestic violence surged during lockdowns, disproportionately affecting women academics, who faced heightened workloads, caregiving responsibilities, and economic insecurity, making it harder to report abuse or seek help. Furthermore, the shift to virtual communication led to new forms of cyber harassment, including stalking, inappropriate messages, and online intimidation. Institutional responses were often slow or insufficient, as universities struggled to adapt their anti-GBV policies to the digital environment. The crisis underscored the urgent need for stronger, more adaptable mechanisms to address gendered violence in academic settings, both online and offline.

Initiatives such as mandatory gender sensitivity training, institutional policies on sexual harassment, transparent reporting

mechanisms, gender-sensitive leadership and gender equity audits have been shown to mitigate the prevalence of GBV in higher education and are critical to creating a safer and more inclusive academic environment (UN Women, 2019; EIGE, 2024a). The European Commission's strategic framework for gender equality (2020–2025) recognizes the importance of institutional reforms, policy interventions, and cultural shifts to tackle GBV in academia effectively. This is where the effects of numerous research and education activities within the project UNIGEM find their place, as well as the research that this book reports on. Thus, addressing GBV in academia requires a multi-layered approach that combines legal frameworks, policy interventions, cultural change, and survivor-centred mechanisms to dismantle the gendered structures that perpetuate discrimination and violence in educational institutions.

Understanding GBV in academia requires both structural and cultural analysis, acknowledging that gendered hierarchies shape institutional practices and also everyday interactions. While legal frameworks such as the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe, 2011) and EU gender equality policies provide a foundation for addressing GBV, cultural shifts within academic institutions remain crucial. Addressing GBV requires both policy-level changes and grassroots activism to dismantle deeply entrenched gender norms that perpetuate violence and discrimination in higher education

By conducting research into perceptions and experiences of university teachers regarding GBV, we intend to develop a comprehensive understanding of GBV in academic settings. Further, through implementing effective strategies to prevent and address it, ultimately it should not only be possible to foster a safer and more equitable educational environment but also to contribute to the well-being of entire communities (Sharoni & Klocke, 2019). The UNIGEM project also conducted many teacher education activities with this objective in mind.

This chapter therefore, intends to analyse and discuss the results pertaining to the perception of university teachers, with a gender disaggregated approach in mind, of various forms of gender-based violence as it appears in their academic work and context. The theoretical background is based on a mixed

methods approach, combining quantitative survey analysis and qualitative thematic analysis of semi structured interviews, as described in detail at the beginning of this book, The results from two waves of research are compared – the first conducted in 2021[8] and the follow-up in 2024.

6.1. Prevalence of Different Forms of GBV and the Fear to Report Among Teaching Staff: Analysis of Quantitative Results

This study sought to examine the perception of gender-based violence among university staff, by focusing on the subjective experiences of male and female teachers, and providing comparison analysed by countries included in the research. The table below shows the percentages of different forms of gender-based violence and harassment as reported by university teachers (male and female) in 2021 and 2024. Key findings indicate significant gender differences in experiences across several categories.

Table 19. The Most Prevalent Forms of Gender-Based Violence and Harassment Shown as a Percentage of Total Teaching Staff, by Gender 2021 and 2024

	2021		2024	
	M	F	M	F
Sexually suggestive remarks and comments	44	55.5	33.5	66.3
Inappropriate and offensive comments about physical appearance	28.6	42.9	32.4	67.4
Inappropriate staring or gazing	18.3	42.9	36.6	63.2

8 The results from the first research conducted in 2021 were published in 2022 in Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian (Spahić Šiljak, Kovačević & Husanović, 2022) and in 2023 in English (Spahić Šiljak, Kovačević & Husanović, 2023).

Stalking, whether physical or via social media	14.3	20.8	30.8	69.1
Sexually explicit messages sent via electronic communication channels	16.2	17.8	30.8	69.1
Persistent invitations to meetings despite explicit refusals	5.1	13.7	31.9	68
Unwanted physical contact	8.2	19	32.8	67.1

The data analysis for 2024, compared to 2021, reveals significant changes in the experiences of GBV and harassment among university teaching staff. While patterns of harassment remain evident, the data indicate shifts in the intensity of certain forms of violence experienced by female and male teachers.

In 2024, sexually suggestive remarks and comments were still more frequently reported by female professors (66.3%) than male professors (33.5%), with a noticeable increase among women only as compared to 2021 (55.5% of female teachers and 44% of male teachers). This suggests not only a continued prevalence of verbal harassment, but also the possibility of there being a greater awareness and willingness to report these incidents by men.

Regarding inappropriate and offensive comments about physical appearance, female teaching staff maintained high percentages and a significant increase over the two years (67.4% in 2024, compared to 42.9% in 2021), while male teachers saw a slight increase (32.4% in 2024 compared to 28.6% in 2022). This trend indicates increased recognition of such forms of harassment in academic settings. Inappropriate staring or gazing remained prevalent and increased significantly among female teachers in 2024 (63.2% compared to 42.9% in 2021), while for male teachers the rate doubled from 18.3% in 2021 to 36.6% in 2024.

Stalking, whether physical or via social media, was more frequently reported by female teachers in 2024 (69.1%) compared to 20.8% in 2022, while the rate for male teachers rose more than doubly from 14.3% in 2021 to 30.8% in 2024. Reports of

sexually explicit messages sent via electronic communication channels also increased significantly for female teachers (69.1% in 2024 compared to 17.8% in 2022). For male teachers the percentage also rose significantly, from 16.2% to 30.8%.

Persistent invitations to meetings despite clear refusals grew significantly from 2021 to 2024, from 13.7% to 68% for female teachers and 5.1% to 31.9% for male teachers.

The most significant increase was observed in reports of unwanted physical contact, where female teachers' reports rose to 67.1% in 2024 compared to 19% in 2021, while for male teachers, the percentage increased from 8.2% to 32.8%.

Compared to 2021, 2024 data gathered reveals a significant rise in reports of all forms of GBV, particularly among female teaching staff. This increase may not only reflect a higher incidence of such behaviours but also greater awareness and willingness to report these types of harassment.

These findings emphasise the urgent need for stronger protection mechanisms, prevention strategies, and support systems for women in academic environments to reduce their exposure to violence and create a safer workplace.

In looking at the results regarding fear of reporting GBV, the table below shows frequency of the agreement of teachers with the statement *Most people feel afraid to report gender-based violence* in two waves of research, disaggregated by gender (in 2021 and 2024).

Table 20. Distribution of Agreement of Teachers With the Statement Most People Feel Afraid to Report Gender-Based Violence by Gender 2021 and 2024

	2021			2024			
	M	F	Total	M	F	Other	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Completely Agree	35.60	52.10	46.20	31.00	47.00	0.00	42.00
Partly Agree	44.40	33.80	37.60	45.70	37.50	0.00	40.00

Undecided	12.00	10.80	11.20	15.30	12.40	100.00	13.40
Partly Disagree	5.30	2.40	3.50	5.80	2.10	0.00	3.20
Completely Disagree	2.70	0.90	1.50	2.10	1.10	0.00	1.40
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
	Pearson chi2(4) = 32.6043 Pr = 0.000			Pearson chi2(8) = 37.1502 Pr = 0.000			

In 2022, the responses were divided into Male (M) and Female (F), while in 2024, there is an additional category: Other. The results indicate that the association between gender and affirmative response to the question is statistically significant in both years. This suggests that gender influenced how respondents answered. Overall agreement (Completely + Partly Agree) decreased slightly from 83.8% (2021) to 82.0% (2024). Men's agreement dropped from 80.0% to 76.7%, while women's agreement remained relatively stable (85.9% to 84.5%). Neutral responses increased from 11.2% (2021) to 13.4% (2024). The increase is more pronounced among men (12.0% → 15.3%). Overall disagreement slightly decreased from 5% (2021) to 4.6% (2024). Men's disagreement remains stable (8.0% vs. 7.9%), while women's disagreement remains stable and low (3.3% vs. 3.2%).

These findings suggest statistically significant gendered differences in teachers' perceptions of GBV, with notable shifts between 2021 and 2024. Women may perceive GBV as a more pressing issue, most likely to be due to their lived experiences or heightened awareness of structural inequalities. Men's declining agreement suggests growing scepticism or fatigue around GBV discussions, possibly linked to debates about overemphasis, shifting institutional responses, or defensive attitudes.

Results of this research by countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Serbia) in 2024 regarding the agreement of joined groups (students, teachers and administration) show that the majority (over 80% in all countries) believe people are afraid to report GBV, highlighting a widespread problem across all four countries. There are no major country-level differences in fear of reporting GBV. The lack of statistical significance

suggests that fear of reporting is broadly a shared issue, rather than one shaped significantly by national context. Nevertheless, policy efforts to address reporting barriers should be regionally coordinated, as fear of reporting GBV has been found to be a structural issue affecting all four countries similarly.

The comparison of only teachers' perceptions of fear in reporting GBV between 2021 and 2024 reveals relatively stable trends, with only minor shifts in intensity across Bosnia & Herzegovina (B&H), Montenegro, Croatia, and Serbia. While the overall percentage of teachers who completely agree that fear of reporting GBV is prevalent has slightly decreased in B&H (47.0% → 40.8%) and Serbia (46.1% → 43.1%), Montenegro shows an increase (45.9% → 48.9%), suggesting a growing concern in that country. Across all countries, the "somewhat agree" category has slightly increased, particularly in B&H (38.2% → 41.8%) and Montenegro (39.6% → 42.2%), indicating a shift towards moderate rather than strong agreement. Neutral responses remain low but have increased in Croatia (16.0% → 17.3%), suggesting more uncertainty or mixed views. Importantly, disagreement levels remain consistently low (below 5%) across all countries, showing that very few respondents outright reject the notion that fear of reporting GBV exists. However, statistical analysis shows that the differences between 2021 and 2024 are not statistically significant. This indicates that, despite small fluctuations in intensity across countries, the overall perception of fear in reporting GBV has remained stable over time regardless of country.

The comparison of 2021 and 2024 results on the degree of agreement of teachers, analysed by country, that women do not receive equal treatment regarding competencies and work performance reveals a significant shift in attitudes, with statistical significance confirmed. In 2021, 51.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, indicating a widespread belief in gender inequality. However, by 2024, strong agreement declined sharply, particularly in Montenegro (46.9% → 0.0%) and Serbia (41.3% → 15.0%), while disagreement increased significantly in all countries—especially in Montenegro (strongly disagree: 13.8% → 59.5%) and B&H (16.7% → 35.7%). This suggests either that there is a growing perception that gender-based disparities in the way institutions treat academics have diminished,

or that respondents are more resistant to acknowledging them. The statistically significant shift implies that country-level attitudes toward gender equality in academia have meaningfully evolved over time.

Another relevant insight especially concerning tradition and cultural factors comes from the comparison of 2021 and 2024 results on the degree of agreement that negative stereotypes about women's professional abilities create barriers to their career advancement. These results show a significant shift toward disagreement, though the change is not statistically significant. In 2021, 73.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that stereotypes are a barrier, with particularly strong agreement in Montenegro (69.7%) and Serbia (58%). By 2024, agreement dropped sharply across all countries, particularly in Montenegro (69.7% → 2.7%), B&H (56.2% → 7.2%), and Serbia (58% → 10.2%). Meanwhile, strong disagreement increased dramatically, especially in Montenegro (1.4% → 62.2%), B&H (5.2% → 38.7%), and Serbia (2.7% → 43.2%). This shift suggests that respondents increasingly perceive gender stereotypes as less of a barrier or are less willing to acknowledge them as an issue. However, the lack of statistical significance in comparing differences between countries indicates that, while attitudes have shifted, the variation between countries is not strong enough to confirm a systematic change in perception.

6.2. Double Burden, Belittlement, Exclusion and Sexualization: Analysis of Qualitative Results

This chapter turns now to consider the qualitative dataset that was based on semi-structured interviews with teachers. It was analysed and coded for themes based on guiding questions from the literature with the help of qualitative data analysis software (sample and methodology explained in Chapter 1 of this book).

A recurring theme is the double burden, balancing work and domestic responsibilities, or the expectation that women juggle both their professional and domestic roles. This leads to additional pressure, making career advancement more challenging.

Women in academia are still often expected to prioritise family responsibilities over professional ambitions, reinforcing internalised gender roles.

> *In general, when we consider people engaged in academia, and particularly women, social stereotypes dictate that they are primarily expected to remain within the intimate sphere of the home. They are expected to be mothers first, to educate and raise their children, and only then to focus on their careers. What I can say is that I wouldn't necessarily claim that inequality has been eliminated. For instance, I had to cut my maternity leave short at just five months to keep up with my professional obligations. From that perspective, career advancement is undoubtedly more challenging for women. (T31_BA_UNIBI_FN)*

> *This, of course, is culturally conditioned, reinforced by that internalized sense of responsibility, that we must or should do it all because that's just how things are divided. And when I think about it, women really do carry both a double burden and a double responsibility, along with this persistent feeling of not belonging, of being some kind of outsider. (T9_BA_UNTZ_FN(1))*

These accounts highlight the institutional and cultural expectations that women must excel in both their personal and professional roles, making career progression more challenging.

Women in academia frequently report professional belittlement and undermining of women's expertise, not being taken seriously, being interrupted, or having their authority undermined, especially by male colleagues. This includes public dismissals and the assumption that their expertise is less valuable.

For example, when someone from my faculty, usually a male professor, introduces me before a presentation or lecture at an academic event, he tends to highlight my physical appearance—how nice I look—rather than focusing on my expertise. This emphasis on my appearance diminishes the more important aspect of my presentation. This is a form of discrimination, one that I have personally experienced. (T3_BA_UNSA_FN)

Another example of discrimination occurs during faculty meetings or academic councils. When I speak or try to contribute to a discussion, I am often interrupted halfway through. It's as if they are signalling, 'Okay, okay, but I know better. Let me take over.' They don't fully respect my input, don't let me finish my thoughts, interrupt me, or even complete my sentences for me. This happens frequently, but it doesn't seem to happen to my male colleagues in the same way. (T3_BA_UNSA_FN)

When I was conducting practical lessons in the classroom, a professor who was not even involved in my subject walked in, interrupted the session, and openly reprimanded me in front of the students, as if to correct me. This is something that would never have happened if a male colleague had been in my position. It was completely inappropriate to halt the class and undermine me in front of my students. (T3_BA_UNSA_FN)

These quotes reflect systemic patterns of professional undermining, where male colleagues and superiors assume greater competence and authority, regardless of women's actual expertise.

Women in academia frequently encounter inappropriate remarks about their physical appearance and sexualisation, often in professional settings where competence should be the focus. Such comments trivialise their academic contributions and reinforce gendered expectations.

> *Even senior faculty members made comments. Some leaders of the institution would say things like: We prefer it when you wear skirts instead of pants. Or: Your neckline is too small, you should buy a top with a bigger cut. There was just so much of that kind of talk. (T79_HR_UNZG_FN)*

> *We were at a conference in Opatija, and my mentor and I were walking along the promenade, returning to the hotel after lunch. As we walked, some colleagues who knew both me and my mentor passed by in the opposite direction. And they made a disgusting comment (…) I felt absolutely awful in that moment. It was such an extremely negative experience, and it has stayed with me for years. (T79_HR_UNZG_FN)*

This theme highlights how sexualisation and objectification persist in academic and professional spaces, reinforcing gender-based power imbalances.

Many women report experiencing a sense of not belonging in academia, where assertive, competitive behaviours—often associated with men—are more rewarded, while women feel the need to withdraw or work harder to prove themselves, gain a professional identity and stop feeling like an outsider.

> *So, a kind of feeling like an intruder in the academic world, and what I've noticed is that this wasn't the case for my male colleagues. They were much more—perhaps assertive is the wrong word, but I*

> *can't think of a better one right now—somehow, they put themselves forward more, whereas maybe we, on the other hand, withdrew. (T9_BA_UNTZ_FN(1))*

> *I think we fail to recognize such behaviours as actual cases or examples of discrimination—we're simply used to them. (T56_SR_UNS_FN)*

These testimonies reveal how institutional culture reinforces exclusionary practices, making women feel like they must either assimilate or accept marginalisation.

A key challenge for women facing discrimination is the difficulty of proving and addressing it. Gender bias is often subtle or normalised, making it easy to dismiss or justify.

> *Unfortunately, that's how it is. And even when you do notice it, proving it is extremely difficult. If you were to report it somewhere or try to demonstrate that someone was treated differently because they are a woman, it would be very hard to prove. That's actually the biggest problem with this issue—it's so difficult to substantiate. The person engaging in this kind of discrimination, violence, or any other form of mistreatment will always be able to cite a thousand other reasons for their behaviour—anything but the fact that the person on the receiving end is a woman. (T56_SR_UNS_FN)*

This difficulty in legitimising women's experiences of discrimination enables perpetrators to escape accountability, further entrenching gender inequalities.

The qualitative data from these interviews with university teachers reveal a pattern of systemic gender-based discrimination in academia, spanning multiple dimensions: the double burden of balancing work and home responsibilities, professional belittlement and exclusion, sexualisation and comments on physical appearance, the identity struggle and feeling of being an outsider, the difficulty of proving discrimination and seeking justice. There are many other topics and quotes in the extensive research material; these examples have been selected to illustrate how cultural norms, workplace dynamics, and structural biases shape women's experiences in academic and professional settings, limiting their opportunities and reinforcing deeply embedded gender inequalities.

6.3. High Expectations and Power Asymmetry: Discussing Results

The findings of this research reinforce theoretical perspectives on gender-based violence (GBV) in academia, demonstrating how institutional structures, cultural expectations, and power asymmetries intersect to perpetuate discrimination and harassment against women (Acker, 1990; MacKinnon, 1979; Morley, 2011). The comparison of 2021 and 2024 data highlights an alarming increase in the perception by teaching staff of incidents of GBV. This increase, while potentially reflecting greater awareness and willingness to report, also underscores the persistence of structural and cultural barriers to gender equality in academic institutions, and is comparable to the findings of Makhene's research (2022).

The significant rise in perception of sexual harassment and inappropriate behaviour suggests that academia remains a gendered space, where hierarchical power relations enable GBV to persist, as stated in literature (Ahmed, 2021; Acker, 1990; Conrad et al., 2010). The increase in perceived incidence of sexually suggestive remarks, unwanted physical contact, and sexually explicit messages especially among female teachers, aligns with feminist critiques of academia as an institution that privileges male

authority while marginalising and controlling women's bodies (Morley, 2013; Cole & Hassel, 2017).

Bourdieu's (2001) concept of symbolic violence helps explain how these behaviours are normalised within academic settings, making it difficult for women to challenge them without facing professional consequences. As one interlocutor in an interview noted, women are frequently belittled, interrupted, or dismissed in academic settings, reinforcing the perception that their authority is secondary, which aligns with findings of Humbert and Strid (2024).

We have found strong evidence that GBV in academia is deeply embedded within institutional structures and cultural expectations, manifesting in persistent patterns of harassment, exclusion, and professional devaluation of women. Despite the increase in reported GBV incidents, the findings indicate that fear of reporting remains a critical barrier to justice. A vast majority of respondents in all four countries, in both research waves, agree that most people are afraid to report GBV, with no statistically significant difference across national contexts. This supports institutional betrayal theory, which argues that institutions that fail to protect victims or actively silence them contribute to the persistence of GBV (Smith & Freyd, 2014; Pyke, 2018).

MacKinnon's (1979) foundational work on sexual harassment as a form of workplace discrimination is relevant here, particularly in cases where victims fear retaliation, reputational damage, or career stagnation. The continued reluctance to report GBV, despite growing awareness, highlights the structural failures of reporting mechanisms in academic institutions (Humbert & Strid, 2024).

The findings also reflect Hochschild's (1989) concept of the "second shift," wherein women in academia face a double burden of professional and domestic responsibilities. This reflects the gendered organisation model (Acker, 1990), which suggests that academic institutions are structured around masculinised career trajectories that disadvantage women who take on caregiving roles. The results also may indicate increased resistance to acknowledging gender inequality rather than an actual reduction in disparities. This could be linked to backlash effects, where

increased discussions about gender equality provoke defensive reactions (Ahmed, 2021; Derks et al., 2011).

There is a surge of online harassment, stalking, and coercion, that may be linked to COVID-19 pandemic in the period of research (Franklin-Corben & Towl, 2023; Lopes, Ferreira, & Santos, 2023). The results of this research highlight how digital spaces have become new arenas for GBV. This aligns with feminist research on online misogyny and cyberviolence, which shows that women academics, particularly those involved in gender and feminist research, are disproportionately targeted with threats and harassment in virtual settings. The failure of institutional policies to adapt to these digital threats as well as to manging remote working and caring responsibilities at home (Nash & Churchill, 2020) reinforces the need for stronger enforcement mechanisms for online GBV in academic institutions (UNESCO, 2020; UN Women, 2019).

The findings reinforce the need for comprehensive institutional interventions to combat GBV in academia. The UNIGEM project provides a model for integrating gender-sensitive policies into university governance structures, demonstrating how institutional reform can create safer academic environments (Spahić Šiljak, Kovačević & Husanović, 2022, 2023).

The intersection of traditional gender norms and academic career structures continues to disadvantage women, reinforcing as mentioned Hochschild's (1989) second shift and Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations. To combat GBV effectively, universities must implement mandatory gender sensitivity training, establish stronger enforcement of anti-harassment policies, and dismantle institutional hierarchies that protect perpetrators. By integrating gender equity into academic governance and culture, institutions can create safer and more inclusive environments for all members of their communities. Research on intersectional dimensions of GBV, examining how class, ethnicity, sexuality, and disability impact experiences of violence in academia will be presented in the following chapters (cf. Crenshaw, 1989).

Conclusion

The findings of this chapter highlight the persistent challenge of GBV and discrimination in academia, demonstrating that despite growing awareness, deeply ingrained cultural and institutional norms continue to shape the experiences of university teachers. Women in academia remain disproportionately affected by various forms of gendered harassment, professional belittlement, and exclusion from leadership roles. The reported increase in GBV incidents between 2021 and 2024, particularly among female professors, underscores the urgency of addressing these issues through institutional reforms and cultural change. At the same time, the ongoing fear of reporting GBV suggests that significant barriers to justice and accountability remain in place.

The UNIGEM project has played a crucial role in bringing these issues to light in the regional context, providing both empirical data and a platform for discussion and institutional advocacy. Through research, training sessions, and awareness-raising activities, UNIGEM has contributed to breaking the silence around GBV in academia, equipping university staff and leadership with the tools needed to recognise, address, and prevent gendered discrimination and violence. The research conducted within this project has provided data-driven evidence that supports these efforts, demonstrating both progress in awareness and areas where further intervention is needed. The findings from this study not only reveal the scale and impact of GBV but also emphasise the need for long-term institutional commitment to ensuring gender equality in academic spaces.

Moving forward, the momentum generated by UNIGEM must be sustained through continued research, policy implementation, and training programs. The ultimate goal is to create academic environments where gender equality is not just an aspiration but a lived reality, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of gender, can work and thrive without fear of discrimination or violence.

Chapter 7.

The Challenges of Intersectionality in an Analysis of Gender Equality at Universities: Lessons Learned From the UNIGEM Research

Introduction

Intersectionality is a way of appreciating how belonging to multiple social categories—such as gender, class, ethnicity, and religion—shapes social inequalities. By analysing the relationship between individual experiences, social practices, and power structures, this approach provides a broader framework for understanding the distribution of power in society (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

Intersectionality, conceptualized by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991), emerged from Black feminist thought as a response to the limitations of mainstream feminist and anti-discrimination frameworks. Crenshaw demonstrated how single-axis analyses of oppression—focusing on gender or race in isolation—failed to capture the lived experiences of Black women, whose marginalization is shaped by the interaction of multiple intersecting systems of power (Crenshaw, 1989). This concept extends the legacy of Sojourner Truth's (1851) "Ain't I a Woman?" speech, which challenged the exclusion of Black women from early feminist struggles, and builds on the contributions of Angela

Davis (1981), bell hooks (1984), and Patricia Hill Collins (2000), who emphasized the interdependence of race, gender, class, and other social categories.

Intersectionality as a method critiques universalist approaches to feminism that assume a homogeneous category of "woman" (Mohanty, 1988), arguing instead for an analysis rooted in lived experiences and structural conditions (Collins & Bilge, 2016). It provides a framework to understand how privilege and oppression function through interlocking social systems, including racism, sexism, classism, ableism, and heteronormativity (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013).

The application of this lens to higher education and gender equality in universities exposes the limitations of policies that treat gender as a monolithic category. Feminist scholars adopting this approach argue that gender equality measures must address overlapping forms of oppression to be effective in diverse institutional spaces (Ahmed, 2012; Morley, 2015). This requires moving beyond numerical representations, to analysing institutional cultures, power relations, and knowledge production processes (Hearn, 2014; Ahmed, 2017).

While intersectionality originated in Black feminist and critical race studies, its integration with critical realism offers a valuable ontological and epistemological foundation for understanding structural inequalities (Archer, 2000; Bhaskar, 1989, 1998). Critical realism, particularly as developed by Roy Bhaskar (1989), provides a stratified model of reality, distinguishing between the empirical (lived experiences), the actual (events and interactions), and the real (underlying social structures and causal mechanisms).

Intersectionality's engagement with social structures and power relations, aligns with critical realism's argument that oppression is not merely discursive but grounded in material conditions, considering both structure and agency (Archer, 2003). There are also intersectional approaches focused on the complexity of institutions, rather than isolated categories, in order to reveal how multiple structures of power operate simultaneously, shaping agency and constraints (Walby, 2009). A critical realist lens allows researchers to examine both structural determinants and

individual experiences, avoiding the pitfalls of overly relativist or essentialist analyses (Gunnarsson, 2017; Nash, 2017).

Agency and privilege in intersectional frameworks must be understood in relation to structure and power dynamics. Traditional liberal feminist models emphasise individual agency, but intersectional analysis wonders whose agency is recognised and enabled within specific contexts (McNay, 2008). In addition, some scholars argue that agency is unequally distributed, shaped by historical and institutional barriers and is performative (Butler, 2021; Mahmood, 2005).

Privilege, as explored by Peggy McIntosh (1988) and later by Sara Ahmed (2012), functions often as an invisible system of advantage, reinforcing dominant epistemologies and institutional exclusions. In academia, privilege manifests through unequal access to leadership roles, funding opportunities, and intellectual recognition, disproportionately affecting women from racialised, working-class, and marginalised backgrounds (Bhopal, 2018; Mirza, 2017).

Furthermore, class remains a frequently overlooked category in gender and intersectional analysis. This is despite its centrality to material inequalities (Skeggs, 1997; hooks, 2000). Working-class women in academia experience specific forms of marginalisation, including economic precarity, class-based exclusions, and the devaluation of certain knowledge systems (Reay, 2004; Rosenkranz, 2024). This necessitates a materialist feminist approach to intersectionality, linking gender and class inequalities to neoliberal academic restructuring (Lynch, 2010; Morley, 2021).

Intersectionality operates on both objective (structural) and subjective (experiential) levels. While structural analyses focus on institutional mechanisms of exclusion, subjective experiences highlight how individuals navigate and negotiate their positions within academic hierarchies (Yuval-Davis, 2006). An intersectional lens reveals how subjectivities are shaped by institutional norms, reinforcing feelings of displacement, imposter syndrome, and epistemic marginalization (Puwar, 2004; Ahmed, 2017). Women of colour, LGBTQ+ individuals, and academics with disability frequently report not feeling “at home” in

university spaces, exposing how academia remains a racialised and gendered domain (Mirza, 2015; Bhopal, 2018). Recognising these subjective dimensions challenges dominant narratives of meritocracy and neutral academic excellence (Shilliam, 2021).

Finally, intersectionality demands an auto-reflexive approach, requiring scholars to critically engage with their own positionality, biases, and epistemic standpoints (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991). Reflexivity is crucial in intersectional research, as the researcher's identity and institutional location shape what knowledge is produced, whose voices are amplified, and what forms of exclusion remain unchallenged (Ahmed, 2017).

This chapter therefore adopts an intersectional and reflexive methodology in analysing gender equality in universities, acknowledging the complex entanglements of privilege, exclusion, and institutional power. Auto-reflexivity not only strengthens epistemic accountability but also contributes to more inclusive and transformative knowledge production in higher education (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013).

Bringing it all together, we can summarise by saying that intersectionality provides a critical framework, challenging simplistic and one-dimensional approaches to discrimination. By integrating insights from Black feminism, critical realism, and materialist feminist theories, intersectional analysis reveals the structural, cultural, and subjective dimensions of power in academic institutions. The discussion on agency, privilege, class, and reflexivity underscores the need for a multidimensional approach to gender equality, one that moves beyond representation alone, to address systemic inequities and institutional barriers. This chapter will apply intersectionality as both a theoretical lens and methodological tool to examine how gender operates within university settings, drawing lessons from the UNIGEM research project to propose more effective and inclusive gender equality strategies in academia. First quantitative data will be presented followed by qualitative data from semi-structured interviews. The sample and methodology were described at the beginning of this book.

7.1. Varied Perception of Discrimination: Analysis of Quantitative Results

The table below shows the differences in the perception of students, teaching staff and administrative staff, in a gender disaggregated manner, expressed as a scale of (dis)agreement with the statement:

Persons belonging to minorities, such as Roma, disabled persons, people with developmental and learning disabilities, religious and ethnic minorities, and LGBTQIA+ persons, suffer more from gender-based violence and discrimination.

The results indicate significant gender differences on the scale of agreement with this statement.

Table 21. The Level of Agreement with the Statement, by Students, Teachers and Administrative Staff, by Gender 2021

	Students			Total	Teaching staff			Total	Administrative staff			Total
	M (%)	F (%)	Other (%)		M (%)	F (%)	Other (%)		M (%)	F (%)	Other (%)	
Completely agree	36.0	47.3	41.7	44.6	32.6	34.7	0.0	33.9	35.8	31.9	0.0	32.7
Partly agree	26.0	29.6	8.3	28.6	30.7	33.6	0.0	32.6	31.3	35.9	0.0	34.9
Undecided	15.1	9.9	33.3	11.2	17.1	14.1	0.0	15.1	7.5	10.8	0.0	10.1
Partly disagree	9.2	7.1	0.0	7.6	9.6	8.7	0.0	9.0	9.0	9.6	0.0	9.4
Completely disagree	13.7	6.1	16.7	7.9	9.9	9.0	0.0	9.3	16.4	12.0	0.0	12.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The table shows that in 2021, female students were more likely to recognise and agree with the statement that minority groups, such as LGBTQIA+ individuals, the Roma population, and persons with disabilities, more frequently experience violence and discrimination. While 47.3% of women completely agreed with the statement, the same opinion was shared by 36.0% of men.

On the other hand, men were more often undecided (15.1%) or completely disagreed (13.7%) compared to women (9.9% and 6.1%, respectively). Respondents who identified as "other" showed varied responses, with a higher proportion of indecisiveness (33.3%). Overall, most of the respondents recognised the link between discrimination and minority status, but a significant proportion of those who were undecided or disagreed highlighted the need for further education on these issues.

Data from 2021 for teaching staff indicates that most teachers recognise the connection between minority status and gender-based violence or discrimination, with women showing a higher level of agreement.

Analysis of the 2021 data reveals a relatively high level of agreement, amongst administrative staff, with the statement that minority groups experience higher levels of gender-based violence and discrimination,. A total of 67.6% of respondents from this group express agreement (both complete and partial), with a slightly higher percentage among women (67.8%) compared to men (67.1%). These findings suggest that most administrative staff recognise discrimination against minority groups. However, the fact that some respondents remain undecided of disagree with the statement highlights the need for further information and education to increase awareness of specific challenges these groups face. While gender differences in the perception of discrimination remain small, they still justify targeted interventions.

In 2024, the question about violence and discrimination based on gender was divided into three separate questions, each focusing on specific groups—LGBTQIA+ individuals, persons with disabilities, and ethnic/religious minority groups—allowing for a more detailed analysis of respondents' perceptions based on gender. When comparing the results for each group, clear differences emerge in the levels of agreement, indecisiveness, and disagreement. However, it was not possible to directly compare responses between the two research waves in terms of statistically significant differences in perception between male and female participants.

Female students generally showed greater support for the statement "LGBTQIA+ individuals experience higher levels of

gender-based violence and discrimination", with a combined agreement (complete and partial) of 67.5%, while men had a lower overall level of agreement (58.4%). Men were more likely to be undecided (18.7%) and to completely disagree (14.8%) compared to women (8.4%). Statistically significant differences were found between male and female students' responses.

Table 22. Level of Agreement with the Statement: LGBTQIA+ Individuals Experience Higher Levels of Gender-Based Violence and Discrimination by Status 2024

	Students				Teaching staff				Administrative staff			
	M (%)	F (%)	Other (%)	Total (%)	M (%)	F (%)	Other (%)	Total (%)	M (%)	F (%)	Other (%)	Total (%)
Completely agree	34.9	33.0	63.6	33.5	33.4	34.1	0.0	33.8	23.9	31.4	0.0	30.0
Partly agree	23.5	34.5	18.2	31.9	29.8	33.4	0.0	32.2	29.9	35.1	100.0	34.3
Undecided	18.7	15.5	0.0	16.1	14.7	14.8	100.0	14.9	25.4	18.4	0.0	19.6
Partly disagree	8.1	8.7	0.0	8.6	9.5	8.1	0.0	8.5	7.5	3.0	0.0	3.8
Completely disagree	14.8	8.4	18.2	9.9	12.6	9.6	0.0	10.5	13.4	12.0	0.0	12.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The data from teaching staff reveals similar patterns in agreement with the statement, between male and female respondents, with the majority expressing some level of agreement with the statement. Among men, 33.4% completely agree, while the percentage is slightly higher among women (34.1%). When partial agreement is included, the total agreement reaches 63.2% for men and 67.5% for women, indicating a general recognition of discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals among teaching staff, with a slight tendency toward higher agreement among women. There are no statistically significant differences between male and female respondents in their answers.

Compared to the 2021 data, the 2024 results indicate a stable level of recognition of discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals among teaching staff. Overall, the findings suggest that perceptions of discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals have not changed significantly. However, the continued presence of respondents who completely or partly disagree, or who are indecisive, highlights need for further education and awareness-raising on this issue.

The 2024 results indicate that 64.3% of administrative staff (both completely and partly) recognize LGBTQIA+ individuals as a group that experiences higher levels of gender-based violence and discrimination. Women show a higher level of agreement (66.5%) compared to men (53.8%). Indecisiveness is recorded among 19.6% of respondents, occurring more frequently among men (25.4%) than women (18.4%). Disagreement (both complete and partial) is observed in 16.1% of the total sample, with similar levels across genders. There are no statistically significant gender differences in responses to this question.

These findings indicate a higher level of awareness among women and a substantial need for further education, particularly among men, to foster greater recognition of discrimination faced by LGBTQIA+ individuals.

For the following statement - *Individuals with disabilities experience higher levels of gender-based violence and discrimination* - female students (in 2024) showed a slightly higher tendency for partial agreement (21.3%) compared to male students (14.5%). Both genders exhibited a high level of indecisiveness (30.5% among men and 31.0% among women), while men were more likely to completely reject the statement (29.6%) compared to women (15.1%). These findings indicate a generally lower level of recognition of the connection between disability and discrimination especially among male students. The responses of male and female students differ statistically significantly.

Table 23. Level of Agreement with the Statement: Individuals with Disabilities Experience Higher Levels of Gender-Based Violence and Discrimination by Status 2024

	Students				Teaching staff				Administrative staff			
	M (%)	F (%)	Other (%)	Total	M (%)	F (%)	Other (%)	Total	M (%)	F (%)	Other (%)	Total
Completely agree	10.6	14.4	63.6	13.7	10.7	15.0	0.0	13.6	9.0	13.7	0.0	12.8
Partly agree	14.5	21.3	18.2	19.7	21.8	25.7	0.0	24.5	9.0	25.4	100.0	22.6
Undecided	30.5	31.0	9.1	30.8	35.3	33.4	100.0	34.0	44.8	32.4	0.0	34.6
Partly disagree	14.8	18.2	0.0	17.4	11.0	13.5	0.0	12.7	14.9	10.7	0.0	11.4
Completely disagree	29.6	15.1	9.1	18.3	21.2	12.5	0.0	15.2	22.4	17.7	0.0	18.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The 2024 results indicate that recognition of the connection between disability, violence, and discrimination among teaching staff remains limited. A total of 13.6% of respondents completely agree with the statement, while 24.5% express partial agreement. However, the high level of indecisiveness (34.0%) and the significant proportion of those who disagree completely, or partly, (27.9%) suggest insufficient awareness of this issue. Female teachers generally show greater total agreement (40.7% in total) than men (32.5%), while men are more likely to express disagreement (32.2%). Statistically significant differences exist between the responses from male and female respondents to this question. These results emphasise the need for further educational activities to raise awareness of the discrimination faced by individuals with disabilities.

Administrative staff show a lower level of agreement in recognising discrimination against individuals with disabilities. A total of 35.4% express agreement (both complete and partial), with a much higher percentage among women (39.1%) compared to

men (18.0%). Indecisiveness is notably high, recorded in 34.6% of the total sample, with the highest occurrence among men (44.8%). Disagreement is also significant, particularly among men (37.3%) compared to women (28.4%). The difference in response to this question, from men and women, is not statistically significant. These findings indicate insufficient awareness of discrimination against individuals with disabilities and emphasise the need for further education on this issue.

The next statement evaluated by respondents addressed whether religious and ethnic minorities experience higher levels of gender-based violence and discrimination. Partial agreement among students was moderately high among both men (26.9%) and women (32.9%). Indecisive responses were nearly identical between male (23.1%) and female (23.0%) students. However, men were more likely to completely disagree (21.5%) compared to women (10.0%). Once again, statistically significant differences were found in the responses between male and female students regarding this statement.

Table 24. Level of Agreement with the Statement: Religious and Ethnic Minorities Experience Higher Levels of Gender-Based Violence and Discrimination by Status 2024

	Students			Total (%)	Teaching staff			Total (%)	Administrative staff			Total (%)
	M (%)	F (%)	Other (%)		M (%)	F (%)	Other (%)		M (%)	F (%)	Other (%)	
Completely agree	15.7	22.4	72.7	21.1	13.5	17.9	0.0	16.5	10.4	16.1	0.0	15.0
Partly agree	26.9	32.9	18.2	31.5	33.4	32.0	0.0	32.4	25.4	30.8	100.0	30.0
Undecided	23.1	23.0	0.0	22.9	25.2	26.6	100.0	26.3	34.3	24.4	0.0	26.2
Partly disagree	12.8	11.6	0.0	11.8	10.7	12.4	0.0	11.8	10.4	13.7	0.0	13.1
Completely disagree	21.5	10.0	9.1	12.6	17.2	11.1	0.0	13.0	19.4	15.1	0.0	15.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The 2024 results also show that recognition of violence and discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities is present among teaching staff, but with great variation in attitudes. A total of 48.9% of respondents express agreement (both complete and partial), with female teachers showing a slightly higher level of agreement (49.9%) compared to male teachers (46.9%). Indecisiveness remains high, with 26.3% of respondents overall, with similar percentage of responses between men (25.2%) and women (26.6%). Disagreement however, (both complete and partial) is more common among men (27.9%) compared to women (23.5%), indicating gender-based differences in perception. However, there are no statistically significant differences between respondent groups regarding this statement. These findings suggest that, while there is significant recognition of discrimination against minorities, the remaining high levels of indecisiveness and disagreement indicate a need for greater awareness-raising efforts among teaching staff. Educational programs focusing on intersectional discrimination and its various manifestations could help reduce these differences and increase understanding among faculty members.

Recognition among administrative staff of discrimination against religious and ethnic minorities is moderate, with a total of 45% of respondents expressing agreement (both complete and partial). Women (46.9%) show a higher level of agreement compared to men (35.8%). Indecisiveness remains high (26.2%), particularly among men (34.3%). Disagreement (both complete and partial) stands at 28.9%, with a slightly higher proportion among men (29.8%) compared to women (28.8%). The differences in perception between male and female respondents are not statistically significant. These findings suggest limited recognition of the issue among administrative staff and emphasise the need for further efforts to raise awareness of minority discrimination.

The 2024 data indicate that administrative staff most frequently recognise discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals, while awareness of issues faced by individuals with disabilities and religious and ethnic minorities is significantly lower. Women generally demonstrate a higher level of awareness and agreement compared to men, while indecisiveness remains notably high, particularly among male respondents.

When comparing the results of administrative staff with those of students and teaching staff, it is evident that students show greater sensitivity to discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals, whereas teaching staff exhibit a more balanced perspective across all minority groups. Administrative staff, despite recognising discrimination, display the highest levels of indecisiveness across all groups, suggesting a need for specifically targeted educational programs for this category, along with broader awareness-raising efforts across all segments of the academic community.

7.2. Complex Marginalization and Solidarity: Analysis of Qualitative Results

Qualitative data from this research was gathered via semi-structured interviews and analysed with the help of qualitative data analysis software for reflexive thematic insights (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The results reveal insights of students, administrative staff and teachers connected with solidarity of men and not only women in the fight for gender equality. The data reveals that gender equality should not be viewed as a women's issue alone, but rather as a broader human rights concern that affects all individuals. Both men and women can reinforce or challenge patriarchal structures, depending on their level of awareness and socialization. The importance of recognising how gender intersects with other forms of marginalisation, such as disability, ethnicity, sexuality, and socioeconomic status, is crucial in addressing structural discrimination at universities. This chapter mainly focuses on solidarity and structural intersecting issues in the qualitative data analysis, however more detailed analysis of our interlocutors' perceptions and experiences about disability and LGBTQIA+ are discussed in chapters 8 and 9 respectively.

> *Gender equality is a fundamental human right that essentially belongs to both women and men. In these discussions and presentations, men do not always see it as a women's issue. Some might*

> *feel irritated by the topic, but in the end, it benefits everyone. Despite patriarchal norms, gender equality should not come at the expense of men, but rather aim for equal opportunities for all. (T31_BA_UNIBI_FN)*

> *Both men and women can be deeply embedded in patriarchal views, but they can also be feminists. Some men have fought for feminism longer and more consistently than some women. It depends on how one was socialized and shaped by patriarchal culture. Those who genuinely respect women as human beings will always be open to further education and advocacy for gender equality. (T16_BA_UNIBL_FN)*

One of the most frequently mentioned themes is the need for continuous education to raise awareness about gender equality and intersectionality. The interviews emphasise that without education, both structural discrimination and everyday biases remain unchallenged. Many respondents argue that men should be specifically targeted in gender equality education, as their lack of awareness contributes to maintaining the status quo.

> *Education is crucial. First, we need to engage allies—those who are already aware and interested in these topics—and then gradually, through different types of training, introduce others to what gender equality truly means. For instance, I remember when I mentioned Jenny Wolf in a lecture, feeling proud of my knowledge, but the professor, a traditionalist, reacted with complete rejection. The problem is that many associate feminism with extreme stereotypes rather than seeing it as a necessary fight for equality. (T11_BA_UNTZ_FA)*

> *We must continuously educate and raise awareness. Perhaps mandatory training specifically for men should be introduced, explaining why they should be allies in advocating for gender equality and bridging the gender gap. (T5_BA_UNSA_FA)*

> *If I have been uninformed about these issues until now, you need to educate me. Education is the only way to properly introduce these topics and create real change. (T12_BA_UNTZ_FA)*

Another essential aspect of achieving gender equality in universities is solidarity among different groups, including men, women, and other marginalised identities. The interviews highlight that social change is only possible through collective action, and that men's involvement is particularly important due to their structural advantage in many areas of society. This view is expressed by men in our interviews too, like in the following two examples.

> *Real progress can only be achieved if we join forces and work toward common goals. As a man discussing these topics, I have noticed that my male colleagues often dismiss them as nonsense. I believe this attitude comes from the fact that they hold power in society and have never personally experienced these challenges. This is why they lack motivation to fight for gender equality. I don't think men are necessarily the problem, but without their involvement, we won't achieve much. (T94_BA_SVEMO_MS)*

> *I hate the idea of polarisation, where gender equality is seen as just a women's fight. If we don't include men and make them believe in it, we will never change anything. It's crucial to remove this division and include everyone in the conversation. (T60_SR_UNS_MS)*

Several respondents pointed to the persistent issue of gendered division of labour, both in professional and domestic spheres. The intersection of professional careers and traditional gender roles creates additional challenges for women in academia, as they are often expected to balance both academic work and household responsibilities. The expectation that women will always assume caregiving roles reinforces existing inequalities.

> *The biggest problem here is the complete dominance of men in everything. Women are constantly pushed into the domestic sphere. For example, we have a female colleague at the university who has been on maternity leave for a year, and we strongly feel her absence at work. Meanwhile, her husband, who works in the same position, continues his career without interruption. Why shouldn't he take leave instead? The burden falls on women, and men are never expected to share the responsibility (...) Even if policies force men to take parental leave, the issue remains that many women believe they do things better than men when it comes to child-rearing. There's a cultural expectation that men don't know how to handle household and childcare duties, reinforcing the cycle of inequality. (T15_BA_UNIBL_FN)*

While individual education and awareness are essential, systemic and institutional efforts are also required for long-term change. Respondents emphasised that while laws and policies exist, they are often poorly implemented, and true progress requires coordinated action across multiple sectors, including education, policy-making, and civil society.

> *The responsibility lies with everyone, as nothing can succeed if only one part of society is working toward change. The state and its institutions play a crucial role, but there are also many action plans and legal frameworks that remain unimplemented. Laws alone are not enough; they must be enforced,*

> *and we must work toward a deeper cultural shift. (...) It is not enough to have policies in place—we need systematic and long-term work at all levels. Education, legal institutions, cultural spaces, and even private companies must all be involved. This cannot be done by just one ministry or one sector. (T16_BA_UNIBL_FN)*

The qualitative analysis from the UNIGEM follow-up research underscores the complexity of gender equality in universities, revealing deep intersections with education, institutional structures, domestic labour, and cultural expectations. While gender equality is widely recognised as a human rights issue, its implementation requires ongoing education, institutional reforms, and collective solidarity. The role of men as allies, targeted education programs, and systemic policy enforcement are recurring themes in the discussion, highlighting the multi-dimensional nature of intersectional gender discrimination. Moreover, the double burden of women in academia, which extends beyond their professional responsibilities into the domestic sphere, remains a key challenge. The insights from these interviews suggest that without targeted efforts to include men, deconstruct traditional gender roles, and improve policy enforcement, meaningful change in gender equality at universities will remain slow and fragmented.

7.3. Deep Entanglements: Discussing Results

The results of this follow up research conducted within the UNIGEM project as well as the comparison with the first wave results underscore the intersecting nature of gender-based discrimination in academia, confirming key theoretical insights from feminist intersectional theory (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins & Bilge, 2016) and critical realism (Bhaskar, 1998). The results indicate that gender inequality in universities is not experienced in isolation, but is deeply entangled with other axes of marginalisation, such as ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation.

This aligns with intersectionality's fundamental argument that oppression operates through overlapping social structures rather than as a single-axis phenomenon (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013).

The survey results show significant gender differences in perceptions of discrimination, with female respondents consistently more likely to recognise structural inequalities compared to male respondents. This pattern, evident across student, teaching, and administrative staff, suggests that men—who are less directly affected by these experiences—may be less aware of the cumulative disadvantages faced by marginalized groups. This quantitative finding can find support in arguments from feminist epistemology that claim that privilege obscures the recognition of structural inequalities (Harding, 1991; McIntosh, 1988; Ahmed, 2012).

The finding that men are more likely to express indecisiveness or disagreement regarding discrimination against minority groups reflects the ongoing influence of hegemonic discourses of meritocracy in academia, where neutrality is often mistaken for objectivity (Hearn, 2014; Morley, 2015). Intersectionality as a method challenges such assumptions, arguing that dominant epistemologies tend to exclude the voices of those who experience multiple, compounded forms of oppression (Mohanty, 1988; Bhopal, 2018).

The persistence of structural barriers in academic institutions is evident in the continued perception of gender-based violence and discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals, people with disabilities, and ethnic and religious minorities. Although recognition of these issues remains high among respondents, indecisiveness in responses—especially among men—indicates a gap between awareness and institutional action. This reflects the critique that universities, while often adopting gender-equality policies at a formal level, fail to address the deeper cultural and structural constraints that sustain exclusionary practices (Ahmed, 2017; Gunnarsson, 2017).

Moreover, qualitative data highlight the invisibility of caregiving responsibilities and the double burden on women, a recurring theme in feminist analyses of labour division (Hochschild, 1989;

Lynch, 2010). The lack of policies around shared parental leave, for example, alongside cultural resistance to men taking on caregiving roles, reinforces gender hierarchies in academia. The interview data confirms that male colleagues rarely assume the same level of responsibility for domestic work, which negatively impacts women's career progression, a finding consistent with previous studies on the gendered division of labour (Skeggs, 1997; Reay, 2004).

A major theme in both the survey and interview data is the importance of education in shifting perceptions of gender equality. Many respondents stress that gender equality training should not be limited to women but should actively target male allies and institutional leaders. This is because structural change requires a collective, rather than an individualized approach (Morley, 2015; Nash, 2017).

Respondents' experiences of resistance to feminist discourse in academic settings, reveal how stereotypes about feminism and gender equality persist; often trivializing these issues as irrelevant or extreme. This reflects the broader backlash against gender equality initiatives, where feminist critique is dismissed as ideological, rather than as an evidence-based approach to systemic inequities (hooks, 2000; Mirza, 2015). Intersectionality, as an analytical tool, helps to deconstruct these discursive barriers by exposing the underlying power relations that sustain gender inequalities (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

The findings also highlight the necessity of reflexivity within academic institutions. Both qualitative and quantitative data reveal that awareness of discrimination varies significantly, depending on the respondent's positionality, thus reinforcing the argument that intersectional analysis must be both structural and subjective (Yuval-Davis, 2006). The discomfort some respondents express in discussing gender and intersectionality suggests a need for greater institutional reflexivity, particularly in addressing unconscious bias and systemic exclusion (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991).

The survey results further illustrate that while gender equality is widely recognised in principle, it is not necessarily internalised as a systemic issue requiring action. The persistence of

indecisiveness and disagreement—especially regarding discrimination against minority groups—demonstrates that passive agreement is insufficient in addressing intersectional inequalities (Ahmed, 2017). Instead, sustained institutional efforts are needed to challenge dominant narratives of neutrality and meritocracy in academia (Shilliam, 2021).

The intersectional framework applied in this study, reveals that achieving gender equality in universities requires more than policies around numerical inclusion. It demands structural, cultural, and epistemic transformations that address how multiple forms of discrimination intersect (Walby, 2009; Bhopal, 2018). The recognition that men must also be active participants in gender equality initiatives is a crucial finding, reinforcing arguments that solidarity and collective engagement are necessary for institutional change (Rosenkranz, 2024).

Furthermore, the intersectional perspective highlights that gender cannot be analysed in isolation from other social factors, since discrimination is shaped by many factors simultaneously. Institutional interventions must therefore be holistic, addressing the interconnected structures of oppression rather than implementing single-issue policies (Archer, 2000; Bhaskar, 1993).

Conclusion

The findings of this study reaffirm the importance of intersectionality as both a theoretical framework and a practical approach to understanding gender equality in universities. The results demonstrate that gender-based discrimination is deeply entangled with other axes of marginalisation, requiring multi-dimensional interventions that go beyond numerical gender representation to address cultural, structural, and epistemic exclusions.

Despite growing awareness, resistance to intersectional feminist perspectives remains a significant barrier. The persistence of gendered labour divisions, unequal recognition of caregiving responsibilities, and the marginalisation of LGBTQIA+ and minority groups indicate that policy measures alone are insufficient.

Instead, universities must engage in systematic institutional reflexivity, targeted education programs, and the active inclusion of male allies and institutional leaders to create meaningful change.

UNIGEM follow-up research results as well as the entire project with its myriad activities has clearly taught us that intersectionality provides a transformative lens that moves beyond individual agency to examine the power structures that shape academic institutions. By integrating critical realism, feminist epistemology, and intersectional analysis, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how universities can become truly inclusive spaces for all marginalised groups. Future research should focus on implementing intersectional strategies at an institutional level, ensuring that gender equality efforts address not just representation, but the underlying mechanisms of exclusion that sustain inequality in academia.

Chapter 8.

Gender, Disability, and Intersectionality

Introduction

Approaches to disability have evolved significantly over time, moving from exclusionary or charitable perspectives to a human-rights-based framework (UN, 2024). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) explicitly recognizes the right of people with disabilities to enjoy all human rights on an equal basis with others (UN, 2006). Under this convention, in the Preamble, disability is recognized as an evolving concept that results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder full and effective inclusion. At the European Union level, the European Disability Strategy 2010–2020 and the subsequent EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030 reaffirm a commitment to remove structural obstacles and promote equal opportunities in education, employment, and social life (European Commission, 2021). The interpretive approach taken in this chapter wishes to accentuate the social model of disability, over the medical model or the charity model, more radically in that it evades a perspective of

impairments and instead treats disability as a social construct created by interaction of physical, sensory, cognitive, or other differences with social and environmental barriers that limit inclusion and equality.

From a gender perspective, these international frameworks highlight the heightened vulnerability of women and girls with disabilities, who often face multiple layers of discrimination and encounter social and cultural stereotypes depicting them as dependent or incapable (UN, 2006; EIGE, 2021). Their marginalisation is reinforced when educational facilities lack adequate equality, diversity and inclusion policies (European Commission, 2021). Gendered assumptions about both disability and academic capability can combine to exclude women with disabilities altogether from higher education (Mirza, 2017).

Feminist disability theory argues that gender and disability must be analysed jointly, rather than in isolation (Garland-Thomson, 2002; Morris, 1991). While feminist scholarship has often centred on dismantling patriarchy, disability studies criticise norms that stigmatise bodily or cognitive differences as inherently inferior, or in need of "fixing" (Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare, 2006). Further, bringing these perspectives together shows how women with disabilities encounter overlapping forms of oppression (cf. Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1984).

Ableism is a form of discrimination which privileges able-bodied norms, frames, bodies and minds (Mladenov, 2014; Thomas, 1999). Within academic environments, ableism can manifest through architectural inaccessibility, lack of adaptive technologies, and low expectations for students with disabilities (Barnes & Mercer, 2003). These barriers intersect with gendered stereotypes—for instance, the view that women with disabilities are overly dependent (Morris, 1996). In practice, this can further limit both academic attainment and social engagement and reinforce other existing inequalities.

An intersectional framework recognises that social categories such as gender, disability, class, and ethnicity overlap, create unique forms of disadvantage (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). In higher education, these overlaps become starkly evident in for example the low enrolment and

retention of students with disabilities, especially women (Mirza, 2017). As mentioned, factors like inaccessible buildings, scarcity of assistive technologies, and rigid institutional structures, disproportionately affect individuals who face multiple axes of marginalisation (Lynch, 2010).

Efforts to address these challenges often emphasise ensuring there are allies for inclusion available. For example, by making sure provision is made in the faculty with administrators, and peers, actively working to create enabling environments (Garland-Thomson, 2002; Barton & Oliver, 1997). True allyship, however, requires moving beyond only declarative accommodations or individualised assistance. Instead, institutions should adopt universal design principles—architectural, pedagogical, and policy measures that benefit a wide spectrum of learners (European Commission, 2021). Moreover, male allies can leverage their structural power to foster more inclusive policies, challenging both patriarchy and ableism in academic spheres (Ahmed, 2012).

Literature indicates that while some help is offered to women with disabilities in universities, it is too often based on pity rather than intention to promote systemic equity. Intersectionality helps uncover these nuances, showing how disability-related discrimination is intertwined with gendered assumptions about competence or worth (Morris, 1991; hooks, 2000). This dynamic underscores the need for cultural change as much as for additional institutional policies.

In summary, gender and disability must be understood as intersecting vectors of oppression, deeply shaped by cultural norms, institutional policies, and individual perceptions (Crenshaw, 1991; Garland-Thomson, 2002). The UN CRPD and various EU strategies highlight the formal commitments to equality, but ableism and patriarchal mindsets still limit real-world progress (UN, 2006; European Commission, 2021). Feminist disability scholarship stresses that true inclusion is not a matter of charity but of structural transformation, where women with disabilities are valued as active participants in academic and public life (Shakespeare, 2006; Morris, 1996).

Thus, any strategy to advance gender equality in higher education must embrace an intersectional, rights-based approach—one that dismantles ableist barriers, expands educational

opportunities, and challenges narrow gender norms (Barnes & Mercer, 2003). By fully integrating disability into feminist analyses, institutions can better identify converging forms of discrimination and move toward systemic solutions that benefit all members of the academic community (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Ahmed, 2017). A contribution to this effort was achieved within the UNIGEM project, among other activities through the quantitative and qualitative mixed-method research conducted in two waves, the first one in 2021 and the follow-up in 2024. The elaborate description of the methodological procedures and sampling can be found at the beginning of this book, while this chapter brings an overview of the results and their discussion.

8.1. Low Recognition of Intersection and Indecisiveness: Analysis of Quantitative Results

Chapter 7 presented a table showing levels of agreement (completely agree, partly agree, indecisive, partly disagree, completely disagree) with the statement: "Persons belonging to minorities, such as Roma, disabled persons, people with developmental and learning disabilities, religious and ethnic minorities, and LGBTQIA+ persons, suffer more from gender-based violence and discrimination" in the first research wave conducted in 2021. The results indicate significant gender differences in agreement levels. Female students were more likely to agree with the statement compared to male students, who showed more indecisiveness and disagreement. Teaching staff also showed differences, with women agreeing more strongly than men. Among administrative staff, the level of agreement was relatively high (67.6%), with women showing a slightly higher recognition of discrimination than men. In 2024, this general statement was split into three separate questions focusing specifically on LGBTQIA+ individuals, people with disabilities, and ethnic/religious minorities. This allowed for a more detailed analysis, but direct comparisons between the 2021 and 2024 results were not statistically tested. To summarise the findings on the intersection of disability and gender inequality from follow-up research conducted in 2024 (refer to Table in Chapter 7), quantitative results showed that

recognition of discrimination against individuals with disabilities is relatively low across all surveyed groups—students, teaching staff, and administrative staff. While women generally demonstrate higher levels of agreement with the statement that "people with disabilities experience more gender-based violence and discrimination," men are more inclined to express uncertainty or complete disagreement. This trend is especially noticeable in administrative staff responses, where male respondents record the highest levels of indecisiveness. Although the differences in men's and women's responses are often statistically significant among students and teaching staff, they are less so among administrative staff. Moreover, high proportions of respondents in each group (over 30%) remain undecided about whether disability status exacerbates gender-based violence and discrimination. This finding suggests insufficient awareness of the specific challenges faced by individuals with disabilities. In turn, it underscores the need for targeted educational initiatives, aimed at clarifying how multiple forms of disadvantage—such as disability and gender—can intersect to intensify discrimination in academic and workplace environments. The results reveal varying levels of agreement with the statement that people with disabilities experience higher levels of gender-based violence and discrimination.

These insights serve as a starting point for the more in-depth discussion of disability-focused intersectionality provided in this chapter. The table below examines the views of respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, and Serbia on whether individuals with disabilities experience higher levels of gender-based violence and discrimination, according to data from the 2024 research wave. The results indicate significant differences in opinions among respondents from the four different countries.

Table 25. Level of Agreement with the statement "People with Disabilities Experience Higher Levels of Gender-Based Violence and Discrimination": Analysis of Responses by Country 2024

Response Category	B&H (%)	Montenegro (%)	Croatia (%)	Serbia (%)
Completely Agree	13.0	13.6	12.8	15.5
Partly Agree	21.9	19.6	19.6	21.4
Undecided	30.5	26.5	31.2	37.3
Partly Disagree	15.7	18.6	16.1	13.5
Completely Disagree	18.9	24.3	17.8	12.4

The highest percentage of indecisive response was recorded in Serbia (37.3%), indicating a high level of uncertainty or lack of information about this issue. By contrast, Croatia has the highest percentage of respondents who completely agree with the statement (15.5%). Regarding disagreement, Montenegro has the largest percentage of respondents who completely disagree with the statement (24.3%), and it also shows the highest proportion of partial disagreement (18.6%). This may suggest greater scepticism, or a different perception of the issue, in Montenegro compared to the other countries. The findings also indicate that there are statistically significant differences in the responses of all groups of respondents from different countries. These results underscore the need for further education and awareness-raising about violence and discrimination against people with disabilities. This education and awareness-raising must take into account the specific sociocultural contexts of each of the countries analysed.

8.2. Challenges of Systematic Implementation: Analysis of Qualitative Results

Qualitative data reveals personal experience, opinions and reflections of students and teaching and administrative staff on the problematic of disability and intersection with gender.

Participants frequently refer to university regulations or policies designed to support students with disabilities. However, they also reveal inconsistencies in putting these frameworks into practice. While official documents exist, the effectiveness of these measures often depends on individual awareness rather than a systematic, institution-wide approach.

> *When it comes to persons with learning difficulties or developmental challenges, our University was truly a pioneer in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It adopted specific regulations, and we follow them… But I believe that sometimes, perhaps unintentionally, people overlook the fact that someone with those challenges might be in my lecture group. There might even be unconscious discrimination. Still, we're always ready to help those with learning difficulties. (T10 BA UNTZ FN)*

> *Our international mobility policy includes categories of students who face certain challenges or come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. We give them extra points so they can access those opportunities… But sometimes it comes across as help out of pity rather than a systematic form of support. (T12 BA UNTZ FA)*

There is also the difference between there being an inclusive infrastructure versus the reality of such accessibility actually existing. Many institutions attempt to provide physical accommodations—such as ramps, elevators, or adapted classrooms—but the actual level of accessibility varies. Some interviewees

highlight that while mobility issues may receive attention, other types of disabilities are overlooked.

> *I had one student who couldn't walk; she used a wheelchair, and we did offer support. We have an elevator. But if there's another type of impairment—like dyslexia or mental or cognitive difficulties—we have no information about that. We find out in class, and we're not competent to handle it. (T15_BA_UNIBL_FN)*

> *We have students with disabilities who are fully equal to others, and in some cases, an assistant is provided to write for a student who physically can't. But that usually applies to visible needs, while mental or cognitive disabilities are tougher to spot. (T20_BA_UNIBI_FN)*

Despite the existence of guidelines, we can see that some respondents note invisible disabilities (e.g., mental, cognitive, or emotional) often remain unaddressed because staff and faculty are unaware of the students' specific needs. The lack of information regarding students with non-visible disabilities is a recurring theme. Educators and administrators often remain unaware of these students' circumstances until issues arise in the classroom.

> *We don't receive any details unless it's a visible physical disability. If someone has another type of challenge—like dyslexia or emotional or cognitive issues—we know nothing about it. I've noticed some students struggling, but we're not trained to address that. (T15_BA_UNIBL_FN)*

> *We held a workshop with students who had various kinds of disabilities, and I must admit I had no idea about some of the difficulties they faced… especially if their condition wasn't obvious, like using a wheelchair. (T81 HR UNZG FA)*

The lack of systematic communication about hidden disabilities implies that staff often cannot provide adequate accommodations or empathy, which can lead to unintentional exclusion.

While the role of gender is not always explicitly stated, several respondents recognise that women with disabilities may be confronted by compound layers of discrimination. Cultural biases regarding both gender and disability mean that these issues may go unaddressed due to underreporting or being "under the radar."

> *People with disabilities are often discriminated against because of their condition, and I believe they can also face additional gender-based discrimination, but it tends to slip under the radar. (T17 BA UNIBL FA)*

> *I have a friend in a wheelchair, and from her experiences, she's faced more gender-based violence than women without disabilities. I wouldn't go into her details, but yes, I've noticed that. (T94 BA SVEMO MS)*

> *Some organizations lump everything under gender-based violence. It's not always about gender—sometimes it's about disability or being part of the Roma community… We need a more complex approach. (T78 HR UNZG MN)*

These observations support intersectional perspectives showing that women with disabilities may be at an increased risk of gender-based violence and are less likely to receive tailored support.

Respondents frequently emphasise how cultural perceptions of disability—often involving pity or misunderstanding—shape the university atmosphere. Many illustrate individual acts of support, but systemic solutions remain scarce. They also mention the risk of "positive discrimination" turning into paternalistic treatment, highlighting the need for rights-based, inclusive systemic policies.

> *We're here for the students; we try to guide them. If someone is from a low-income or socially vulnerable background or has a disability, we give them extra points. But sometimes it's just sympathy, not a systematic approach. (T12 BA UNTZ FA)*

These comments reveal ongoing tensions between personal goodwill and institutionalising inclusive practices. They underscore the importance of awareness-raising and professional training, so that disability is recognised as part of human diversity, rather than an exception.

Taken together, these themes expose a multifaceted environment where official policies, personal attitudes, infrastructural realities, and hidden disabilities all intersect. The interviews indicate both positive efforts and significant gaps in supporting students with disabilities, particularly women who may face overlapping prejudices. Addressing these issues calls for comprehensive training, clear communication channels, and a stronger intersectional framework that views disability and gender as integral to academic life, rather than as peripheral concerns.

8.3. Tokenism and Persistent Gaps: Discussing Results

From analysing both quantitative and qualitative data, a persistent gap is revealed between formal policy statements and commitments to disability inclusion on the one hand, and issues around practical implementation and everyday realities faced by students and staff in university settings on the other. Despite policies and legal frameworks grounded in the human-rights-based approach to disability (UN, 2006), the findings reveal that deep seated, cultural, ableist assumptions and gendered stereotypes still operate in subtle ways, limiting the full participation of people with disabilities, particularly women who are rendered invisible or "dependent" (Mladenov, 2014; Thomas, 1999; Oliver, 1990; Morris, 1996). The results also show that despite established policies, their enactment frequently happens through isolated acts of goodwill rather than systemic reform (Shakespeare, 2006). As feminist disability scholars emphasise, tokenistic measures do little to dismantle structural ableism, especially for women whose intersecting identities compound their exclusion (hooks, 1984; Morris, 1991).

The quantitative data reveals widespread indecisiveness and higher rates of disagreement among men and administrative staff, pointing to a knowledge gap and possible underestimation of intersectional discrimination. This indicates that a significant proportion of the academic community has yet to internalise these perspectives. Further, there is alignment with theoretical observations that individuals often fail to grasp the complex forms of oppression experienced by women with disabilities (Crenshaw, 1991; Garland-Thomson, 2002). Consequently, education and awareness-raising are both essential, echoing calls in the literature for institution-wide training on disability and gender (Barnes & Mercer, 2003; Ahmed, 2017).

Beyond physical barriers, respondents frequently mention that invisible disabilities—mental health issues, learning difficulties, and other non-physical differences—are poorly understood and rarely accommodated. This finding affirms the intersectional perspective that oppressed groups with less "visible" forms of marginalisation can be overlooked, especially when policies and

infrastructures cater primarily to enable physical access (Crenshaw, 1991; Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). Although some interviewees express willingness to help, they also acknowledge insufficient training to enable recognition of, and hence to address, these needs effectively. The result is an unintentional exclusion that can have long-term academic and social consequences (Lynch, 2010; Reay, 2004).

Taken together, these findings underscore the need for a holistic approach that addresses physical accessibility, policies for hidden disabilities, awareness training, and ongoing monitoring to ensure accountability (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Ahmed, 2012). Institutions should broaden their inclusion efforts beyond providing ramps or isolated accommodations, to create a culture of belonging. This includes universal design principles in teaching, clear reporting mechanisms for discrimination, and comprehensive staff development on intersectionality (Garland-Thomson, 2002; Barton & Oliver, 1997). Strengthening allyship with male colleagues and institutional leaders, along with community-based advocacy, can help shift the burden of change from individuals with disabilities to the broader academic community (hooks, 2000; Mirza, 2017).

Accordingly, a fully intersectional, rights-based approach is needed to dismantle persistent ableism and gender bias in academic life (Collins & Bilge, 2016; European Commission, 2021). Beyond nominal accommodations, universities must institutionalise inclusive practices through ongoing training, universal design, and robust data collection on both visible and non-visible forms of disability. Only then can higher education genuinely affirm the equal worth and agency of women and men with disabilities, aligning with the goals set forth by feminist disability theory and the UN CRPD (UN, 2006; Shakespeare, 2006).

Conclusion

This study underscores that disability is not merely a medical or personal challenge but a complex interaction of societal, cultural, and institutional factors. Although the existence of policies signal progress—highlighting a move toward human-rights-based frameworks and inclusive strategies—practical implementation remains uneven. Physical barriers persist on university campuses, and initiatives often focus on visible disabilities, leaving students with non-obvious disabilities unsupported. This gap between policy and practice reveals a deeper issue: cultural assumptions, including stereotypes about dependency and ability, continue to influence how students with disabilities are perceived and treated.

Moreover, the intersection of gender and disability further complicates these experiences. Women with disabilities frequently encounter dual barriers—ableist norms that question their academic capabilities and patriarchal attitudes that label them as dependent. While men may acknowledge the need for inclusivity in principle, many remain undecided or less convinced that disability amplifies gender-based discrimination. These perspectives point to a lack of comprehensive awareness, suggesting that both structural and cultural reforms are necessary.

Qualitative interviews illustrate individual stories of goodwill and support, alongside persistent uncertainties and gaps in training. Respondents note that institutional regulations sometimes reduce disability support to sporadic acts of help, rather than system-wide solutions. Yet, the very existence of official protocols, coupled with pockets of proactive allyship, indicates a significant opportunity for improvement. Educators and administrators who understand and embrace intersectionality can work toward dismantling ableism and gender bias simultaneously, reshaping academic environments into spaces where everyone belongs.

Ultimately, this chapter highlights the importance of sustained, collective efforts, as exemplified by the UNIGEM project. Training programs, universal design principles, and institutional leadership must converge to recognise disability as part of human diversity, not an exception to the norm. In doing so, academia can move beyond token accommodations and move closer

to fostering deeper cultural change, ensuring that women and men with disabilities can participate fully, no longer hindered by stigma or physical barriers. This transformation requires ongoing collaboration and reflection, but it is only through such an integrated, rights-based approach that higher education institutions can genuinely fulfil their mission of serving all students equally.

Chapter 9.

Gender-Based Violence Towards Marginalized Groups at Universities: Challenges of LGBTQIA+ Members and People With Disabilities

Introduction

The study of gender-based violence (GBV)[9] in academic settings has traditionally centred on gendered power dynamics and institutional hierarchies, often neglecting the ways in which disability and LGBTQIA+ identities shape experiences of violence and discrimination. An epistemological approach to the issue in this chapter will employ Michel Foucault's work on power and knowledge as well as critical realism. These frameworks will offer valuable tools for understanding how GBV functions within the intersection of sexuality, disability, and higher education.

Foucault's theorisation of power challenges the notion that discrimination and violence are merely the result of individual prejudices or overtly oppressive structures. Instead, he presents power as diffuse and embedded in discursive formations, shaping how bodies, identities, and institutions function. In The History of Sexuality (1978), he critiques the ways in which regimes of

9 An elaborate discussion of the concept of GBV and approaches to analyzing it was given in Chapter 6.

knowledge have regulated and normalised bodies, constructing hierarchies that determine who is deemed legitimate, deviant, or in need of discipline (Weeks, 2016). This is particularly relevant for understanding the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals and persons with disabilities in academia, as both groups have historically been subjected to pathologisation, exclusion, and invisibilisation (Wendell, 1997). Universities, as sites of knowledge production, do not simply reflect broader societal norms but actively participate in the governing of identities, often through institutional policies that claim neutrality while perpetuating exclusionary practices.

From a critical realist perspective, oppression is best understood through the analysis of structural mechanisms that generate and sustain inequalities. Bhaskar's theory of critical realism (1978) distinguishes between the empirical, the actual, and the real, emphasising that observable discrimination (empirical) is merely a manifestation of deeper structures (real) that must be examined if meaningful change is to occur (Van Ingen, Grohmann, & Gunnarsson, 2020). Within academic institutions, GBV against LGBTQIA+ individuals and persons with disabilities, is not only a result of individual actions but is also structurally reproduced through inaccessible infrastructures, implicit biases in hiring and funding, and the failure of institutional policies to address intersectional vulnerabilities (Van Ingen, 2020). Margaret Archer's concept of morphogenesis (1995) further contributes to this understanding by demonstrating how institutional transformation requires sustained agency and resistance from marginalised groups, rather than being an automatic outcome of progressive policies. This aligns with the micro-macro dilemma in sociology, which underscores the interplay between individual agency and structural constraints in shaping lived experiences of discrimination (Tsekeris & Lydaki, 2011).

Both Foucauldian and critical realist frameworks are instrumental in analysing how GBV operates within academia, where LGBTQIA+ individuals and persons with disabilities remain particularly vulnerable. While public discourse increasingly acknowledges discrimination against women and other marginalized groups, institutional policies often fail to recognize the compounded experiences of those who belong to multiple marginalized

categories. This is evident in research in higher education, which highlights the persistence of heteronormative and ableist biases despite formal commitments to equality (Ćavar & Opačić, 2023).

Within the specific context of LGBTQIA+ individuals, studies indicate that violence and discrimination are not only pervasive but also deeply normalized in academic settings (Bilić, 2019). The cultural construction of gender and sexuality in the Balkan region, shaped by traditional family values and conservative political movements, contributes to an environment where LGBTQIA+ students and faculty often experience harassment, social ostracization, and the constant pressure to conceal their identities (Butterfield, 2019). Even within universities—spaces theoretically positioned as progressive and inclusive—homophobic and transphobic rhetoric persists in both formal and informal settings, contributing to an atmosphere of unspoken tolerance for harassment. This aligns with broader regional studies on LGBTQ activism in the Balkans, which illustrate how institutional silence and passive complicity enable ongoing marginalization (Bilić, 2019).

In contrast, the issue of GBV against persons with disabilities in academia remains significantly underexplored despite mounting evidence of their heightened vulnerability. Research on disability and discrimination in higher education highlights how students with disabilities often experience a lack of institutional support, inadequate accommodations, and paternalistic attitudes that further add to their marginalisation (Ćavar & Opačić, 2023). Unlike LGBTQIA+ individuals, who face explicit hostility, GBV against individuals with disability is often rooted in infantilisation and the denial of their sexual agency, reinforcing stereotypes that render them invisible victims of harassment and violence (Wendell, 1997). Moreover, sexual violence against persons with disabilities is frequently dismissed or inadequately addressed due to misconceptions about their capacity for autonomy and consent (Mršević, 2013).

The comparison between LGBTQIA+ individuals and persons with disabilities in relation to GBV in academia reveals both shared vulnerabilities and distinct challenges. Both groups experience systemic exclusion, institutional inaction, and social stigma, yet the mechanisms of marginalisation differ. LGBTQIA+

individuals often encounter overt discrimination, hostility, and pressure to conform to heteronormative expectations, while disabled individuals are frequently desexualised, dismissed, or ignored in conversations about GBV.

Understanding GBV through an intersectional lens that incorporates Foucault's analysis of power/knowledge structures and Bhaskar's critical realism, allows for a more nuanced approach to institutional accountability and policy reform. Universities should move beyond symbolic commitments to diversity and engage in structural transformation that actively dismantles heteronormative, ableist, and patriarchal barriers (Van Ingen et al., 2020). This requires redefining inclusion not as an abstract principle but as a concrete institutional practice that accounts for the lived realities of marginalised groups. Only through such an approach can higher education institutions begin to address the systemic nature of GBV and create genuinely inclusive academic environments.

9.1. Compounded Barriers: Analysis of Quantitative Results

This chapter, although focused on GBV in academia against LGBTQIA+ individuals and persons with disabilities, will focus its analysis of results on the former. The latter, GBV against persons with disabilities in academia, will be briefly presented based on the findings discussed in Chapter 8 of this book, which was dedicated to the intersection of disability and gender. These findings reveal that while universities have increasingly adopted equality frameworks and accessibility measures, GBV and discrimination against persons with disabilities remain largely underrecognised and underreported. The research highlights that both physical and attitudinal barriers continue to shape exclusionary practices, reinforcing structural ableism and gendered stereotypes. The 2021 UNIGEM survey results indicated that female students were more likely to agree that minority groups, including people with disabilities, experience more discrimination and GBV. Male respondents, particularly among students and

administrative staff, displayed higher rates of indecisiveness and disagreement, reflecting a potential lack of awareness regarding intersectional discrimination. In the 2024 survey, responses to a newly introduced, more detailed question about disability and GBV revealed similarly low recognition levels across all surveyed groups—students, teaching staff, and administrative personnel. Over 30% of respondents remained undecided on whether disability status exacerbates GBV, with men more frequently expressing uncertainty or outright disagreement. Administrative staff, particularly men, demonstrated the highest level of indecision, underscoring a gap in awareness and institutional training on disability and violence. A comparative analysis across Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, and Serbia showed statistically significant differences in perceptions of disability-based GBV. Croatia had the highest proportion of complete agreement, while Serbia recorded the highest indecisiveness. Montenegro had the highest rates of disagreement, suggesting greater scepticism or differing sociocultural perceptions regarding disability and GBV. These disparities suggest the need for country-specific awareness campaigns and tailored educational initiatives to address misconceptions about disability and violence. Interviews with students, faculty, and administrative staff provided nuanced perspectives on institutional support and challenges. While some universities have policies to support students with disabilities, these frameworks are often inconsistently implemented and largely rely on individual goodwill rather than systematic institutional measures. Respondents frequently expressed frustration over the lack of awareness and training among faculty and staff, particularly regarding hidden disabilities such as mental health conditions, learning difficulties, and cognitive impairments. Educators admitted that they are often unaware of students' specific needs unless the disability is visibly apparent, leading to inadequate accommodations and unintentional exclusion from academic and social participation. Gender emerged as a complicating factor, with interviewees noting that women with disabilities face compounded discrimination, often experiencing higher rates of sexual harassment, infantilization, and social exclusion. Some expressed concern that disability-based GBV remains "under the radar," as it is often dismissed or miscategorised under general disability discrimination rather

than explicitly recognised as GBV. Intersectional challenges were particularly evident in cases where women with disabilities reported violence, with institutional responses often framing support as charitable assistance rather than recognising their rights to safety and autonomy.

Chapter 7 of this book explored intersectionality, presenting UNIGEM survey results on sexuality and disability. The 2021 findings indicate that female students were more likely than male students to recognise discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals, the Roma population, and persons with disabilities. Men were more frequently undecided or in disagreement, while respondents identifying as "other" showed the highest levels of indecision. Among teaching staff, most recognised the link between minority status and GBV, with women expressing stronger agreement. Administrative staff also showed relatively high levels of agreement, though notable proportions of respondents remained undecided or disagreed, emphasising the need for further education on intersectional discrimination. In 2024, newly introduced survey questions specifically addressed GBV and discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals. Female students continued to demonstrate higher recognition of LGBTQIA+ experiences of violence, while men were more often undecided or in disagreement. Among teaching staff, both men and women acknowledged LGBTQIA+ discrimination at similar rates, though slightly more women completely agreed. The responses of administrative personnel followed a similar trend, with higher agreement among women and greater indecision among men. While gender-based differences among teaching and administrative staff were not statistically significant, the data points to persistent gaps in awareness, particularly among male respondents, reinforcing the need for targeted educational initiatives.

The LGBTQIA+ population faces multiple forms of discrimination, often compounded by a lack of support even within their own families, which places them at a disadvantage compared to other minority groups. In the region, LGBTQIA+ individuals frequently experience discrimination in the labour market and in rural areas, often prompting them to migrate to countries with higher levels of tolerance. The political and economic crises in post-Yugoslav states further slow modernisation and the

acceptance of diversity, leaving LGBTQIA+ persons in one of the most vulnerable positions among minority groups. The UNIGEM research included an analysis of these issues, focusing particularly on the discrimination of the LGBTQIA+ population and other minority groups in academic and broader social contexts. An analysis of data from 2021 and 2024 regarding the perception of equality for the LGBTQIA+ population in all areas of public life shows both changes and persistent challenges in recognising the equality of this group in society. In 2021, the data reveal clear gender differences, with women more inclined to express disagreement with the statement that LGBTQIA+ individuals are equal to others in all areas of public life, while men more often display neutrality or a lower level of agreement. By 2024, the perception has not significantly changed, but there are slight shifts in the levels of agreement and disagreement. The overall percentage of those who completely disagree with the statement has decreased, while partial disagreement has increased. Women continue to express a higher level of disagreement compared to men. On the other hand, men more frequently exhibit neutrality or partial agreement than women, which may indicate a lack of a clear stance or less awareness of the challenges faced by the LGBTQIA+ community.

Table 26. The Extent of Respondents' Agreement with the Statement: "In the Country Where I Live, LGBTIQ+ Individuals are Equal to Others in All Areas of Public Life" – an Analysis of Responses by Gender 2021 and 2024

	2021, %				2024, %			
	M	F	Other	Total	M	F	Other	Total
Completely agree	14.6	4.5	25.0	7.3	14.5	4.9	7.7	8.0
Partly agree	16.8	10.0	0.0	11.8	16.4	13.0	7.7	13.8
Undecided	12.0	10.5	25.0	11.0	16.0	13.6	15.4	14.2
Partly disagree	21.0	21.7	16.7	21.5	21.8	24.5	30.8	23.9
Completely disagree	35.0	53.2	33.3	48.5	31.3	43.0	38.5	40.2

The gender disaggregated analysis of replies to five statements about the LGBTQIA+ population in 2024 reveals significant differences in perception between men and women, as shown in the table below.

Table 27. Level of Agreement with the Statements: Analysis of Responses by Gender 2024

	Completely agree		I partially agree		I am undecided		I partially disagree		Completely disagree	
	M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)
Homosexuality is a natural sexual orientation that exists among both humans and animals.	33.0	38.5	14.6	15.9	9.5	12.5	10.0	9.4	32.9	23.7
Transgender persons are those who change their gender.	34.5	41.4	19.5	25.0	23.0	15.6	5.9	7.5	17.1	10.4
The right to recognise same-sex unions threatens the family and causes a demographic crisis.	33.3	24.3	14.3	15.1	12.2	12.2	10.5	11.3	29.8	37.0
Persons of same-sex orientation are more than average exposed to violence and discrimination.	42.8	48.2	27.2	30.0	11.9	10.1	7.4	5.3	10.7	6.4
Homosexual/ bisexual/ transgender persons should enjoy all the rights and freedoms like other citizens.	47.6	53.9	17.4	17.6	11.0	11.2	8.4	7.0	15.6	10.3

Women are more likely than men to agree that homosexuality is a natural sexual orientation and that transgender persons are those who change their gender, while men show greater indecision. More men than women believe that recognising same-sex unions threatens the family and causes a demographic crisis, whereas women are more likely to reject this notion outright. Both genders widely recognize that LGBTQIA+ individuals face higher levels of violence and discrimination, though women express stronger agreement. Similarly, more women than men support equal rights for homosexual, bisexual, and transgender individuals, while men show a higher rate of disagreement. Across all statements, statistically significant gender differences emerge, highlighting women's greater awareness and acceptance of and support for LGBTQIA+ rights compared to men, while men express greater scepticism or disagreement with certain statements. The differences in the levels of agreement reflect deeper gender differences in attitudes toward sexual orientation, gender identity, and the rights of the LGBTQIA+ population.

9.2. Everyday Battles: Analysis of Qualitative Results

When it comes to qualitative insights, thematic analysis of interviews reveals that in academic settings, intellectual prowess can often eclipse non-normative gender expressions, allowing individuals to be respected despite unconventional behaviour. Respondents recalled a professor whose brilliance and multilingual fluency earned him respect—even though his feminine presentation and nontraditional dress (including wearing high heels and painted nails) set him apart.

> *We used to have this professor who, despite the fact that we never knew which group he belonged to because he dressed in a very feminine way at the university (and even outside, he dressed like a woman, painted his nails), was celebrated by us on International Women's Day. While some of us were*

> *tolerant and others were shocked, none could deny his brilliance; he was one of the smartest professors, speaking over seven languages fluently. There is always that minority for whom it is acceptable, even if for the majority it is not. (T1_BA_UNSA_FN)*

Respondents distinguish between formal institutional equality and the everyday discrimination that LGBTQIA+ individuals face. Although universities and workplaces may offer equal opportunities, interpersonal interactions still subject LGBTQIA+ individuals to verbal abuse and subtle acts of exclusion.

> *I personally do not have any LGBT friends, but I believe that institutionally they are not discriminated against since they can study and be employed like everyone else. However, they are still discriminated against by their surroundings; it is an individual matter of how people treat them. Minor verbal insults and subtle aggression are often overlooked, and I think these people experience that on a regular basis. (T20_BA_UNIBL_FS)*

Even within academic environments known for their openness, there is ambivalence about discussing LGBTQIA+ topics. Some educators express a willingness to engage with LGBTQIA+ themes, while others set personal boundaries, highlighting a tension between academic freedom and personal comfort.

> *We had a professor who was really open-minded and even wanted to introduce the subject 'Sociology of Marriage and Sexuality' because of his progressive views. However, as one of my psychology colleagues once told me, '(X), I cannot do it; I have a limit.' She explained that (…) when it came to LGBT topics, it was too much. It seems that even in academic circles, there are limits to what individuals are willing to discuss openly. (T26_BA_UNMO_FN)*

Many LGBTQIA+ individuals choose to remain discreet about their identities as a protective measure. The need to hide one's sexual orientation or gender identity is often linked to a desire to avoid harassment and maintain personal peace in environments that might otherwise be hostile.

> *I know of cases that have been shared with me because they know I am tolerant. Even though people around may seem accepting, that person still chooses not to come out publicly because it is easier to preserve their peace. They prefer to keep their identity secret for now, as it makes them feel safer, despite the fact that many are aware of their situation. (T37_BA_UES_FS)*

> *I have not encountered any situation where they were openly discriminated against. However, those who are part of the LGBTQ+ community usually do not publicly declare themselves due to personal reasons. In my own circle, even though I know some who are LGBTQ+, for family reasons, they choose to remain in the closet, with even their parents unaware of their orientation. (T93_CG_UDG_FS)*

Respondents expressed deep emotional distress in response to extreme right-wing rhetoric and public hostility toward LGBTQIA+ communities. Such attitudes evoke feelings of horror, discomfort, and even shame, and have a tangible impact on those who witness these extreme expressions in public spaces.

> *I am absolutely horrified by these extreme right-wing views, especially the radical attitudes of our so-called right, which disturb me whenever I read or see something upsetting. I felt embarrassed during a recent parade—not because I oppose the parade itself, but because the way society and the state handle it seems overwhelming. I even went to my window, sent kisses, and waved in support,*

> *trying to show them I was there, although I felt a bit ashamed for doing so. (T66_SR_UNBG_FA)*

There is also the theme of a clear recognition that non-heterosexual individuals face an elevated risk of harassment and even violence. Both personal observations and research findings underscore the link between sexual orientation and exposure to various forms of abuse, highlighting an ongoing safety concern.

> *Research has shown that there is a connection between sexual orientation and exposure to sexual harassment, with non-heterosexual individuals being significantly more at risk. Statistically, the relationship between sexual orientation and harassment is significant. (T63_SR_UNBG_FN(1))*

> *Certainly, they experience taunts and even violence in certain situations. Although I do not speak to them regularly and therefore am not completely informed, it is clear that they do not walk hand in hand on the street simply because they are unafraid, but rather to avoid any potential incident. (T76_HR_UNIRI_MS)*

These themes provide a comprehensive picture of the complexities surrounding LGBTQIA+ experiences in academic and social contexts. They reveal both progress in formal institutional acceptance and the persistent challenges of everyday discrimination, emotional distress, and the need for self-protection.

9.3. Heteronormative Culture: Discussing Results

The findings on GBV against LGBTQIA+ individuals and persons with disabilities in academia reinforce the argument that institutional frameworks remain inadequate in addressing the intersectional vulnerabilities of these marginalized groups. Using Foucault's (1978) theorization of power and Bhaskar's (1978) critical realism, the data reveal not only overt discrimination but also the structural and discursive mechanisms that perpetuate exclusion in university spaces. While universities increasingly advocate for inclusivity, their institutional cultures and policies often sustain implicit biases that make GBV an enduring issue for LGBTQIA+ individuals and persons with disabilities.

Foucault's (1978) perspective on power as embedded within discursive structures is particularly relevant in analysing the normalisation of GBV against LGBTQIA+ individuals in academic settings. The survey results confirm that while there is growing recognition of discrimination, male respondents frequently display uncertainty or outright disagreement regarding the prevalence of violence against LGBTQIA+ and disabled individuals. This aligns with research on heteronormative academic cultures, where institutional silence and passive complicity allow discrimination to persist (Bilić, 2019). The reluctance of some educators to engage with LGBTQIA+ issues, as highlighted in the qualitative findings, further reflects how academic institutions regulate discourse, limiting the visibility of queer and non-normative identities (Butterfield, 2019).

Bhaskar's (1978) critical realist framework helps explain why formal anti-discrimination policies in academia fail to produce significant shifts in lived experiences. As Bhaskar theorised, observable discrimination is only the empirical manifestation of deeper structural and cultural mechanisms that shape institutional responses. The high levels of indecision among men regarding LGBTQIA+ discrimination and GBV suggest a lack of awareness that is not solely individual but embedded in the institutional culture. This aligns with Archer's (1995) morphogenetic approach, which emphasises that institutional change does not occur spontaneously but requires sustained pressure from marginalized groups. In this case, the continued marginalisation of

LGBTQIA+ individuals stems from a failure to acknowledge their lived realities, leading to policy inertia despite nominal commitments to equality.

A comparison of GBV against LGBTQIA+ individuals and persons with disabilities reveals both commonalities and key differences in their experiences. Both groups face systemic exclusion, institutional inaction, and social stigma, yet the mechanisms of violence differ. LGBTQIA+ individuals encounter overt hostility, discrimination, and pressure to conform to heteronormative norms, whereas disabled individuals are often desexualised and infantilised, making their experiences of GBV less visible and more easily dismissed (Wendell, 1997). This aligns with the broader literature on ableism, which constructs disability as a site of dependency rather than agency, limiting institutional recognition of GBV against disabled persons (Mršević, 2013). The high proportion of respondents who remain undecided about whether disability exacerbates GBV suggests a persistent gap in awareness, reinforcing the Foucauldian argument that what is not named or recognised within dominant discourse remains institutionally invisible (Weeks, 2019).

Additionally, the regional variations in responses to GBV and discrimination in academia, particularly the higher levels of recognition of disability-based GBV in Croatia compared to Montenegro and Serbia, suggest sociocultural differences in attitudes toward disability and violence. As Tsekeris and Lydaki (2011) note, macro-level structural conditions influence micro-level perceptions, shaping how individuals interpret discrimination in different national contexts.

Finally, the qualitative findings underscore the emotional toll of institutional inaction, with respondents expressing frustration over unaddressed microaggressions, social exclusion, and the continued need for self-concealment among LGBTQIA+ individuals. The testimonies about faculty members who refuse to engage with LGBTQIA+ topics further demonstrate how individual agency is constrained by institutional norms, limiting the possibility for discursive resistance (Van Ingen et al., 2020). As Foucault (1978) posits, power is not only repressive but also productive, shaping what can and cannot be said within institutions, thereby constraining the visibility of marginalised groups.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the complexities of GBV within academia, particularly as it affects LGBTQIA+ individuals and persons with disabilities. Through the theoretical lenses of Foucault's discourse on power and knowledge and Bhaskar's critical realism, it has become evident that GBV in academic settings is not merely the result of isolated acts of discrimination but is embedded within structural and cultural mechanisms that sustain exclusion. While universities increasingly advocate for inclusivity, their institutional policies and cultural practices continue to reflect deeply ingrained biases that render certain forms of violence invisible or insufficiently addressed.

Findings from the UNIGEM study highlight persistent challenges in recognising and addressing GBV, particularly the tendency of male respondents to express uncertainty or disagreement regarding the extent of discrimination faced by LGBTQIA+ and individuals with disabilities. This points to a broader institutional failure to integrate intersectional understandings of violence into awareness-raising and policy initiatives. LGBTQIA+ individuals are particularly vulnerable to overt discrimination, harassment, and exclusion, often facing institutional silence or passive complicity that allows such violence to persist. In contrast, persons with disabilities experience GBV in ways that are often overlooked or dismissed, with their experiences shaped by infantilisation, desexualisation, and inadequate institutional responses.

Despite some progress, particularly in Croatia where disability-based GBV is more widely acknowledged, regional variations in perception highlight the influence of broader sociocultural norms on the recognition and mitigation of violence. The qualitative data further underscore the emotional toll of institutional inaction, with many LGBTQIA+ individuals choosing to remain discreet about their identities and persons with disabilities struggling with inaccessible reporting mechanisms and limited institutional support.

Ultimately, addressing GBV in academia requires more than symbolic commitments to diversity and inclusion. It demands a fundamental shift in institutional structures, cultural attitudes, and

policy implementation. Universities must move beyond rhetorical gestures and engage in meaningful, intersectional reforms that dismantle heteronormative, ableist, and patriarchal barriers. Without such efforts, GBV will remain a pervasive reality for marginalised groups, limiting their ability to fully participate in academic life free from discrimination and violence.

Chapter 10.

Institutionalising Gender Mainstreaming in Universities in the Western Balkans: Progress, Challenges, and Future Directions

Introduction

"Gender mainstreaming" in the university context, refers to the systematic integration of gender perspectives into all institutional policies, practices, and processes, aimed at achieving gender equality. It is a multifaceted process that requires a combination of structural support, educator engagement, cultural change, and student involvement. While significant strides have been made in some areas on a global scale, ongoing challenges and resistance highlight the need for sustained efforts and commitment to achieving true gender equality in higher education.

The implementation of 'gender mainstreaming' varies significantly across different contexts and institutions, influenced by factors such as institutional commitment, faculty engagement, and the broader socio-political climate. One of the critical aspects of gender mainstreaming in universities is the establishment of dedicated structures and policies to support gender equality initiatives. For instance, in Spain, the legal mandate for gender equality has led to the creation of gender equality units and the development of specific protocols to combat sexual harassment

within academic settings (Lombardo & Bustelo, 2021). These initiatives are crucial for institutionalising gender perspectives and ensuring that gender equality becomes a priority in university governance. However, the effectiveness of these measures often hinges on the commitment of university management and the active participation of faculty and students (Yusuf & Yahaya, 2022).

Moreover, the perception and engagement of educators play a significant role in the successful implementation of gender mainstreaming. Research indicates that many teachers lack adequate preparation and awareness regarding gender issues, which hampers the integration of gender perspectives into university curricula (Miralles-Cardona, 2024). This gap underscores the need for comprehensive training and institutional support to empower educators to address gender inequalities effectively in their teaching practices (Ocio, 2023). Furthermore, the resistance to change within academic institutions can pose significant challenges to gender mainstreaming efforts. Studies have shown that implicit institutional resistance and individual opposition can undermine the effectiveness of gender equality strategies, leading to a preference for integrationist approaches that do not challenge the status quo (Tildesley, 2023; Verge et al., 2017).

In addition to structural and educational factors, the cultural context within universities also influences the success of gender mainstreaming initiatives. For example, in some regions, gender discrimination remains prevalent in managerial roles, which can hinder the implementation of gender-sensitive policies (Yusuf & Yahaya, 2022). Conversely, where there is a strong commitment to gender equality from the top levels of university administration, there tends to be more significant progress in mainstreaming gender into academic practices (Annan, 2022).

Finally, the role of students in advocating gender equality cannot be overlooked. Engaging students in gender mainstreaming initiatives fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility towards creating an equitable academic environment. Programs that involve students in discussions and activities related to gender issues can enhance awareness and promote a culture of inclusivity within universities (Annan, 2022).

Considering the above, TPO Foundation has carefully tailored and implemented gender mainstreaming in partner universities through the UNIGEM project by undertaking several key initiatives:

- *Establishment of Gender Equality Bodies*: Each partner university has formed advisory boards or councils dedicated to gender equality. For instance, the University of Sarajevo established its Gender Equality Council to prevent and combat gender-based violence, discrimination, and sexual harassment, thereby ensuring integrity and quality in higher education.
- *Development and Implementation of Gender Action Plans (GAPs)*: Comprehensive GAPs have been created to empower academic and non-academic staff to promote gender equality. These plans include developing training programs focused on gender concepts, integrating gender equality principles into student engagement, and enhancing scientific and artistic work by incorporating gender perspectives.
- *Educational and Training Programs*: The project has organized various workshops, seminars, and training sessions aimed at sensitizing teaching staff, students, and administrative personnel to issues of gender equality and gender-based violence. These programs are designed to raise awareness and build capacity within the university communities.
- *Policy Development and Institutional Mechanisms*: UNIGEM has facilitated the creation of gender-responsive and gender-sensitive policies within higher education institutions. This includes establishing mechanisms to prevent and address gender-based violence and integrating gender perspectives into university policies and curricula.
- *Regional Collaboration and Research*: The project fostered regional cooperation among 19 universities across Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro. It has also initiated research to assess the challenges of mainstreaming gender equality in university communities, providing data to inform future strategies.

Through these comprehensive efforts, TPO Foundation's UNIGEM project aimed to create safer and more equitable academic environments by embedding gender equality into the fabric of university operations and culture. What follows in this chapter is a presentation of the findings from follow-up research in partner universities, with regards to the implementation of gender

mainstreaming activities and initiatives, and laying out the prospects for future efforts.

10.1. Establishment and Functioning of University Bodies for the Prevention and Combating of Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

The establishment of institutional bodies dedicated to gender equality is a crucial component of university efforts to mainstream gender perspectives and combat gender-based discrimination. These bodies serve as key mechanisms for coordinating, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating gender equality policies within academic institutions. However, their effectiveness largely depends on the extent to which they are recognised and trusted by different university stakeholders, including students, academic staff, and administrative personnel. This chapter examines the presence and role of these institutional bodies, their perceived effectiveness, and the challenges that remain in fully integrating gender equality structures into university governance.

A survey conducted in partner universities across Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, and Serbia in 2024 assessed perceptions of the existence and functionality of such institutional bodies. The findings reveal significant variations in awareness and agreement among different respondent groups and across national contexts. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, students expressed the lowest level of agreement regarding the presence of these bodies, with only 14.2% fully acknowledging their existence. In contrast, academic and administrative staff demonstrated higher levels of recognition, with 30.0% and 37.7% fully concurring, respectively. The high proportion of undecided responses, particularly among students (47.8%), highlights a pervasive lack of awareness regarding these structures and their role within the university environment. These findings emphasise the need for universities to strengthen communication strategies to enhance the visibility and perceived legitimacy of institutional bodies focused on gender equality. Ensuring that

all members of the academic community are informed about their purpose, functions, and accessibility is essential for fostering trust and encouraging engagement with gender mainstreaming initiatives.

Table 28. The University Has Established a Body/Bodies for the Coordination, Implementation, Monitoring, and Evaluation of Measures for the Prevention and Combating of Gender-Based Violence: Analysis of Responses by Status and Country 2024

	BiH			Montenegro			Croatia			Serbia		
	Students	Teachers	Administrative staff	Students	Teachers	Administrative staff	Students	Teachers	Administrative staff	Students	Teachers	Administrative staff
Completely agree	14.2	30.0	37.7	27.4	45.9	46.2	13.7	32.3	38.1	17.1	23.3	40.4
Partly agree	11.7	19.8	20.6	20.0	16.2	30.8	11.3	28.0	20.6	16.8	21.4	17.0
Undecided	47.8	37.7	36.6	39.1	35.1	23.1	57.7	30.1	38.1	44.1	48.9	40.4
Partly disagree	9.7	5.5	1.1	6.5	0.0	0.0	10.2	5.4	1.6	10.6	3.4	0.0
Completely disagree	16.6	7.0	4.0	7.0	2.7	0.0	7.2	4.3	1.6	11.4	3.0	2.1

In Montenegro, students demonstrate a higher level of agreement compared to Bosnia and Herzegovina, with 27.4% fully agreeing that universities have established such institutional bodies. Academic staff exhibit an even greater level of agreement (45.9%), while administrative staff report the highest percentage of agreement among the groups (46.2%). However, the

proportion of undecided responses among students remains high (39.1%), which continues to highlight the need for improved dissemination of information on this issue. During interviews, one of the participants commented:

> *I believe that the university, after the completion of this project, must leave behind a certain legacy in the form of a center that would provide support to both students and employees. In my opinion, although this was part of the project, the Council for Gender Equality did not have the necessary capacity. Naturally, it could not have had that capacity in this case, but until such a body is established at the university, everything else remains superficial change that will not directly help any student, male or female. I mean, it's probably much harder for them, of course, than it is for the employees. (T10 BA UNTZ FN)*

In Croatia, the results are similar to those observed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with students exhibiting relatively low levels of agreement (13.7% fully agree), while the proportion of agreement among teaching and administrative staff is somewhat higher (32.3% and 38.1%, respectively). Interestingly, students in Croatia display the highest percentage of undecided responses compared to other countries (57.7%), which indicates even greater unawareness or lack of visibility of these bodies within the academic environment.

In Serbia, teaching staff demonstrate slightly higher levels of agreement (23.3%) compared to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, while administrative staff again report the highest percentage of agreement (40.4%). Students, on the other hand, express relatively low levels of agreement, with only 17.1% fully concurring with the statement, and a high percentage of undecided responses among students (38.8%) further emphasises the challenge of informing this group.

The results highlight significant differences among respondent groups, with administrative staff across all countries demonstrating the highest levels of agreement that universities have

established bodies to combat gender-based violence. This finding should come as no surprise, as administrative personnel are often responsible for implementing university policies, including gender equality initiatives. They are more likely to engage with institutional documents, policies, and procedures related to gender mainstreaming, making them more aware of existing frameworks. Many gender mainstreaming initiatives, such as gender action plans (GAPs) and anti-discrimination policies, require administrative oversight for implementation and reporting. Administrative staff may participate in drafting, updating, and monitoring these policies, which increases their knowledge and awareness. Unlike academic staff, who are often preoccupied with teaching and research responsibilities, administrative staff may have more structured work schedules that allow them to engage more fully with university policies and training programs on gender mainstreaming. Conversely, students show the lowest levels of agreement, alongside a high proportion of undecided responses, suggesting weaker awareness or insufficient visibility of these bodies within the student population.

In conclusion, the data underscores the need to strengthen communication strategies and enhance the promotion of these institutional bodies, particularly among students, to increase their awareness and engagement in combating gender-based violence within academic environments. The differences between countries may reflect varying institutional practices and levels of policy implementation, which could necessitate tailored approaches in each country.

The table presents the results of a survey conducted among students, teaching staff, and administrative personnel in 2021 and 2024, focusing on the perception of the functioning of bodies responsible for the coordination, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of measures to prevent and combat gender-based violence and sexual harassment. The findings indicate significant changes in awareness and perception of these bodies during the observed period.

Table 29. Active Functioning of Bodies for the Coordination, Implementation, Monitoring, and Evaluation of Measures for the Prevention and Combating of Gender-Based Violence and/or Sexual Harassment – Analysis of Responses by Status 2021 and 2024

	Students (%)		Teachers (%)		Administrative staff (%)		Total (%)	
	2021	2024	2021	2024	2021	2024	2021	2024
Yes	8.7	16.4	17.3	31.3	20.1	34.6	12.1	22.1
No	15.4	10.9	21.1	13.5	14.9	10.4	16.9	11.5
I don't know	75.9	72.7	61.6	55.2	65.1	55.0	71.0	66.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Pearson chi2	Pr = 0.000		Pr = 0.000		Pr = 0.000		Pr = 0.000	

Across all respondent groups, there was an increase in the number of individuals recognising the active functioning of these institutional bodies. Among students, the percentage of those who responded affirmatively rose from 8.7% in 2021 to 16.4% in 2024. A similar trend was observed among teaching staff, with an increase from 17.3% to 31.3%, while administrative staff exhibited the largest increase in awareness, from 20.1% in 2021 to 34.6% in 2024. These data indicate that, over the observed period, the visibility and perception of the activities of these bodies improved across all segments of the university community.

There was also a reduction in the proportion of respondents unfamiliar with the existence and functioning of these bodies. Among students, the percentage of those who answered "I don't know" decreased from 75.9% in 2021 to 72.7% in 2024. A similar decline was observed among teaching staff (from 61.6% to 55.2%) and administrative staff (from 65.1% to 55.0%). While the proportion of respondents unfamiliar with these bodies remains high, the decline reflects gradual progress in raising awareness and providing education.

Simultaneously, the proportion of negative responses—those who believe these bodies are not actively functioning—also decreased. Among students, this percentage dropped from 15.4% in 2021 to 10.9% in 2024, while teaching staff reported a decline from 21.1% to 13.5%. Similarly, negative responses among administrative staff decreased from 14.9% to 10.4%. These findings suggest that fewer respondents now deny the existence or functioning of these bodies, which could be attributed to improved implementation of measures and increased awareness within the university community.

Overall trends across all respondent groups reveal that the proportion of positive responses increased from 12.1% to 22.1% between 2021 and 2024. Although the majority of respondents still indicate a lack of awareness about these bodies, the overall proportion of "I don't know" responses declined from 71.0% to 66.4%. This progress suggests that efforts to improve the visibility and recognition of these bodies have yielded results, though there remains significant room for further improvement.

The results of this analysis point to gradual progress in the perception of the functioning of bodies aimed at preventing and combating gender-based violence and sexual harassment. However, the significant number of respondents who remain unaware of these bodies emphasises the need for continued efforts in education and communication to enhance the visibility and effectiveness of these entities within the academic community.

10.2. Policy Development and Institutional Mechanisms

During the UNIGEM project, all 19 partner universities have developed and adopted gender action plans outlining institutional activities aimed at advancing gender mainstreaming to a higher level. This often involved the adoption of regulations, policies, and procedures for preventing and addressing gender-based discrimination and violence.

Nonetheless, qualitative findings from interviews reveal that the level of awareness among academic staff and students about

existing policies and procedures is highly variable. While some respondents acknowledged the existence of regulations and procedures intended to ensure gender equality and protection against discrimination, many lack a clear understanding of their content and application. Some interviewed professors recognized the administration's efforts to address these issues but simultaneously pointed to a lack of communication and proactive information-sharing with all members of the academic community. Even in cases where bodies and mechanisms have been formally established, employees and students are often unaware of how to report discrimination or protect themselves from gender-based violence. Those who are aware of the existence of these bodies and regulations noted that their implementation is often selective and depends on individual initiatives or specific faculties.

> *A few years ago, the university established a Center for Gender Equality, which, among other things, was tasked with engaging in dialogue and providing support to individuals who might potentially be exposed to gender-based violence. I am not familiar with the principles on which they operate, and I would personally like to speak with individuals who have approached them for consultation to understand how they proceed. The Center was, in a way, formed to oversee that aspect of policy at the university. However, to what extent the rectorate and deans' offices allow them the freedom to fulfill this role, I truly do not know. (T40_BA_UNZE_MN)*

> *What students can see, for example, are the guidelines available on the university's website, where terms such as violence, sexual harassment, and gender-based violence are clearly defined. These guidelines explain what these concepts mean, followed by a detailed process on how one can file a report and whom they can approach at the university. The process then continues from there. However, very few students choose this option because*

the procedure is lengthy and complex. In some cases, it can even end unfavorably for the student due to the lack of material evidence. The entire process relies heavily on evidence, making it extremely difficult to prove. Additionally, when it involves a professor, assistant, or someone who has been employed at the university for a longer period, efforts are often directed towards preserving their position, which means the matter is not pursued further when a complaint is filed. (T20_BA_UNIBL_FS)

In some cases, regulations exist only on paper, while their implementation is lacking due to administrative burdens, a lack of political will, or resistance within the academic community.

We should probably enter the Guinness World Records for having the most ineffective regulations. I receive, on average, 10 to 15 emails per day—sometimes even more—which is completely unnecessary and disrupts our work. So, even if regulations and guidelines exist, we do not read them, because most of these policies are created merely to address an issue on paper, rather than to actually resolve it. (T21_BA_SVEMO_FN)

There are certain institutional bodies in place, including designated commissioners at each faculty and institute, a corresponding coordination mechanism for these commissioners, and a gender equality committee. However, whether these structures function effectively is, unfortunately, another matter. It is important to note that prior to 2021, there was no specific regulation that clearly defined gender-based violence and established clear mechanisms to combat it. Instead, such issues were addressed through the Code of Professional Ethics on one hand and the Disciplinary Responsibility Regulation on the other. The newly introduced

> *Regulation for the Prevention of Gender-Based Violence represents a more precise and structured solution. The experiences of certain faculties that pioneered these efforts—such as the Faculty of Political Sciences, the Faculty of Philosophy, and initial attempts at the Faculty of Law—were invaluable in shaping this overarching university-wide regulation. However, this regulation remains in a pilot phase, and I hope it will be further refined to enhance its effectiveness. (T65_SR_UNBG_MA)*

Respondents provided examples where institutions formally endorsed gender equality but, in practice, failed to advocate for the transformation of entrenched patterns of power and privilege. This discrepancy between the normative framework and its implementation often leads to apathy and a sense of helplessness among those striving for gender equality.

> *I do not see the purpose of such committees; no one will trust them, not at all. I, for one, if anything were to happen to me, would not turn to that committee because I neither see its credibility nor its effectiveness in helping or protecting me in any way. What use would it be to have two associate professors or one professor sitting there—how could they possibly help me? If something were to happen, if someone in a higher position or someone close to me were involved, how would they stop that person? In what way? And what actual powers do they have? None, except to write a report. And where does that report go? To the dean? To the entire council? Or to whom? (T79_ HR_ UNZG_ FN)*

This excerpt from interviews highlights a fundamental challenge in the institutionalisation of gender equality within universities: the gap between formal commitments to gender equity and the actual transformation of power structures and institutional culture. While universities may adopt policies, establish gender equality committees, and introduce reporting mechanisms,

these efforts often remain superficial and fail to produce tangible change. This disconnect between policy and practice can lead to disillusionment, apathy, and a lack of trust in institutional mechanisms designed to address gender-based discrimination and violence.

The respondent's statement explicitly expresses scepticism about the effectiveness of gender equality committees, questioning both their credibility and their capacity to provide meaningful support. This concerns reflect a broader distrust in institutional mechanisms, particularly when those mechanisms lack enforcement power or when decision-making remains concentrated among individuals who may have a vested interest in maintaining existing hierarchies.

Ultimately, this reflection reveals a deeper issue: while universities may publicly endorse gender equality initiatives, they often fail to address the entrenched structures of privilege and power that sustain gender-based discrimination. Without clear accountability mechanisms and a genuine commitment to systemic change, institutional responses risk being perceived as performative rather than transformative. This perception, in turn, discourages individuals from seeking institutional support, further reinforcing a culture of silence and inaction.

10.3. Communication and Visibility of Gender Mainstreaming Initiatives

Effective communication and the visibility of gender mainstreaming initiatives are essential for ensuring institutional accountability and fostering a culture of gender equality within universities. The accessibility of information related to gender-based violence prevention, reporting mechanisms, and institutional policies plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions and engagement among students, academic staff, and administrative personnel. Without clear and visible communication strategies, even well-developed policies risk remaining ineffective due to a lack of awareness and utilisation.

This part of the current chapter explores the effectiveness of communication strategies employed by universities to promote gender mainstreaming initiatives. It examines the extent to which faculty websites and social media platforms serve as accessible and reliable sources of information on gender-based violence policies, the differences in perception among students, academic staff, and administrative personnel, and the broader implications of visibility for institutional gender equality efforts. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for identifying gaps in communication strategies and ensuring that gender mainstreaming efforts translate into meaningful institutional change.

A survey conducted in 2021 and 2024 assessed how different university stakeholders perceive the visibility of guidelines on gender-based violence across official faculty websites and social media platforms. The findings reveal significant shifts in perception over the observed period, with notable differences among respondent groups. Statistical analysis, measured using the Chi-square test (Pr = 0.000), confirms that these changes are statistically significant across all surveyed groups, indicating that the observed variations between 2021 and 2024 reflect genuine shifts in awareness rather than random fluctuations.

Table 30. My Faculty Has Clearly Displayed Guidelines on Gender-Based Violence on Its Official Website and/or Other Social Media Platforms – Analysis of Responses by Respondent by Status 2021 and 2024

	Students (%)		Teachers (%)		Administrative staff (%)		Total (%)	
	2021	2024	2021	2024	2021	2024	2021	2024
Yes	4.4	11.0	7.4	26.2	17.4	28.9	6.4	16.7
No	21.9	14.6	23.7	11.8	18.1	6.0	22.1	13.1
I don't know	73.7	74.4	68.8	62.0	64.4	65.1	71.5	70.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Pearson Chi2	Pr = 0.000		Pr = 0.000		Pr = 0.000			

It is evident that the percentage of positive responses—those confirming the presence of clearly displayed guidelines on official university websites and social media platforms—has significantly increased across all respondent groups. Among students, this percentage rose from 4.4% in 2021 to 11.0% in 2024. Among academic staff, the proportion of positive responses increased from 7.4% to 26.2%, while administrative staff recorded a rise from 17.4% in 2021 to 28.9% in 2024. These findings suggest that universities, at least from the perspective of respondents, have made considerable efforts to enhance the visibility of information on gender-based violence. Conversely, the number of negative responses—those indicating that such guidelines are not clearly displayed—has decreased across all groups. Among students, this percentage dropped from 21.9% in 2021 to 14.6% in 2024, while among academic staff, it declined from 23.7% to 18.0%. A similar trend was observed among administrative staff, where the percentage decreased from 18.6% to 13.1%. These findings suggest an overall improvement in the perceived availability of these resources.

Nevertheless, a significant proportion of respondents still report being unaware of whether such guidelines exist. Among students, the percentage of those who answered “I don’t know” slightly declined from 73.7% in 2021 to 74.4% in 2024, indicating only a minimal improvement. A similar trend is observed among academic staff, where the proportion of uncertain responses decreased from 64.4% to 65.1%, as well as among administrative staff, where the percentage of uninformed respondents remained relatively stable (64.4% in 2021 and 65.1% in 2024). This indicates that despite some improvements, a large portion of respondents remains unaware of the availability of these resources.

The data indicate significant progress in the perceived accessibility of information on gender-based violence through universities’ official platforms. However, the substantial proportion of respondents who remain unaware of the existence of these resources highlights the need for further efforts in communication and outreach to ensure that such information is accessible and visible to the entire academic community.

Table 31. The University, Through Its Public Communication Channels (Official Website, Official Social Media Pages, etc.), Clearly and Regularly Highlights Procedures for Addressing Cases of Gender-Based Violence, Including Sexual Harassment – Analysis by Status and Country 2024

	BiH			Montenegro			Croatia			Serbia		
	Students	Teachers	Administrative staff	Students	Teachers	Administrative staff	Students	Teachers	Administrative staff	Students	Teachers	Administrative staff
Completely agree	13.8	15.8	27.6	32.6	40.5	30.8	10.8	20.4	34.9	11.2	7.9	21.3
Partly agree	11.7	19.2	20.7	20.9	24.3	7.7	15.8	24.7	11.1	14.9	14.3	17.0
Undecided	39.6	38.0	37.9	30.7	27.0	38.5	46.0	33.3	42.9	33.7	50.8	44.7
Partly disagree	11.8	12.2	6.3	9.3	0.0	15.4	13.0	11.8	4.8	17.1	12.8	10.6
Completely disagree	23.2	14.9	7.5	6.5	8.1	7.7	14.3	9.7	6.3	23.1	14.3	6.4

The table analyses respondents' perceptions of whether universities effectively and regularly communicate information regarding procedures for addressing cases of gender-based violence and sexual harassment through their communication channels (official websites, social media, and similar platforms) in 2024. The results reveal significant variations in perception across countries and respondent groups, including students, academic staff, and administrative personnel.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, respondents' perceptions of university transparency on this issue vary considerably across groups. The highest percentage of respondents who fully agree with the statement is found among administrative staff (27.6%), whereas students and academic staff report lower levels of agreement (13.8% and 15.8%, respectively). A notably high percentage of undecided responses, particularly among students (39.6%) and

academic staff (38.0%), suggests that communication efforts regarding this issue lack visibility. Additionally, the proportion of respondents who completely disagree, particularly among students (23.2%), indicates that communication strategies may not be sufficiently effective or recognized.

In Montenegro, perceptions of university transparency on this issue are significantly more positive compared to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Students and administrative staff report the highest levels of agreement, with 32.6% and 40.5% fully agreeing with the statement, while academic staff also demonstrate relatively high agreement (30.5%). The lower percentage of undecided responses and a lower level of disagreement suggest that Montenegrin universities are generally more effective in communicating on these matters.

In Croatia, the situation mirrors that of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with lower levels of agreement across all groups. The highest percentage of full agreement is recorded among administrative staff (20.4%), whereas students and academic staff exhibit lower levels of agreement (20.4% and 20.1%, respectively). The exceptionally high percentage of undecided responses across all groups, particularly among students (45.6%), underscores the need for improved communication strategies.

In Serbia, perceptions of university transparency regarding gender-based violence and sexual harassment are relatively low. Administrative staff exhibit the highest percentage of agreement (17.0%), while students and academic staff report even lower levels of agreement (11.2% and 7.9%, respectively). Furthermore, the high percentage of undecided responses among students (39.9%) and academic staff (38.0%), as well as a substantial proportion of respondents who completely disagree (especially among administrative staff at 16.7%), indicate serious communication challenges.

Overall, these research findings highlight significant differences among countries of the perceived effectiveness of universities' public communication, regarding procedures for addressing gender-based violence. Montenegro stands out as the country with the most positive perceptions, while Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia exhibit similar patterns of lower agreement levels and high uncertainty.

During the interviews, respondents also referred to their freedom to express opinions, and therefore agency, in open communication. The organisational culture of the university emerged as a key factor in shaping attitudes and behaviours within the academic community. In some cases, faculties encourage open discussions on gender equality and LGBTIQ+ rights; however, such instances remain exceptions rather than the norm. Respondents highlighted that many members of the academic community avoid publicly expressing their views on these topics, due to fear of negative repercussions. The fear of marginalisation or professional sanctions often discourages those who wish to actively participate in fostering a more inclusive academic culture. At the same time, there is also explicit resistance to the institutionalisation of gender equality; with some individuals perceiving such initiatives as imposed or as conflicting with traditional academic values.

10.4. Education and Training – Strengthening Capacities in the Field of Gender Equality

Engagement in educational initiatives on gender equality plays a crucial role in fostering institutional awareness, promoting inclusive practices, and strengthening the capacity of university communities to address gender-based discrimination and violence. This section examines the frequency of participation in workshops, seminars, training sessions, and campaigns on gender equality among students, academic staff, and administrative personnel in 2021 and 2024. The findings reveal a modest increase in overall participation, suggesting gradual progress in integrating gender equality education into university settings. However, a significant proportion of respondents report never having attended such activities, underscoring the ongoing challenge of ensuring widespread engagement and institutional commitment to gender mainstreaming.

Table 32. Frequency of Participation in Workshops, Seminars, Training Sessions, or Campaigns on Gender Equality Within One's Institution – Analysis of Responses by Status 2021 and 2024

	Students (%)		Teachers (%)		Administrative staff (%)		Total (%)	
	2021	2024	2021	2024	2021	2024	2021	2024
Often	2.6	3.8	2.8	10.2	0.7	8.1	2.5	5.9
Ocasionally	6.4	7.8	9.5	13.1	7.8	16.4	7.4	10.0
Rarely	9.0	7.6	8.9	6.7	7.0	7.0	8.8	7.3
Once	6.4	6.1	4.0	5.0	4.4	7.0	5.6	5.9
Never	75.5	74.6	74.7	65.1	80.0	61.4	75.6	70.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Chi2	Pr = 0.037		Pr = 0.000		Pr = 0.000			

Statistical analysis using the Chi-square test (Pr = 0.037 for students and Pr = 0.000 for academic and administrative staff) confirms that these changes are statistically significant, particularly for academic and administrative personnel. This suggests that efforts to promote education and awareness of gender equality within these groups have had a measurable impact. Among students, the proportion of those who frequently attend these events has increased slightly, from 2.6% in 2021 to 3.8% in 2024. Similarly, the percentage of students who participate occasionally has risen from 6.4% to 7.8%. Nevertheless, the proportion of students who have never attended such events has remained almost unchanged, decreasing only marginally from 75.5% to 74.6%. This suggests that efforts to raise awareness among students have had a limited impact.

A more significant shift has been observed among academic staff. The percentage of those who frequently participate in these activities has increased from 2.8% in 2021 to 10.2% in 2024, while the proportion of occasional participants has risen from 9.5% to 13.1%. Conversely, the percentage of academic staff who have never attended such events has decreased from 74.7% to 65.1%, indicating substantial progress in engagement within this group.

Administrative personnel, who exhibited the lowest level of engagement in 2021, demonstrated the most significant progress. The percentage of those who frequently participate increased from 0.7% in 2021 to 8.1% in 2024. Similarly, occasional participation saw a notable rise, from 7.8% to 16.4%. The percentage of those who have never participated declined from 80.0% to 61.4%, suggesting more successful inclusion of this group in gender equality-related activities.

Overall, the results for all respondent groups indicate an increase in the percentage of those who frequently attend these events, from 2.5% in 2021 to 5.9% in 2024, while occasional participation rose from 7.4% to 13.1%. The proportion of respondents who have never participated in such activities decreased from 75.6% to 70.9%. Although the changes are not dramatic, they reflect a gradual increase in engagement with gender equality initiatives.

Overall, the data indicate progress in integrating different groups into activities that promote gender equality; however, a significant proportion of individuals, particularly students, remain uninvolved. This underscores the need for additional efforts in outreach and inclusion to ensure that these initiatives reach a broader segment of the academic community.

Table 33. Frequency of Participation in Workshops, Seminars, Training Sessions, or Campaigns on Gender Equality Outside the Faculty/ University – Analysis of Responses by Respondent Groups, 2021 and 2024

	Students (%)		Teachers (%)		Administrative staff (%)		Total (%)	
	2021	2024	2021	2024	2021	2024	2021	2024
Often	4.9	5.0	5.4	7.7	3.0	4.7	4.9	5.7
Occasionally	9.5	10.3	12.7	14.0	7.0	15.4	10.2	11.8
Rarely	11.0	10.7	10.8	12.0	10.4	10.4	10.9	11.0
Once	6.9	8.1	7.7	6.4	6.7	5.4	7.1	7.4
Never	67.7	65.9	63.4	59.9	73.0	64.1	66.9	64.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Pearson chi2	Pr = 0.488		Pr = 0.157		Pr = 0.018			

The previous table examines the frequency of participation in workshops, seminars, training sessions, or campaigns on gender equality outside the context of faculties or universities, categorized by respondent groups—students, academic staff, and administrative personnel—in 2021 and 2024. The results indicate slight changes in engagement across different groups over the observed period, with a general trend of modest increases in participation in these activities.

Among students, the percentage of those who frequently attend such events has remained almost unchanged, with a slight increase from 4.9% in 2021 to 5.0% in 2024. Similarly, the proportion of students who participate occasionally rose from 9.5% to 10.3%. Meanwhile, the percentage of students who have never attended such events decreased from 67.7% in 2021 to 65.9% in 2024, suggesting minimal progress in integrating this group into activities outside the university setting.

Academic staff exhibit a similar pattern. The percentage of those who frequently attend such events declined from 7.7% in 2021 to 5.4% in 2024, while the proportion of occasional participants remained relatively stable (12.7% in 2021 and 14.0% in 2024). The percentage of those who have never attended such activities decreased from 63.4% to 59.9%, indicating relatively steady but slightly improved engagement within this group.

Administrative personnel demonstrate a more substantial increase in engagement compared to other groups. The percentage of those who frequently participate increased from 3.0% in 2021 to 4.7% in 2024, while the proportion of occasional participants rose from 7.0% to 15.4%. The percentage of those who have never participated declined from 73.0% in 2021 to 64.1% in 2024, reflecting more significant progress in the engagement of this group.

At the overall level, a modest increase in participation is evident across all categories. The proportion of those who frequently attend such events increased from 4.9% in 2021 to 5.7% in 2024, while occasional participation rose from 10.2% to 11.8%. The percentage of respondents who have never participated in these activities decreased from 66.9% to 64.1%. While these findings indicate some progress in integrating various groups into gender equality initiatives, a substantial portion of the

population remains uninvolved in such activities outside the university setting.

Statistical data, measured using the Pearson Chi-square test, reveal differing results across respondent groups. Changes in engagement levels among students and academic staff are not statistically significant (Pr = 0.488 and Pr = 0.157, respectively), whereas the change among administrative personnel is statistically significant (Pr = 0.018). This suggests that the increase in engagement among administrative personnel is more pronounced than in other groups.

The table highlights the need for more intensive efforts to promote gender equality initiatives beyond university settings to enhance participation across all groups, particularly students and academic staff, who demonstrate limited involvement in these initiatives. Greater efforts in awareness-raising, organisation, and content adaptation could contribute to higher engagement and increased awareness of gender equality in a broader societal context.

Conclusion

Gender mainstreaming in universities is a complex and multifaceted process that requires institutional commitment, policy implementation, and cultural transformation. Baseline and follow-up research on gender mainstreaming in Western Balkans universities confirm this notion and reveal a landscape characterized by varying degrees of commitment, implementation strategies, and outcomes. However, these challenges are not unique to the Western Balkans region; European universities also exhibit significant disparities in the adoption and effectiveness of gender mainstreaming efforts. While some institutions have successfully integrated gender perspectives into their policies and governance structures, others continue to lag due to cultural resistance, lack of institutional commitment, and resource constraints (Carvalho et al., 2020).

One of the key tensions in gender mainstreaming efforts is the balance between compliance with governmental directives and the preservation of academic autonomy. For instance, in Sweden, the implementation of government-supervised gender mainstreaming has been met with mixed responses. Although structured plans exist, concerns over institutional independence have led to resistance within some universities, illustrating the complexities of enforcing gender policies within academia (Olsson & Sörensen, 2020). Similarly, historical and socio-political contexts play a crucial role in shaping institutional approaches to gender issues, further complicating uniform implementation across different higher education settings (Minto & Mergaert, 2018).

The lived experiences of women faculty members further underscore the ongoing challenges of gender mainstreaming. Research indicates that women in academia continue to face gender-based biases and systemic barriers that hinder their professional advancement and representation in leadership positions (Berger-Estilita, 2024). These structural inequalities contribute to the underrepresentation of women in decision-making roles, often discouraging female academics from pursuing leadership opportunities. Addressing these challenges requires not only policy interventions but also a cultural shift that fosters a more inclusive and equitable academic environment.

A significant factor in advancing gender mainstreaming is the active involvement of male faculty members in gender equity initiatives. Studies suggest that engaging men as advocates for gender equality can lead to more effective institutional transformation and a more equitable academic environment (Anicha et al., 2015). This highlights the importance of collective responsibility in addressing gender disparities and ensuring that gender mainstreaming is not perceived solely as a women's issue but as a structural imperative for universities.

Looking ahead, the institutionalisation of gender mainstreaming in Western Balkans universities requires a sustained and strategic approach. Respondents emphasise the need for continuous education and training for academic staff and students, as well as the reinforcement of protective mechanisms for individuals facing discrimination. Additionally, ensuring the active

implementation of gender equality policies and increasing female representation in leadership through targeted institutional measures are identified as key priorities. While meaningful progress is possible, achieving gender equality in higher education requires more than the mere adoption of policies—it demands a long-term, coordinated effort supported by adequate resources, institutional accountability, and cultural transformation. Universities must move beyond symbolic commitments and actively work toward the enforcement of gender mainstreaming initiatives. As institutions continue to navigate these challenges, fostering a more inclusive and equitable academic environment will require both structural reforms and a commitment to changing deeply embedded cultural norms.

Chapter 11.

Gender Mainstreaming in University Curricula: Milestones and Challenges

Introduction

'Gender mainstreaming' in university curricula is a critical aspect of promoting gender equality in higher education. This approach, which integrates gender perspectives into all levels of education policy and practice, has been a focal point of European Union (EU) initiatives since the late 1990s. The EU's commitment to gender mainstreaming was formalised in 1996, aiming to create a culture of equal opportunities and address systemic gender inequalities within member states (Lomazzi et al., 2018; O'Connor, 2014). Despite these efforts, implementing gender mainstreaming in higher education has faced significant challenges, leading to mixed outcomes in achieving gender equality (Miralles-Cardona et al., 2021; Bencivenga & Drew, 2021).

One of the primary challenges in effectively mainstreaming gender in university curricula is the persistence of traditional gender norms and stereotypes that influence both educational practices and student experiences. Research shows that while higher education has expanded opportunities for women, it often fails to challenge entrenched gender norms, which can lead

to the reproduction of inequalities (Loots & Walker, 2015). For instance, studies have shown that without explicit educational interventions aimed at countering conventional gender norms, students may unconsciously perpetuate existing inequalities, such as those related to sexual harassment and gendered career choices (Loots & Walker, 2015). This highlights the necessity for curricula that not only include gender perspectives but also actively engage students in critical discussions about gender roles and expectations.

Moreover, the development and implementation of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) have emerged as a strategic response to these challenges. GEPs are designed to promote structural changes within academic institutions, fostering an environment that supports gender equality (Bencivenga & Drew, 2021; Clavero & Galligan, 2021). The European Commission's Science with and for Society (SwafS) program within Horizon has been instrumental in this regard, encouraging universities to adopt GEPs that align with EU gender equality objectives (Bencivenga & Drew, 2021). However, the effectiveness of these plans varies significantly across institutions, often depending on the political will and institutional culture surrounding gender issues (Mohloakana & Wet, 2023).

Furthermore, the role of faculty and institutional leadership is crucial in advancing gender mainstreaming in higher education. Studies emphasise the importance of training and awareness-raising among educators to ensure that gender perspectives are integrated into teaching and research practices (Miralles-Cardona et al., 2021; Silfver et al., 2021). For example, the development of self-efficacy scales for prospective teachers can help assess and enhance their capacity to implement gender-sensitive pedagogies (Miralles-Cardona et al., 2021). This approach not only contributes to the professional development of educators but also ensures that gender equality becomes a sustained focus within educational institutions.

Experiences so far point to the conclusion that integrating gender mainstreaming into university curricula requires a multifaceted approach in order to address both structural and cultural barriers. In the following passages of this chapter, we outline the gender mainstreaming efforts in this domain within UNIGEM

project in partner universities from 2021 to 2025, reflecting on milestones reached as well as challenges that hindered effective implementation of gender mainstreaming in the curricula.

11.1. The Modalities of Gender Mainstreaming in University Curricula within UNIGEM

Recognising the crucial role of universities in shaping societal values, the project has undertaken a comprehensive approach to embedding gender equality into academic curricula. One of the foundational steps in this process has been the establishment of institutional mechanisms dedicated to gender mainstreaming. Universities participating in the UNIGEM project have formed Gender Equality Councils and Centers, which are tasked with developing and overseeing policies that promote gender inclusivity (as outlined in previous chapter 10). These bodies have also been instrumental in crafting Gender Action Plans (GAPs) - strategic documents that outline concrete steps for integrating gender-sensitive policies into university structures and academic programs.

A key element of this initiative has been curriculum development. To facilitate the incorporation of gender perspectives into university courses, the project team in cooperation with gender and subject matter experts has designed and disseminated syllabi covering a range of topics, including *Introduction to Gender Studies, Gender-Based Violence, Gender and Economics, Gender in the UN System, and Gender and European Integration.* These resources have been offered to partner universities, encouraging them to embed gender-sensitive content into their existing programs or introduce new courses dedicated to gender issues.

Implementing these syllabi and other resources in partner universities was undertaken in two ways, which were previously recognised in the 2021 baseline research (Radončić & Lendák-Kabók, 2023):

- an inclusive approach which included integrating gender topics into existing courses,
- a complementary approach that included designing and

implementing separate, independent subjects dedicated to gender topics, or in other ways enabled inclusion of gender topics into education classes.

11.1.1. Inclusive and Complementary Approaches to Gender Mainstreaming the Curricula

Whether an inclusive or complementary approach was chosen depended on a combination of institutional constraints such as: faculty expertise, student demand, administrative hurdles, cultural context, and available resources:

- *Institutional Readiness and Curriculum Structure:* Some universities have rigid or heavily structured curricula, making it easier to integrate gender topics into existing courses rather than introducing entirely new subjects (e.g. case of University of Sarajevo). Others have more flexible academic programs, allowing them to develop stand-alone gender courses without disrupting existing curricula (e.g. University of Zenica and University of Bihać).
- *Academic Autonomy and Faculty Expertise*: Universities with faculty members already trained in gender studies might be more inclined to introduce independent gender courses. Institutions where gender expertise is lacking or limited may prefer to incorporate gender themes into existing subjects, ensuring faculty can gradually build competence.
- *Accreditation and Bureaucratic Challenges:* Developing a new, stand-alone gender course often requires formal administrative approvals, and resource allocation, which can be time-consuming and politically sensitive. In contrast, embedding gender topics into existing courses can be implemented more swiftly without requiring major curriculum revisions.
- *Sociopolitical and Cultural Factors:* In some regions, gender topics may be controversial or politically sensitive, making a gradual, integrative approach more acceptable to university leadership and the broader community. In more progressive environments, universities may proactively establish independent gender courses as part of their commitment to gender equality.
- *Resource Availability and Funding:* Universities with limited funding or staff shortages might find it more practical to integrate gender topics into existing courses rather than investing in new course development. Institutions with external funding or strong institutional backing may have the capacity to create dedicated gender courses.

- *Alignment with Broader University Strategies:* Some universities may aim to mainstream gender topics across disciplines, favoring an inclusive approach. Others might seek to establish gender studies as a distinct academic field, leading to the creation of independent courses.

The varied experiences of universities within the UNIGEM project illustrate these challenges, emphasizing the need for context-specific approaches to effectively mainstream gender equality in higher education.

11.1.2. Ad Hoc Educational Activities Supporting Curriculum Development

Beyond structured workshops and curriculum development programs, the UNIGEM project has embraced a dynamic and flexible approach to gender mainstreaming through ad hoc educational activities. These initiatives, often organised spontaneously or in response to emerging needs, serve as valuable tools for raising awareness, fostering dialogue, and encouraging engagement among faculty, students, and university staff.

One of the most effective methods used has been the organisation of guest lectures and seminars, where gender experts, activists, and academics are invited to share insights on critical issues related to gender equality. These sessions offer students and educators the opportunity to engage with contemporary debates, bridging theoretical knowledge with real-world applications.

Complementing these lectures, panel discussions provide a platform for multidisciplinary perspectives on gender issues. These events bring together voices from different fields—law, social sciences, education, and the arts—to facilitate critical conversations and challenge existing biases. By encouraging open dialogue, they create safe spaces for discussing gender-related challenges within the academic community.

To ensure broader visibility, UNIGEM has also initiated awareness campaigns, often leveraging university spaces and social media to spotlight gender-related themes. From poster exhibitions in university hallways to online campaigns marking important gender-related events, these activities serve to normalise

discussions about gender equality and challenge stereotypes in an accessible and visually engaging manner.

Marking internationally recognised gender equality events, such as International Women's Day, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and a campaign 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence, has further helped to reinforce the importance of gender-sensitive education. These commemorative events serve as key moments for reflection, activism, and institutional commitment to gender equality.

Another vital component of UNIGEM's ad hoc educational efforts is student-led initiatives, where students are encouraged to develop and lead their own gender-focused activities. Whether through community engagement projects, or interactive workshops, these initiatives help foster peer-to-peer learning and empowerment, ensuring that students become active participants in shaping gender-sensitive academic environments.

By integrating these ad hoc educational activities into university life, UNIGEM has created a dynamic and responsive model for gender mainstreaming. These initiatives complement formal curriculum changes by ensuring that gender equality remains a lived experience within the academic community, encouraging ongoing engagement, discussion, and advocacy across multiple levels of the university.

11.1.3. Winter Schools as Exemplary Ad hoc Educational Activities

As an inclusive and complementary approach to gender mainstreaming the curricula required a longer term perspective depending on the structural outlook of universities, UNIGEM project introduced Winter Schools as a strategic response to the need for intensive, focused educational interventions that address emerging gender-related issues within the academic community. These programs are designed to complement existing curricula by providing short-term, immersive learning experiences that delve deeply into specific themes relevant to gender studies.

Winter Schools within the UNIGEM project served as ad hoc educational activities, playing a crucial role in gender mainstreaming by offering intensive, short-term learning experiences focused on gender-related topics. Unlike regular university courses, these Winter Schools were designed to be flexible, responsive, and interdisciplinary, allowing students and faculty from various universities and fields to engage with contemporary gender issues in a concentrated format.

Winter Schools within the UNIGEM project are a prime example of ad hoc educational activities that contribute to gender mainstreaming in higher education. These schools offer short-term, intensive learning experiences designed to address emerging gender-related issues while fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and experiential learning. Unlike traditional university courses, Winter Schools operate as stand-alone educational events, typically lasting a few days or weeks. Their flexibility and responsiveness make them a powerful tool for integrating gender perspectives into academia.

One of the defining characteristics of Winter Schools is their short-term and intensive format. They are not part of the standard academic curriculum but serve as focused learning interventions that deliver in-depth insights on specific gender topics. These condensed programs provide opportunities that may not be available in traditional courses, offering students and faculty a space for concentrated engagement with gender issues. Each Winter School is thematically designed to reflect contemporary social and academic concerns. By selecting topics relevant to the region, the program ensures that gender studies remain timely and impactful. Themes such as “Gender and Globalization” (Sarajevo), “Gender and Violence” (Novi Sad), and “Gender and Art” (Tuzla) illustrate how these schools tackle diverse yet interconnected gender-related challenges, ensuring that the discussions remain grounded in real-world issues.

Sarajevo: “Gender and Globalization” Winter School: Held from February 20 to 26, 2023, in Sarajevo. This Winter School gathered 50 participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and Montenegro. Organized by the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of Sarajevo and the TPO Foundation, the program targeted second- and third-year

undergraduate and master's students from 19 partner universities involved in the UNIGEM project. The curriculum covered four main areas: Introduction to Gender Issues, Gender and Globalization, Gender and the Economy, and Gender and Migration. Participants engaged in lectures, exercises, and study visits, totaling 45 hours of educational activities. Upon completion, students had the opportunity to write a final paper under mentorship, with selected works published in a collection and awarded 3 ECTS points.

Novi Sad: "Gender and Violence" Winter School: The UNIGEM project organized a Winter School titled "Gender and Violence" at the University of Novi Sad from February 19 to 23, 2024. This program brought together over 40 students from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia, representing 20 universities. The five-day event featured 17 interactive lectures covering various aspects of violence, aiming to provide both theoretical insights and practical guidelines for prevention and intervention. The Winter School's outcomes were compiled into a collection titled "Gender and Violence in the Balkans," which was launched online on October 25, 2024. During this event, selected students presented their papers, offering unique insights into themes such as gender-based violence, women's experiences, and gender inequality.

Tuzla: "Gender and Art" Winter School: In December 2024, the "Gender and Art" Winter School was held in Tuzla, bringing together students, academic lecturers, and artists from across the region. The program provided a platform for intellectuals, artists, and students to explore the intersection of gender and art, fostering discussions and creative expressions that highlight gender perspectives in artistic endeavors.

These Winter Schools exemplify UNIGEM's dedication to promoting gender equality and integrating gender perspectives across different fields of study, providing participants with valuable knowledge and experiences to apply in their academic and professional lives. Unlike conventional university courses that are confined to a single institution, Winter Schools bring together students, faculty, and experts from multiple universities, facilitating regional collaboration and knowledge exchange. Participants benefit from exposure to diverse disciplinary perspectives,

allowing for richer and more complex analyses of gender-related topics.

Beyond theoretical learning, Winter Schools place a strong emphasis on experiential and interactive education. Instead of relying solely on lectures, they incorporate workshops, case studies, film screenings, and study visits, ensuring a dynamic and engaging learning process. Participants actively debate, engage in simulations, and conduct research projects, fostering hands-on learning and critical reflection.

For many students, Winter Schools provide an opportunity for mentored research and academic output. Some programs guide participants in developing research papers under faculty supervision, offering them a chance to contribute to academic discourse. Selected papers are often published in collective volumes, such as the "*Gender and Globalization*" collection from The Sarajevo Winter School, *"Gender and Violence in the Balkans"* collection from the Novi Sad Winter School and "*Gender and Art*" from the Tuzla Winter School. This ensures that Winter Schools not only educate but also produce tangible academic contributions that further the field of gender studies.

While they are not part of the formal academic structure, Winter Schools offer ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) credits, allowing students to integrate their learning experiences into their formal education. This recognition adds academic value to their participation while maintaining the flexibility and adaptability that characterize ad hoc educational activities.

Through their intensive format, thematic relevance, interdisciplinary engagement, and interactive learning methods, Winter Schools serve as a bridge between structured education and innovative gender mainstreaming initiatives. They complement institutionalized gender courses while remaining responsive to emerging issues, making them an essential component of the UNIGEM project's efforts to promote gender equality in higher education. By functioning as short-term, high-impact educational interventions, Winter Schools provide an alternative model of learning that complements institutionalized gender courses. They enable:

- Quick adaptation to emerging gender issues without waiting for formal curriculum changes.
- A platform for students and educators to explore gender themes in depth without the constraints of semester-long courses.
- Greater networking opportunities among students, faculty, and experts, fostering regional collaboration in gender studies.

Winter Schools within UNIGEM exemplify how ad hoc educational activities can effectively support gender mainstreaming. Their flexibility, interdisciplinary nature, and intensive focus make them powerful tools for raising awareness, deepening knowledge, and promoting critical thinking about gender equality in higher education.

11.2. Capacity Building for Gender Mainstreaming the Curricula

Building teacher capacity regarding gender mainstreaming, using a variety of methods, is a prerequisite for gender mainstreaming the curricula, in whatever modality, and the UNIGEM project has therefore placed a strong emphasis on capacity-building for university educators. Recognising that teachers play a critical role in shaping attitudes and knowledge about gender equality, the project has designed a series of initiatives to support and empower faculty members in integrating gender perspectives into their teaching and institutional practices.

A key component of this has been **professional development workshops**, which provide educators with the tools to recognise and address unconscious bias, integrate gender-sensitive teaching methods, and combat gender-based violence in academic settings. These workshops are designed to be highly interactive, allowing participants to engage in discussions, case studies, and practical exercises that help them apply gender perspectives within their respective disciplines.

In addition to workshops, **curriculum development training** has been an essential part of the initiative. Teachers have received

guidance on revising syllabi to include gender-related content, selecting inclusive teaching materials, and even designing entirely new courses dedicated to gender studies. By equipping educators with these skills, UNIGEM ensures that gender equality becomes an integral part of academic programs rather than a marginal topic.

Beyond curriculum development, **research and resource creation** have been major pillars of UNIGEM's approach to capacity-building. The project actively supports educators in conducting research on gender-related issues in academia, helping them publish their findings and incorporate new knowledge into their teaching. This research contributes to a growing body of literature on gender in higher education, ensuring that educators have access to evidence-based strategies for fostering gender-sensitive learning environments.

Collaboration has also been a key focus of the project. UNIGEM has fostered regional and international networking opportunities for educators, creating a vibrant community where teachers can exchange best practice, share teaching resources, and support one another in their gender mainstreaming efforts. By connecting educators across institutions, the project ensures that gender-sensitive education is not implemented in isolation, but as part of a broader movement toward inclusivity and equity in higher education.

Through these comprehensive capacity-building activities, UNIGEM is not only equipping educators with the knowledge and skills to integrate gender perspectives into their teaching but also to foster long-term cultural shifts within academic institutions. By empowering teachers as agents of change, the project is paving the way for more inclusive and gender-sensitive universities across the region.

11.3. Findings from Follow-Up Research in Partner Universities on Gender Mainstreaming the Curricula

The follow-up research also intended to reveal the outcomes of gender mainstreaming the curricula. The table below presents data on the frequency of participation in courses or academic subjects focused on gender equality among students and teaching staff in 2021 and 2024. The findings indicate a gradual increase in engagement and awareness of this topic, however, they also highlight that a significant proportion of respondents never participated in such educational activities.

Among students, the percentage of those who frequently attend courses on gender equality increased from 3.1% in 2021 to 5.6% in 2024. Similarly, the proportion of students who attend these courses occasionally remained nearly unchanged, decreasing slightly from 8.4% in 2021 to 8.3% in 2024. However, a substantial number of students still report that they have never attended such courses, despite a slight decline in this figure from 72.0% in 2021 to 69.3% in 2024. This data suggest that, although there is a modest increase in engagement, a large proportion of students remain uninvolved in formal education on gender equality.

Table 34. Frequency of Attending Courses on the Topic of Gender Equality by Respondent Status 2021 and 2024

	Students (%)		Teaching staff (%)	
	2021	2024	2021	2024
Often	3.1	5.6	3.8	8.0
Occasionally	8.4	8.3	8.1	12.5
Rarely	9.6	8.9	8.0	8.8
Once	6.8	7.9	2.7	4.5
Never	72.0	69.3	77.3	66.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Chi2	Pr = 0.002		Pr = 0.000	

More significant changes have been observed among teaching staff. The percentage of those who frequently teach or participate in gender equality-related courses increased from 3.8% in 2021 to 8.0% in 2024, while the proportion of occasional participants rose from 8.1% to 12.5%. Concurrently, the percentage of academic staff who have never participated in these courses decreased from 77.3% in 2021 to 66.2% in 2024. This suggests a greater improvement in engagement among academic staff compared to students, potentially reflecting increased availability or integration of gender-related topics into curricula and teaching programs. Statistical analysis, conducted using the Chi-square test (Pr = 0.002 for students and Pr = 0.000 for academic staff), confirms that these changes are statistically significant for both respondent groups. This indicates that the differences observed between 2021 and 2024 are not random, but rather reflect genuine shifts in participation in these educational activities.

The results demonstrate a positive trend in the increased presence of gender equality-focused courses and academic subjects, particularly among academic staff. However, the substantial proportion of respondents who have never participated in these activities underscores the need for further efforts in expanding and promoting these topics to ensure their accessibility and relevance to a broader academic audience. This includes integrating gender equality content into curricula and developing innovative and accessible educational formats for both students and academic staff.

Over the past few years, efforts to promote gender equality through capacity building workshops, seminars, training sessions, and campaigns within universities have led to gradual but uneven shifts in participation across different groups. While overall engagement has increased, participation remains relatively low, particularly among students and teachers.

Between 2021 and 2024, the percentage of individuals who reported never participating in gender-related activities has declined from 75.6% to 70.9%, indicating a modest but meaningful increase in engagement. This positive trend is most evident among administrative staff and teachers, while student participation remains stagnant.

Table 35. Frequency of Participation in Workshops, Seminars, Training Sessions, or Campaigns on Gender Equality Within One's Institution – Analysis of Responses by Respondent Status 2021 and 2024

	Students (%)		Teachers (%)		Administrative staff (%)		Total (%)	
	2021	2024	2021	2024	2021	2024	2021	2024
Often	2.6	3.8	2.8	10.2	0.7	8.1	2.5	5.9
Occasionally	6.4	7.8	9.5	13.1	7.8	16.4	7.4	10.0
Rarely	9.0	7.6	8.9	6.7	7.0	7.0	8.8	7.3
Once	6.4	6.1	4.0	5.0	4.4	7.0	5.6	5.9
Never	75.5	74.6	74.7	65.1	80.0	61.4	75.6	70.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Chi2	Pr = 0.037		Pr = 0.000		Pr = 0.000			

One of the most notable transformations is seen among administrative staff, where non-participation dropped from 80% in 2021 to 61.4% in 2024. At the same time, those who participate often have increased from just 0.7% to 8.1%. This significant rise suggests that institutions may be placing a stronger emphasis on gender-related training at the administrative level, possibly through institutional policies, leadership directives, or targeted training programs.

For teachers, there is a noticeable increase in frequent participation, rising from 2.8% in 2021 to 10.2% in 2024. However, despite this progress, a large majority (74.7%) still report never participating in gender-related activities. This suggests that while gender mainstreaming efforts are reaching a growing number of faculty members, significant barriers to full engagement remain, whether due to lack of institutional support, competing academic priorities, or resistance to gender-related discourse.

Among students, engagement remains the lowest of all groups. Although the proportion of students participating "often" increased slightly from 2.6% to 3.8%, and those participating "occasionally" grew from 6.4% to 7.8%, nearly three-quarters (74.6%) still report never attending gender-related workshops

or campaigns. This suggests that current outreach efforts may not be sufficiently engaging students, or that there are structural or cultural barriers preventing deeper student participation in gender equality initiatives. The Chi-square (Chi2) test results reveal statistically significant changes in participation patterns, particularly for teachers and administrative staff (Pr = 0.000), meaning that the increase in their engagement is not just incidental but reflects a meaningful shift over time. The students' participation trends (Pr = 0.037) also show a change, but to a lesser degree, reinforcing the idea that student engagement requires more targeted interventions.

While the gradual rise in participation is encouraging, the data highlights persistent challenges in fostering broad engagement with gender-related initiatives. The increase in administrative participation suggests a growing institutional commitment, but the low engagement among students and teachers points to the need for further efforts. Universities may need to rethink their strategies, perhaps by integrating gender training into mandatory coursework, offering incentives for participation, or developing more interactive and student-friendly approaches.

In line with findings from the survey, the narratives from interviews with teachers and students engaged in the UNIGEM project reveal a complex and multi-dimensional process of gender mainstreaming in higher education. The responses highlight institutional challenges, varying levels of acceptance, engagement strategies, and the transformative impact of educational activities on participants.

Institutional and Sociocultural Challenges: One of the key obstacles to mainstreaming gender studies in curricula is sociocultural resistance and low student interest. A teacher participating in an interview commented:

> *We introduced the elective course Gender Equality, but so far there has been no interest, which speaks to the broader context that views gender equality as a negative thing that undermines BiH society and threatens our families and system. (T39_BA_UNZE_FN)*

This narrative confirms the concern that gender equality is perceived negatively, as a threat to traditional family structures and societal values in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This perspective reflects the broader societal hesitancy toward gender-related topics and suggests that deep-seated cultural norms may hinder student engagement. At the same time, another teacher describes proactively integrating gender studies into their teaching, signaling that despite challenges, there are academic spaces where gender discourse is welcomed and successfully implemented:

> *Well, gender equality is an extremely important topic, which is why we integrated it into our teaching two years ago. I wrote the first syllabus and established the course that I now teach, the first year I taught it, the second year it was taught by a colleague who is a sociologist……We did workshops here and we participated in all the activities that TPO organized, especially in the last year since we changed the coordinator. And we were also involved, I was personally involved and my colleagues, in writing and mentoring during this process. (T46_BA_IBU_FN)*

The differences in experiences among educators suggest that the level of institutional readiness and faculty support varies across universities, influencing the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming.

Strategies for Gender Mainstreaming in University Education: The interviews indicate that universities have adopted varied approaches to gender mainstreaming, ranging from integrating gender topics into existing curricula to introducing elective courses and organizing extracurricular activities. One educator discusses the introduction of multiple gender-related electives, including Gender Studies, Gender-Based Violence, Gender and Economics, and Gender in the UN System:

> *I was also in certain sessions organized by our university, I was also at the promotion of textbooks, I actively advocated for that and for certain*

> *curricula to be introduced and put into practice. First of all, it was simpler and easier for us to introduce them as elective courses in certain semesters and years of study than an introduction to gender studies, gender-based violence, I think there was also gender economics and European integration and gender in the United Nations system. If I remember correctly, those were courses. I also participated and was actively involved in all those professions and events, primarily as a vice-rector and in the campaigns given to activism and in promoting the textbooks that we received from that project. We developed certain brochures, we had videos that were on our LCD displays at the university and that's how we really got active. The response and acceptance of students and teachers in that context was also interesting. (T50_BA_IUT_MN)*

The gradual incorporation of gender themes as electives rather than mandatory courses may serve as a strategic response to institutional resistance, allowing for gender discourse to be introduced in a more flexible and less confrontational manner.

Beyond coursework, gender mainstreaming has been reinforced through workshops, campaigns, and materials dissemination. One faculty member describes actively participating in TPO-organized events, mentoring students, and promoting gender equality textbooks and resources. This reflects a commitment to fostering gender awareness beyond the classroom, using institutional and community-based initiatives to engage students and faculty.

A teacher who did not participate directly in UNIGEM activities commented:

> *I did not directly participate in these UNIGEM projects, but for example I had the opportunity to see some of the academic materials. My colleague who is included in the project has sent me some links to videos that actually talk about what gender equality would actually be, and it's very nice*

> *in an academic manner, but still readable, understandable, so I even shared some of the information with the students. yet they know something about it. I think it's extremely useful that it is available and shared. (T9 BA UNTZ FN)*

This narrative acknowledges the usefulness of gender-related academic materials, demonstrating that even indirect exposure to UNIGEM's resources can influence educators and encourage them to integrate gender perspectives into their teaching. This highlights the potential for UNIGEM's impact to extend beyond its direct participants, reaching a broader academic audience.

Student Engagement and Transformative Learning Experiences: Students who participated in Winter Schools, workshops, and awareness campaigns describe their experiences as educational and personally transformative. A student volunteer explains how participating in gender-related workshops, public discussions on violence, and research writing led to both intellectual growth and a sense of contribution to a greater cause:

> *It all started when I volunteered at the faculty, holding various workshops from events that took place within the Unigem project. We also held a more informative stand at the Faculty of Philosophy in the lobby where we talked to people about violence, how to report violence, etc. I also participated in the winter school, as part of the Unigem project in Novi Sad. There I also wrote a piece of research that was published in a collection of papers. And in general, my experience throughout the entire Unigem project was really very, very positive. The winter school was great. I really learned a lot that I didn't know before, through this volunteering, through these activities. I can also say that I somehow created a feeling in myself that I contributed to something. (T94 BA SVEMO MS)*

Similarly, another student describes the Winter School experience as "phenomenal," emphasising the diversity of expertise and the open discussions on gender. These perspectives highlight the importance of interactive, interdisciplinary, and real-world learning experiences in fostering deeper engagement with gender issues.

> *The winter school was really phenomenal, how it was held, how people came who spoke from really different fields like law and all that, and I really enjoyed it and it was incredible to me that such a project exists, that people talk about it so freely. (T61_SR_UNS_FS)*

Teachers also observed that students responded positively to participatory learning methods. One educator describes how students engaged in discussions about gender norms, illustrating how conversations about gender equality resonate on a personal level:

> *I actually realised that it was precisely in this way that we should start from very basic things, because then a great discussion opened up in which all of these young men and women felt the need to speak. To speak about their families, about what their fathers say, what their mothers say. That amphitheater suddenly became our community in which we really share some views and I think at that moment that they came out of those lectures so enriched and it is so important that precisely on these small simple examples, and even everyday life, this very thing, using the theory of seduction, these questions are opened up, it is extremely important because maybe someone who has more conservative views might change a little. (T9 BA UNTZ FN)*

The dialogical and experiential learning approach appears to have been particularly effective in encouraging students to critically reflect on gender norms and inequalities.

The Role of Winter Schools as a Catalyst for Gender Awareness: The Winter Schools stand out as an impactful intervention that bridges academic knowledge with practical application. Students describe them as enriching spaces where diverse perspectives from various disciplines, such as law and sociology, contributed to a deeper understanding of gender issues. These intensive, immersive programs offer an alternative mode of learning, different from standard university lectures, and create an environment where students feel free to engage in open discussions about gender equality.

Conclusion

The UNIGEM project's efforts to mainstream gender studies in university curricula have been met with both institutional challenges and successes. While socio cultural resistance and low student interest remain obstacles, the project has successfully introduced gender-related content through curricular integration, elective courses, and extracurricular initiatives. Interactive and participatory learning approaches, such as workshops and Winter Schools, have proven to be particularly effective in fostering engagement among students and faculty.

The diverse narratives underscore that gender mainstreaming is not a one-size-fits-all process but requires a tailored approach, adapting to institutional constraints, cultural context, and faculty readiness. The project's greatest impact appears to be in creating spaces for dialogue, experiential learning, and knowledge dissemination, which gradually shift perceptions and encourage

deeper engagement with gender equality in academia. Based on the experiences of UNIGEM partner universities, the following key challenges for gender mainstreaming have been identified:

- *Insufficient Interest and Motivation*: Teaching staff often show insufficient interest in gender equality topics, which may stem from a lack of perception of their relevance to their specific discipline or research focus. The lack of additional incentives, such as academic points or other forms of recognition for participation, can further reduce the motivation for engagement.
- *Overload of Obligations*: A busy schedule of teaching, research, and administration responsibilities often prevents teaching staff from taking time for additional educational activities outside regular working hours. Workshops or seminars held during intensive periods of teaching or research may be given low priority due to lack of time.
- *Communication Challenges*: Lack of clear communication about the goals, advantages, and concrete benefits of participating in training can result in an insufficient understanding of the importance of such activities. Organisers often fail to sufficiently emphasise that participation could contribute to participants' personal and professional development, which may reduce interest in participation.
- *Institutional Support and Promotion*: A lack of strong support and promotion from institutional leadership may result in lower participation of teaching staff. Lack of visibility and support can reduce the perception of the importance and obligation to participate in gender equality education, often resulting in reduced response.
- *Resistance and Conservative Attitudes*: Resistance within the academic community, especially among conservative teaching staff, represents a significant challenge in implementing gender equality education. These groups may perceive gender equality topics as controversial or outside the scope of academic interests, resulting in open resistance or disinterest in participation.
- *Logistical Challenges*: The organisation of events such as workshops and seminars for teacher capacity-building for gender mainstreaming in the curriculum, requires careful planning in terms of space capacity, technological support, timing, and participant coordination. The lack of adequate logistical support can make it difficult to implement educational activities, especially if there are many participants or several locations simultaneously involved.

Apart from the above mentioned challenges stemming from the internal environment at universities, the organisation of teaching staff capacity-building on gender mainstreaming the curriculum, faces an additional challenge: the influence of anti-modernist or anti-gender movements that have their roots in conservative social circles of society. These movements often promote traditional values and deny the importance of gender equality as an essential aspect of social development and academia. In practice, several partner universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Croatia encountered active resistance from anti-gender movements, which resulted in reduced response to educational programs or even their cancellation. These challenges require strategies that not only promote gender equality education but also strengthen institutions' resistance to pressure and manipulation. According to interviews with university coordinators who have encountered pressures from the anti-gender movement, the pressures can be manifested in the following ways:

- *Ideological Resistance and Denial of the Importance of Gender Equality*: Anti-gender movements often oppose initiatives and projects aimed at gender equality, considering them an attack on traditional family values and institutions. Their arguments frequently include pseudoscientific theories that challenge the existence of gender discrimination or deny the need for changes in social norms related to gender roles.
- *Political and Institutional Pressure*: In specific cases of universities from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, anti-gender movements may have political and institutional support that hinders the implementation of gender equality education. This can include political decisions that reduce funding or support for projects that promote gender equality and administrative obstacles that slow down or prevent the implementation of educational activities.
- *Stigmatisation and Serious Consequences:* Teachers and academic workers who actively engage in gender equality education are often exposed to stigmatisation or even threats. Anti-gender movements sometimes use aggressive media campaigns or public protests to discredit such initiatives, which can result in difficult working conditions for interested participants.
- *Educational Barriers and Lack of Information*: The lack of accessible and relevant information on gender equality may result from political pressure or insufficient support for educational

institutions. Educators sometimes struggle to find reliable materials or resources to support their work in this area.

- *Threatening Academic Freedoms*: Anti-gender movements often promote rhetoric that threatens academic freedoms and freedom of expression within educational institutions. This can create fear and self-censorship among teachers and researchers who want to research or teach gender equality.

Given these obstacles, gender mainstreaming in academia requires not only curriculum adjustments but also strategic institutional commitment, stronger communication efforts, and resistance to external pressures. Sustained institutional support, faculty incentives, and advocacy for academic freedom are essential to ensuring that gender equality education remains a fundamental part of university programs, shaping future generations of scholars and professionals.

Ultimately, for gender mainstreaming in higher education to be truly effective, it must be deeply embedded in institutional policies, supported by leadership, and embraced by faculty and students alike. By fostering inclusive, participatory, and resilient educational environments, universities can ensure that gender equality becomes a fundamental part of academic culture, shaping more equitable and socially conscious future generations.

Chapter 12.

Anti-Gender Movement and Gender-Based Violence

Introduction

As we were finishing this book, news arrived from the United States of America (USA) that the government had ordered the removal of all content promoting "gender ideology" from websites of organizations supported by their government. (Steenhuysen and Hesson, 2025)[10]

What is "gender ideology"? It is a question to which very few people know the answer, yet a large number of them pretend that they know and that they are afraid of it.

Gender ideology is a term that has been strategically employed by various religious, political, and cultural movements as a means of opposing gender equality, LGBTQIA+ rights, and feminist movements. It is evident that gender ideology is not a well-defined or coherent concept but rather a constructed discourse that lacks academic or scientific grounding and is used as a rhetorical weapon to resist change. Some scholars argue that "gender is systematically mistaken by self-declared anti-genderists as automatically meaning atrocities like child abuse, lack of

10 Graph Steenhuysen, J and Hesson, T. 2015. US health agencies scrubbing websites to remove 'gender ideology'. https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-health-agencies-scrubbing-websites-remove-gender-ideology-2025-01-31/ (accessed on January 31, 2025)

any moral or normative standards and the destruction of taboos" (Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017, 110). They further explain that gender ideology is used as sign for a moral panic because it is deliberately vague, allowing opponents to adapt it to various socio-political contexts and use it as a rallying cry to mobilize conservative groups against progressive laws, such as same-sex marriage, abortion rights, and gender-inclusive education.

Moral panic theory coined by Stanley Cohen (1972, 1) **occurs when "a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests**". At the core of the moral panic concept lies the idea that public fear or concern over a social issue serves the mutual interests of state officials, law enforcement agencies, politicians, and the news media.

Religious groups, particularly the Catholic Church, played a key role in framing gender studies and feminist movements as ideologies designed to undermine "natural" or "God-given" differences between men and women. Jadranka Rebeka Anić (2011; 2012) explains how religious institutions have constructed the notion of gender ideology to defend their doctrinal teachings on family, sexuality, and gender roles. In the Balkans, this discourse is deeply intertwined with nationalist and religious identities, which position themselves as guardians of tradition. Every critique of traditional gender roles is perceived as an attack on the very foundation of society, including religion, the family, and nationhood. This fear manifests in the rejection of concepts like gender equality and non-binary identities, which are framed as unnatural and harmful. (Spahić Šiljak and Anić, 2023, 92-118)

The framing of gender ideology as a threat, has been used to build political capital, solidify conservative voter bases, and delegitimise international frameworks on women's human rights. Ruth Wodak in her groundbreaking work *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourse Mean*, explains how this framing divides people and instils fear:

> *All right-wing populist parties instrumentalise some kind of ethnic/religious/linguistic political minority as a scapegoat for most if not all current woes and subsequently construe the respective*

> *group as dangerous and a threat 'to us', to 'our' nation; this phenomenon manifests itself as a 'politics of fear. (2015, 2)*

Anti-gender campaigns used the term "gender ideology" as a backlash against advancement in gender equality and feminist movements (Vaggione, 2005). It serves as a tool for consolidating opposition to gender equality movements, framing them as ideological, foreign, and dangerous. Instead of engaging in substantive debates about gender and sexuality, these campaigns manipulate emotions and cultural anxieties, fostering resistance to social progress. LGBTQI+ individuals are often specifically targeted, framed as a threat to traditional family values and national identity. In addition, issues that had been relegated to the private or secular sphere, such as contraception, abortion, artificial insemination, the rights of same-sex couples, sex education, the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, and the preservation of the traditional family structure have re-entered the public discourse under the framing of "moral politics," (Gavrilović, D. et al. 2022, 8-13)

Based on the surveys and interviews from the follow-up research, this chapter elaborates on issues related to anti-gender tendencies, with a particular focus on gender and sexual minorities, and how anti-gender narratives may lead to gender-based violence.

12.1. Gender and sexual Minorities

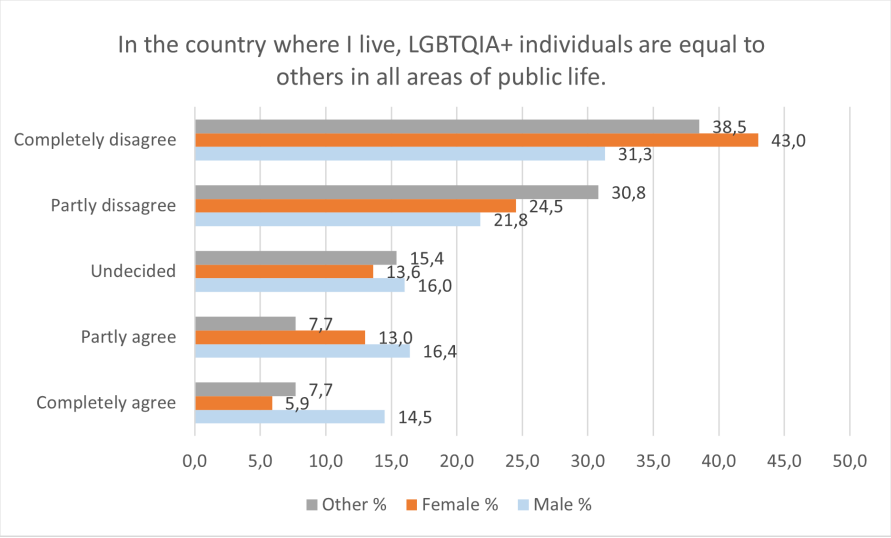
Anti-gender movements and their proponents create political and religious discourses which specifically target LGBTQIA+ individuals, portraying them as a threat to the 'the natural order' of things. Although significant progress has been made in the past decades in regulating the fundamental human rights of gender and sexual minorities, these groups remain the most discriminated against, as shown by the follow-up UNIGEM research.

The data indicates as shown here, that a higher percentage of women (57.5%) than men (53.1%) either completely or partly

disagree with the statement that LGBTQIA+ individuals are equal to others in all areas of public life. This suggests that women, in this context, are slightly more likely to recognise or perceive inequality experienced by LGBTQIA+ individuals.

This trend may reflect women's greater sensitivity to or awareness of systemic inequalities, possibly because of their own experiences with gender-based discrimination. However, it could also indicate a heightened scepticism among women toward the actual realisation of equality in public life for LGBTQIA+ individuals, despite existing legal or social advancements. This highlights the need for further research into why these differences in perception exist, and how societal structures influence these viewpoints.

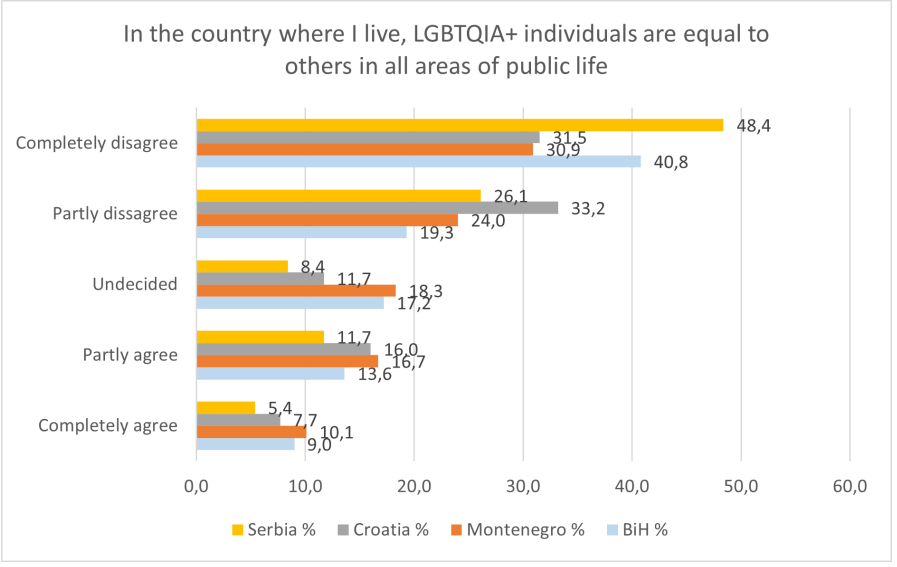
Chart 16. Level of Agreement on LGBTIA+ Equality, by Gender 2024



The chart below, provides a comparative view of perceptions across four countries of Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, and BiH regarding the statement that LGBTQIA+ individuals are equal to others in all areas of public life. Serbia exhibits the highest level of complete disagreement (48.4%) and partial disagreement (26.1%) with the statement followed by BiH (complete disagreement 40.8% and 33.2% partial disagreement). This reflects a pervasive lack of recognition of LGBTQIA+ rights in public life, suggesting the influence of deeply rooted cultural conservatism and strong patriarchal norms in these societies.

Montenegro (7.7% complete and 16.7% partial agreement) and Croatia (10.1% complete and 16.0% partial agreement) demonstrate slightly higher levels of partial and complete agreement compared to Serbia and BiH. While these numbers remain low, they indicate a marginally more progressive stance, potentially tied to Croatia's EU membership and exposure to broader European human rights discourses. A significant proportion of respondents in Montenegro (18.3%) and BiH (17.2%) remain undecided, suggesting ambivalence or limited awareness of LGBTQIA+ issues. Across all countries, the percentages for "I completely agree" are notably low (ranging from 5.4% in Serbia to 10.1% in Croatia). This highlights the widespread reluctance to fully embrace LGBTQIA+ equality.

Chart 17. Level of Agreement on LGBTIA+ Equality, by Country 2024



In interviews, respondents also confirmed that although universities have laws and ethical codes prohibiting any form of discrimination, implicit biases and discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals persist. Teachers from Sarajevo and Mostar reflected on discriminatory practices in their institutions.

> *If we're being honest, at universities people whisper about gay individuals, make jokes — often vulgar ones — but most stick to politically correct language. When an assistant for a certain course was being chosen, as a joke, one colleague was asked what would happen if they selected him and had to share an office with him. It's awful, but that's just how it is in our culture. (T1_ BA _UNSA FN)*

> *We had one professor who was very open-minded and wanted to design a course on the sociology of family and sexuality, but somehow, you know, it still gets brushed aside. A colleague of mine from the psychology department told me, since I like to talk about LGBT topics, "You know what, I can't join you, I have my limits…please, don't make me deal with it." (T26_BA_UNMO_FN)*

A male student from Rijeka shared his perception of discriminatory practices, that sometimes these end up in violence, and how gender and sexual minorities are therefore cautious about disclosing their identities.

> *Well, they certainly experience comments and perhaps even violence in certain situations. I am quite sure that they don't walk down the street holding hands — not because they're afraid, but simply because they want to avoid any kind of incident. (T76_HR_UNIRI_MS)*

Teachers from Belgrade and Sarajevo highlighted that there are already studies confirming that gender and sexual minorities face greater discrimination compared to others. They reported that efforts are being made to ensure that such discriminatory behaviour does not become normalised or socially acceptable, and if such behaviour is observed within the university community action is taken.

> *Well, the research has shown that there is a connection between sexual orientation and exposure to sexual harassment, with non-heterosexual individuals being more exposed. On a statistical level, the significance of this connection with sexual orientation has been demonstrated . (T63_SR_UNBG_FN)*

> *Among colleagues, we have one openly gay person, and among the students, there was one openly gay individual who was a victim of harassment because of his sexual orientation. Consequently, the person who harassed him was expelled from the university. (T43_BA_SSST_FN)*

The perception of equality for LGBTQIA+ individuals in all areas of public life depends on the context of societal norms, legal frameworks, and cultural attitudes. It is encouraging to hear that some universities are aware of this type of discrimination and sanction it. This may reflect either genuine progress toward inclusivity or a misalignment between perceived and actual equality.

12.2. The Pathway to GBV

As explained before, the anti-gender movement is a social and political movement that opposes progressive ideas and policies related to gender equality, sexual rights, and LGBTQIA+ rights. It is not a coherent or evidence-based ideology itself but rather a reactionary framework used to resist perceived threats to traditional gender roles, family structures, and societal norms.

Respondents in the follow-up survey explain how they understand the anti-gender movement and why these movements often oppose modern feminist ideals, portraying them as threats to societal structure or tradition.

> *Essentially, it is a movement that promotes the idea that men should dominate and that a woman's place is still in the kitchen, that she simply doesn't need to work, and so on. It opposes feminism and gender equality. (T37_BA_UES_FS)*

In the follow-up survey, respondents answered the question whether "gender equality" is backed by an ideology that intends to change gender roles, destroy the family, and traditional values. When comparing the two graphs below together, one showing responses by gender and the other by country, the analysis provides a broader understanding of how perceptions regarding this statement vary by demographics and regional context. When this data are analysed by country, the highest levels of complete disagreement are observed in Serbia (57.8%), followed by Croatia (51.8%), Montenegro (37.5%), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (31.5%). This indicates that respondents from Serbia and Croatia are less likely to view gender equality as a threat, potentially influenced by Croatian integration into European political and social frameworks. Country-specific variations indicate the role of sociopolitical context in shaping attitudes. For example, Croatia's and Serbia's higher rates of disagreement reflect the influence of modernizing forces, while Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro show stronger adherence to traditional views.

Women (45.3% completely and 13.1% partly disagree) and individuals in the "Other" category (76.9%) are far more likely to completely disagree with the statement that behind gender equality lies an ideology that seeks to change gender and sex roles in order to destroy the family and fundamental social values, compared to men (31.2% and 11.5% partly). This reflects stronger opposition to the perception that gender equality threatens family values among women and non-binary individuals, likely due to their lived experiences of inequality and marginalization. Men (22.6%) are significantly more likely to completely agree with the statement compared to women (11.5%) and the "Other" group (15.4%). This suggests that men are more likely to view gender equality as a challenge to traditional gender roles, which are often tied to patriarchal norms. The belief that

gender equality undermines family values is rooted in patriarchal ideology, which positions traditional gender roles as essential to societal stability. This belief is often amplified by moral panic narratives in regions where religion and culture strongly influence public opinion.

Chart 18. Level of Agreement on Gender Ideology and Family Values by Gender 2024

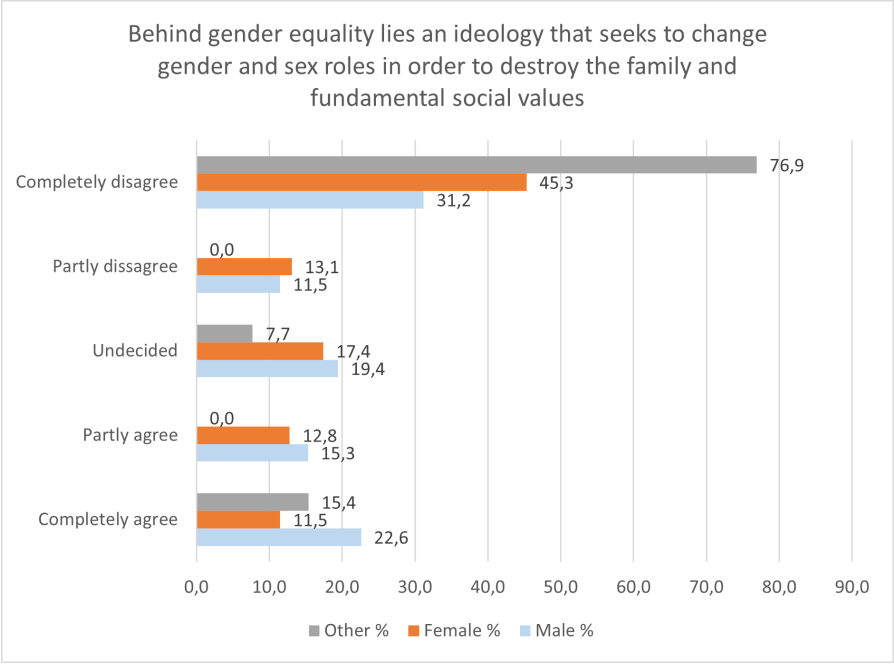
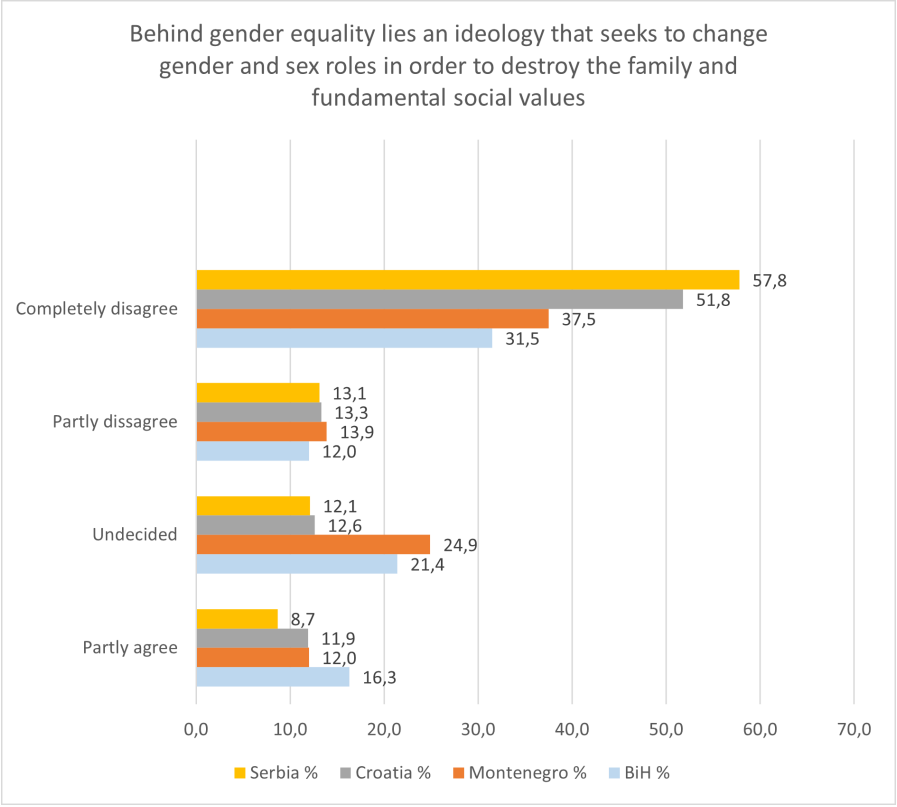


Chart 19. Level of Agreement on Gender Ideology and Family Values by Country 2024



The next question addresses the connection of anti-gender movement and GBV and the perceptions of respondents by gender and country regarding the claim that strengthening anti-gender ideology, including opposition to women's reproductive rights and the promotion of traditional family roles, will lead to GBV and discrimination.

Serbia (completely 47.4% and 18.8% partly) and Croatia (45.8% and 24.0% partly) show the highest percentage of respondents completely agreeing with the statement. This suggests heightened awareness or concern in these countries about the implications of anti-gender ideology for GBV and discrimination. Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) (36%) and Serbia (30.8%) demonstrate lower complete agreement, indicating less concern or differing sociopolitical attitudes towards the issue of GBV. At the same the highest level of uncertainty is observed in BiH (30%)

and Montenegro (30.3%), followed by Croatia (21.3%) and Serbia (19.3%). This could reflect a lack of knowledge or polarized opinions about the relationship between anti-gender ideology and GBV.

When it comes to perceptions on this issue segregated by gender a significantly higher percentage of female respondents (completely 41% and 25.0% partly) agree with the statement compared to male respondents (27.7% and 24.0% partly). This aligns with the global trend where women are more likely to recognise and oppose systems that perpetuate GBV and gender inequality. Respondents in the "Other" category overwhelmingly agree (69.2%), indicating heightened sensitivity to the issue, possibly due to their experiences as marginalized individuals.

Males (28.6%) show a higher degree of uncertainty compared to females (25.2%) and the "Other" category (7.7%), possibly reflecting a lesser degree of engagement or understanding of the topic.

Chart 20. Level of Agreement on Anti-gender Ideology and Women's Rights by Gender 2024

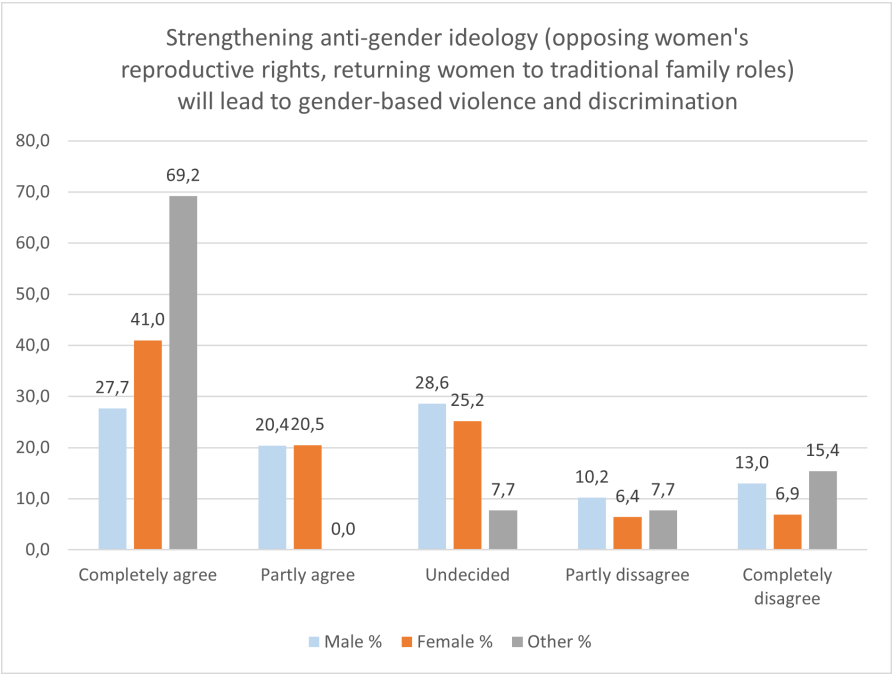
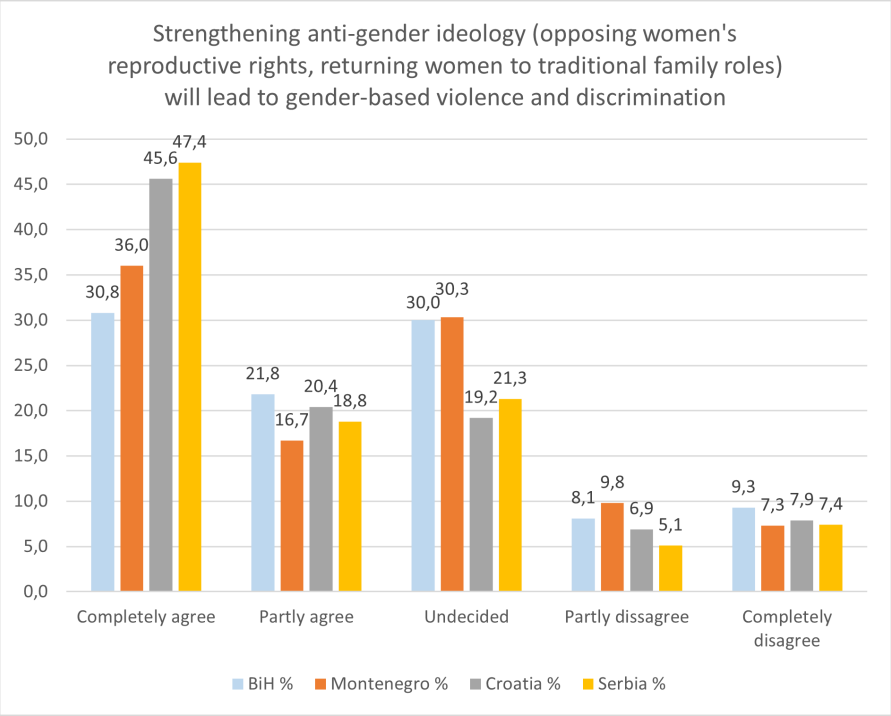


Chart 21. Level of Agreement on Anti-gender Ideology and Women's Rights by Country 2024



The interview responses reveal a widespread acknowledgment among respondents of the presence of anti-gender narratives. However, many contextualise this within a broader framework, suggesting that gender-based violence is not merely a result of ideological disputes but deeply rooted in societal constructs of hegemonic and toxic masculinity (Connell, 2009). Hegemonic masculinity was coined in 1980s and it "was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men." (Connell, and Messerschmidt, 2005, 832)

Since the concept of hegemonic masculinity is grounded in practices that sustain men's collective dominance over women, it is unsurprising that, in certain contexts, hegemonic masculinity

manifests through toxic behaviours—such as physical violence—that reinforce and stabilize gender dominance within specific social settings. (Ibid.)

This form of masculinity, often glorified as the traditional model, places men in rigid, dominant roles, perpetuating the expectation that they must assert their power and authority, often through violent means. Respondents in interviews mostly used the term toxic masculinity in a way that stems from a patriarchal ideals, ones which define men as the unquestioned heads of families and active agents in sexual and social roles, a clear demarcation of gendered responsibilities. The inability of many men to live up to these unattainable standards of dominance and control leads to frustration, insecurity, and, subsequently, the manifestation of violence as a means of compensating for perceived inadequacies. This highlights the interconnectedness of cultural norms, gender expectations, and systemic inequalities, reinforcing the need to deconstruct traditional gender roles to address gender-based violence effectively.

Moreover, the crisis of male identity, as mentioned by respondents, points to the harmful effects of these patriarchal norms on men themselves, who struggle under the weight of societal expectations. This reinforces the idea that dismantling toxic masculinity benefits not only women and marginalized groups but also men by liberating them from restrictive gender norms that lead to psychological and behavioural harm.

> *Well, I definitely think that there is an anti-gender ideology... I can tell you that masculinity, as it has traditionally been understood... that it is ultimately toxic... specifically for men... that they feel it is a God-given right for them to command and behave that way. (T38_BA_UES_FS)*

> *There is this ideal of masculinity that is extremely patriarchal, meaning that the man is supposed to be the head of the family, who has an active role in sex, and, well, the traditional division of labour... but, I think, that traditional male role, as well as*

> *the traditional female role, is something that dominates. On the other hand, you also have a crisis of male identity because no man can fully achieve that ideal... violence happens because he has to prove his power by being violent. (T63_SR_UNBG_FN)*

Anti-gender narratives often capitalize on the fear of cultural erosion and societal change, portraying the push for gender equality as a threat to the "natural order" or family values. This phenomenon not only hinders further advancement but also exacerbates gender-based discrimination and violence by perpetuating inequalities.

Conclusion

The anti-gender movement is deeply interwoven with the perpetuation of gender-based violence (GBV) through its defence of traditional gender roles and its rejection of progressive gender equality initiatives. By framing gender equality, LGBTQIA+ rights, and the dismantling of patriarchal norms as existential threats to the "natural order," this movement cultivates a moral panic designed to mobilize resistance against perceived social destabilization. It portrays such efforts as part of an ideological agenda intent on dismantling the traditional family and eroding foundational societal values.

Respondents in qualitative research revealed that the anti-gender movement's rhetoric fosters toxic masculinity, which serves as a cornerstone of traditional gender expectations. This model imposes on men the obligation to assert dominance, strength, and authority, often through control and violence. When men perceive their roles as "head of the household" or cultural protectors being undermined, they may resort to acts of violence as a means of reaffirming their power. The anti-gender movement intensifies this dynamic by positioning traditional masculinity as under attack, thereby normalizing both structural and individual forms of violence as defensive measures.

The perpetuation of moral panic plays a central role in the anti-gender narrative. By amplifying fears that gender equality and non-normative identities threaten cultural, religious, and societal stability, the movement legitimises discriminatory practices and GBV. The evocation of moral panic functions as a tool for political and ideological mobilisation, shifting focus away from systemic inequalities and redirecting societal anxieties toward marginalized groups. This dynamic creates an environment in which discriminatory norms are not only maintained but also reinforced under the guise of protecting tradition and morality.

Furthermore, the movement's co-optation of religion, culture, and tradition serves to justify resistance to gender equality and the associated policy reforms. By framing traditional roles and values as divinely or culturally ordained, it obscures the systemic inequalities and harms caused by such frameworks. The rejection of alternative, inclusive interpretations of religion and tradition perpetuates a climate in which GBV is not only tolerated but also structurally embedded.

The anti-gender movement is both a driver and a product of moral panic, reinforcing GBV by fostering toxic masculinity, stigmatizing non-conforming identities, and resisting egalitarian social reforms. This underscores the critical need to deconstruct the narratives underpinning moral panic and to address the intersections of religion, culture, and tradition that the movement exploits. Efforts to combat GBV must go beyond policy reforms to challenge the ideological foundations of the anti-gender movement and dismantle its normalisation of violence and discrimination.

Chapter 13.

Femicide

Introduction

The killing of any individual is a loss to society and demands attention. To develop a specific focus on femicide does not negate male victimisation, nor its importance as a serious social issue.

In the Routledge International Handbook on Femicide and Feminicide, editors Myrna Dawson and Saide Mobayed Vega (2023) write a dedication to all those who lost their lives to femicide and feminicide, as well as their families, friends, and communities who continue to grieve for their losses. They stress the urgent need to actively resist the normalisation of male violence against women and girls, and express their hope that the coming generation of women and girls will live in much better conditions in which our current reports on femicide will be only a testimony to past dark times. Our hope is the same.

The symbolic 2012 event of signing the Vienna Declaration on Femicide took place almost four decades after feminist pioneer Diana Russell introduced the term at the International Tribunal of Crimes Against Women in 1976. The term femicide was later defined as the murder of women by men motivated by hatred, contempt, pleasure, or a sense of ownership of women (Caputi and Russell, 1990: 34), and several years after that as the gender-based killing of women and girls, typically perpetrated by men and rooted in patriarchal structures that sustain gender inequality (Radford & Russell, 1992).

Building on this definition, Marcela Lagarde (2005; 2006) later coined feminicide (*feminicidio*) to highlight the role of state negligence and institutional complicity in gender-based killings. Feminicide encompasses not only the act of killing but also the structural and systemic failures that allow such violence to persist with impunity (Fregoso & Bejarano, 2010). This concept gained particular relevance in Latin America, where widespread gender-related killings and weak legal responses necessitated a framework that acknowledged state responsibility. While some scholars use femicide and feminicide interchangeably, others maintain that feminicide should be reserved for cases where state inaction plays a direct role (Carcedo, 2010).

The term femicide has been contested across disciplines, with criminologists often favouring a narrower definition limited to intimate partner killings, whereas feminist scholars advocate for a broader conceptualisation that includes sexual violence, honour killings, and structural neglect (Corradi et al., 2016). Legal frameworks also vary, with some countries criminalising femicide as an aggravated form of homicide, while others subsume it under general homicide laws, often failing to account for gender-specific motivations (UNODC, 2018; Schlytter & Linell, 2010). The reluctance to recognize femicide as a systemic issue is often linked to societal attitudes that normalise gender-based violence (Reddy, 2008).

Femicide manifests in different forms depending on the perpetrator, motive, and socio-cultural context. One of the most common forms is intimate partner femicide, in which a woman is killed by her current or former intimate partner. Studies estimate that over 35% of all murders of women globally are committed by an intimate partner, compared to approximately 5% of male homicides (Stöckl et al., 2013; Campbell et al., 2003). These killings are often preceded by histories of domestic violence, threats, and coercive control (Lewandowski et al., 2004). Another category is non-intimate femicide, which includes murders committed by strangers or acquaintances, often involving sexual violence or misogynistic motives (Daly & Wilson, 1988). Within certain socio-cultural contexts, specific forms of femicide emerge, such as already mentioned honour killings, in which women are murdered by family members for allegedly violating

traditional gender norms, such as engaging in extramarital relationships or refusing arranged marriages (Faqir, 2001). Similarly, dowry-related femicide occurs primarily in South Asia, where women are killed due to disputes over dowry payments (Sanghavi et al., 2009). The conceptualisation is made additionally complex when other forms are taken into consideration, including female infanticide and feticide, death as a result of female genital mutilation, murder on accusations of witchcraft, and other types of femicide related to gangs, organised crime, drugs, human trafficking, and firearm possession (UNESC, 2013).

Despite its global prevalence, femicide remains difficult to measure due to gaps in data collection, legal classifications, and institutional responses. Many legal and medical systems do not distinguish femicide from other forms of homicide, making it challenging to assess gender-related motivations (WHO, 2012). Official records often fail to document the victim-perpetrator relationship, prior instances of intimate partner violence, or whether sexual violence was involved, leading to underreporting and misclassification of cases. The United Nations' *Femicide Watch Initiative* calls for improved data collection and policy interventions to combat gender-based killings. In 2017, the Femi(ni)cide Watch Platform (FWP) (https://femicide-watch.org) was started, where varied content related to femicide and feminicide is curated, categorised, and contextualised.

According to UNODC and UN Women estimates, 51,100 women and girls were killed by intimate partners or family members globally in 2023, representing 60% of all female homicides that year (UNODC & UN Women, 2024; 2022). This equates to approximately 140 women and girls murdered every day in the private sphere. Africa recorded the highest absolute number of femicides, with an estimated 21,700 victims, followed by Asia (18,500), the Americas (8,300), Europe (2,300), and Oceania (300). Adjusted for population size, Africa had the highest rate of femicide at 2.9 per 100,000 women, followed by the Americas (1.6 per 100,000), Oceania (1.5 per 100,000), Asia (0.8 per 100,000), and Europe (0.6 per 100,000) (UNODC & UN Women, 2024).

In the Balkan region, patriarchal norms and weak institutional responses contribute to high femicide rates. In Croatia, most

femicides are committed by current or former partners, often following prolonged histories of domestic violence (Bonacci Skenderović, 2022). Croatia has legally recognised femicide. Femicide in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro is a significant and persistent issue, deeply rooted in patriarchal norms and systemic failures in addressing gender-based violence (Women's Rights Center Montenegro, 2022). A common characteristic of femicide cases in these countries is that most victims were murdered by their intimate partners or close family members. More than half of the victims were killed by their husbands or ex-husbands, while intimate partner violence (IPV) was a leading precursor to these murders. The report highlights that institutional responses remain inadequate, as many victims had previously reported violence to authorities but did not receive sufficient protection. For example, in Serbia, several cases involved victims who had sought restraining orders or filed complaints against their abusers before being murdered (Konstantinović & Petrušić, 2021). Firearms are frequently used in femicide cases in the region, with Serbia having the highest rate of intimate partner killings involving guns. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, nearly half of all femicide cases involved firearms, reflecting broader issues related to weapon accessibility and the post-conflict presence of illegal arms in the region. The report also points out that official statistics on femicide are incomplete, as many cases are underreported or misclassified as general homicides. The report emphasises the urgent need for stronger legal frameworks, better enforcement of protective measures, and improved institutional responses to gender-based violence. Prevention efforts must focus on risk assessment, early intervention, and addressing the societal attitudes that perpetuate femicide. Without comprehensive reforms, femicide will continue to be a severe human rights violation in the region (Women's Rights Center Montenegro, 2022; Konstantinović & Petrušić, 2021).

Violence against women (VAW), including femicide, is a global issue, influenced by global trends and patterns. Migration, technological advances, the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis, and environmental destruction all have complex and contradictory impacts on VAW, including femicide (Adanu and Johnson, 2009; Fulu and Miedema, 2015). The COVID-19 pandemic had

a significant impact on gender-based violence (GBV) and femicide, exacerbating existing inequalities and increasing risks for women and girls globally. The pandemic led to widespread lockdowns and movement restrictions, which resulted in women being confined with their abusers, limiting their ability to seek help or escape violent situations, increasing their vulnerability to continued violence (Peterman et al., 2020). The UN and WHO reported a sharp increase in calls to domestic violence hotlines worldwide, with some countries experiencing a 25-50% surge in reported cases of GBV during the first months of lockdown (UN Women, 2021; WHO, 2021). The economic crisis triggered by COVID-19 led to increased unemployment and financial instability, which are well-documented risk factors for IPV and femicide (Evans, Lindauer, & Farrell, 2020). Women in precarious employment were particularly affected, as financial dependence on abusive partners made it harder for them to leave violent relationships. The pandemic disrupted police and judicial responses to GBV, with many law enforcement agencies overwhelmed by public health concerns. Courts postponed hearings, restraining orders were harder to obtain, and emergency services struggled to respond to domestic violence calls, allowing abusers to act with impunity (van Gelder et al., 2020). COVID-19 disproportionately affected women in various ways, including increased caregiving responsibilities, job losses in female-dominated sectors, and greater exposure to workplace violence in essential services like healthcare (UN Women, 2021). These gendered inequalities further contributed to women's vulnerability to GBV and femicide. With the shift to remote work and online interactions, there was also a rise in digital GBV, including cyberstalking, online harassment, and image-based abuse. The pandemic created new spaces for perpetrators to control, harass, or manipulate survivors, exacerbating the overall GBV crisis. Even as lockdowns lifted, the effects of the pandemic on GBV and femicide persisted. Many survivors faced long-term trauma, economic setbacks, and legal barriers to seeking justice. Some governments and organisations implemented stronger protections, such as emergency shelters and GBV awareness campaigns, but gaps in prevention and response remain. The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a "shadow pandemic" of GBV and femicide, revealing systemic weaknesses in protecting women and girls from violence. The

crisis underscored the need for integrated prevention strategies, stronger legal protections, and sustained funding for support services to ensure that responses to future crises do not overlook gender-based risks (Evans, Lindauer, & Farrell, 2020).

Femicide research requires interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary lenses in order to to develop nuanced and comprehensive understandings and responses, which inform its prevention. This must employ and integrate knowledge, theories and methodologies from and across different disciplines and perspectives, including anthropology, communication studies, criminal justice, criminology, cultural studies, education, epidemiology, gender, women and/or sexuality studies, international relations, international environment and development studies, journalism, law, literature, medicine, nursing, philosophy, political science, psychology, public health, public policy, social work, sociology etc.. It is not possible to present exhaustively the approaches that can be used as a starting point for research, but we offer a few here to give an illustrative snapshot.

Feminist theory conceptualizes femicide as an extreme manifestation of patriarchal control and gender-based violence (Radford & Russell, 1992). Sociological approaches frame femicide within broader patterns of gender inequality, examining factors such as economic dependency, cultural norms, and social attitudes toward women (Corradi et al., 2016). Walby and her colleagues (2017) advocate for the inclusion of femicide, along with other forms of gender-based violence such as rape, domestic violence, and female genital mutilation, in official statistics. They argue that making these forms of violence visible through accurate data collection is essential in order to understand their prevalence and to formulate effective responses. She also critiques existing measurement systems for often lacking comprehensive gender dimensions, which can lead to an underestimation of the severity and frequency of femicide. Walby (2023) particularly discusses “universal” versus “particular” tensions in conceptualising femi(ni)icide as a global indicator. Furthermore, criminologists analyse femicide as a distinct form of homicide shaped by intimate partner relationships, prior criminal behaviour, and systemic failures in the justice system (Weil et al., 2018). Sociological and criminological perspectives also emphasize the

ecological model of violence, which identifies risk factors at multiple levels: individual (e.g., male unemployment, substance abuse, history of IPV), relational (e.g., separation from a partner, past abuse), and societal (e.g., gender inequality, access to firearms) (Heise, 1998; Campbell et al., 2003). This approach helps explain why certain groups of women, such as pregnant women and those attempting to leave abusive relationships, face heightened risks of femicide (Martin et al., 2007).

Michel Foucault's power/knowledge theory can be applied to femicide to examine how institutions regulate knowledge about these crimes and contribute to their visibility or erasure (Foucault, 1978). Decolonial and intersectional perspectives further emphasize how race, class, and colonial histories shape femicide patterns, highlighting the greater risks faced by marginalized women (Segato, 2016).

Addressing femicide requires a multi-sectoral approach involving legal, health, and social interventions. Strengthening legal frameworks is essential, including the criminalisation of femicide, the enforcement of restraining orders, and firearm restrictions for perpetrators of domestic violence (Zeoli & Webster, 2010). Police and judicial training can improve responses to GBV and ensure better protection for victims (Campbell et al., 2007). Health systems also play a role in early intervention, as many femicide victims had prior contact with healthcare providers. Tools such as the Danger Assessment Scale can help identify women at risk (Campbell, 2009). Public awareness campaigns and community-based prevention initiatives that engage men and boys in addressing GBV have also been effective in shifting social norms (Palma-Solis et al., 2008).

Ultimately, femicide prevention requires structural changes to dismantle patriarchal norms, improve legal accountability, and provide comprehensive support for survivors of gender-based violence. This is a Herculean effort, but we hope we will reach the point where we no longer read news headlines regarding women being murdered.

13.1. Qualitative Reflections on Themes in Interviews

Data from UNIGEM research on femicide was collected in 2024 based on semi-structured interviews with students and staff in universities, following the methodology described in Chapter 1of this book. There was no data on femicide from the 2021 research wave, therefore the comparison is not possible. The narratives shared in interviews were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis.

Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA), developed by Braun and Clarke (2022), is a qualitative research method that enables researchers to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns of meaning within textual data. This approach is particularly useful for studying complex social phenomena such as femicide, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' narratives, emphasizing their opinions, lived experiences and social contexts. Unlike other forms of thematic analysis, RTA is flexible, theoretically grounded, and acknowledges the active role of the researcher in shaping themes. One of the defining features of reflexive thematic analysis is its iterative process, which does not follow a rigid coding framework but instead evolves through continuous engagement with the data. The method involves familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Unlike positivist approaches that emphasise reliability and replicability, RTA aligns with constructivist and critical paradigms, recognising that meaning is co-constructed between the researcher and the data. A crucial aspect of RTA is reflexivity, where researchers acknowledge their positionality, assumptions, and influence on the analytical process. This is particularly important in research on femicide, as the topic is deeply embedded in power dynamics, gender-based violence, and systemic inequalities. By adopting a reflexive stance, the researcher continuously interrogates their interpretations, ensuring that the themes generated are meaningful and representative of participants' perspectives. In this chapter, RTA is applied to analyse transcripts of interviews within the UNIGEM follow-up research conducted in 2024, focusing

on recurring patterns related to femicide, institutional responses, and socio-cultural attitudes. The themes derived will provide insights into how femicide is perceived, experienced, and addressed within academic contexts, contributing to a deeper understanding of gender-based violence.

Femicide is not an isolated phenomenon but rather a result of deep-rooted social, economic, and psychological factors that shape gendered violence. Many respondents pointed to systemic issues, such as patriarchal norms, economic instability, and male entitlement, as fundamental causes of femicide. They highlighted that perpetrators often exhibit patterns of control, possessiveness, and a belief that women are their property.

> *Men who commit femicide are often those who cannot accept that women have autonomy. They feel entitled to decide over their lives, and when women resist, violence escalates. (T1_BA_UNSA_FN)*

> *In most cases, femicide is the culmination of long-term abuse. Women who report violence are often not believed, and the abuser continues unchecked until the final act of murder. (T10_BA_UNTZ_FN)*

> *Economic dependency also plays a role. Many women stay in abusive relationships because they have nowhere to go. If they try to leave, that is often the most dangerous moment. (T11_BA_UNTZ_FA)*

Respondents expressed concern about how society reacts to femicide, with many believing that institutions fail to provide justice. They noted that victim-blaming narratives persist, and legal mechanisms often do not work in favour of the victims.

Every time a woman is murdered, the first thing you hear is 'why didn't she leave earlier?' instead of asking why he killed her. (T10_BA_UNTZ_FN)

Even when cases are reported, there is often a lack of real consequences for perpetrators. Protective measures are weak, and sometimes, women who report abuse are left even more vulnerable. (T11_BA_UNTZ_FA)

The media plays a significant role in shaping perceptions. Too often, femicide is framed as a 'crime of passion' rather than gender-based violence. (T1_BA_UNSA_FN)

A recurring issue in the interviews was the general lack of awareness about femicide, particularly in terms of recognising warning signs and understanding it as a systemic problem rather than isolated incidents. Many respondents called for more education on gender-based violence at all levels of society.

We need education on this issue, starting from schools. If young people are not taught about gender equality and violence prevention, these patterns will continue. (T10_BA_UNTZ_FN)

Many people still think femicide is just another crime, not realizing the gendered aspect of it. If society doesn't acknowledge the problem, how can we solve it? (T11_BA_UNTZ_FA)

> *There is so much misinformation. Some people even believe femicide isn't real, that it's just exaggerated feminism. (T1_BA_UNSA_FN)*

Many respondents discussed the lack of safety measures for women and the failures of institutions to provide adequate protection. Despite legal frameworks being in place, enforcement remains weak, and women often do not feel safe even after seeking help.

> *I know women who have restraining orders against their abusers, yet they still live in fear because those orders are not enforced. (T10_BA_UNTZ_FN)*

> *When women report violence, they are often met with skepticism or indifference. Police sometimes downplay threats, saying 'he didn't actually do anything yet.' But by the time he does, it's too late. (T11_BA_UNTZ_FA)*

> *There needs to be better shelter options. Many women stay in dangerous situations simply because they don't have a safe place to go. (T1_BA_UNSA_FN)*

13.2. The Culmination of GBV, Patriarchal Norms and Institutional Failures

This analysis highlights the complexity of femicide and its deep entrenchment in social structures. The causes of femicide, societal responses, awareness gaps, and institutional failures all contribute to an environment where gendered violence continues. The interviews reveal an urgent need for systemic changes, including legal reforms, better protective measures,

and widespread education to challenge the normalisation of violence against women. Addressing femicide requires not only punitive measures against perpetrators but also a cultural shift that recognises women's rights to safety and autonomy.

The findings from the UNIGEM research confirm that femicide is not an isolated phenomenon but rather the culmination of a continuum of gender-based violence, deeply embedded in patriarchal structures and systemic inequalities (Radford & Russell, 1992; Corradi et al., 2016). Respondents' narratives align with feminist theoretical perspectives, which conceptualise femicide as an extreme form of male control over women, often exercised in response to perceived challenges to traditional gender roles (Fregoso & Bejarano, 2010).

One of the dominant themes emerging from the interviews was the role of patriarchal norms in sustaining violence against women. As respondents pointed out, perpetrators often view women as their property, reinforcing earlier feminist arguments that femicide is motivated by entitlement and a desire to control (Caputi & Russell, 1990). This is consistent with prior research indicating that intimate partner femicide is often preceded by histories of coercive control and psychological abuse (Campbell et al., 2003).

The findings also highlight the role of institutional failures in perpetuating femicide. Respondents noted that legal and protective mechanisms are frequently inadequate, echoing Lagarde's (2005; 2006) concept of feminicide, which emphasises state complicity in gender-based killings. The narratives recognize that many survivors of intimate partner violence seek institutional support before they are murdered, yet they often receive insufficient protection. The reluctance of institutions to take preventative action reflects broader societal attitudes that normalise gender-based violence (Reddy, 2008).

13.3. Economic Factors, Femicide as a Private Matter and Education

Economic dependency was another frequently mentioned factor, reinforcing the ecological model of violence, which identifies financial instability as a key risk factor for femicide (Heise, 1998; Palma-Solis et al., 2008). Respondents described how economic insecurity traps women in abusive relationships, leaving them more vulnerable to fatal violence. These narratives align with global research showing that economic stressors, particularly those exacerbated by crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, increase rates of intimate partner violence and femicide (Evans, Lindauer, & Farrell, 2020; Peterman et al., 2020).

Another key finding was the societal tendency to frame femicide as a private or interpersonal issue rather than a systemic problem. Victim-blaming narratives persist, with media often portraying femicide as a 'crime of passion' rather than an act of gender-based violence (Stöckl et al., 2013). Respondents' concerns about misinformation and public denial of femicide mirror previous research indicating that gendered violence remains underrecognized, with public discourse often minimising its structural roots (Walby et al., 2017; Walby, 2023).

The importance of education and awareness was another recurring theme in the interviews. Many respondents emphasised that without early intervention and gender-sensitive education, societal attitudes towards gender-based violence will remain unchanged. This aligns with feminist calls for integrating femicide awareness into formal education and policy initiatives (UN Women, 2021; Weil et al., 2018). Prevention efforts must go beyond punitive measures and address the cultural, economic, and legal factors that allow femicide to persist.

Additionally, the findings highlight the intersectional dimensions of femicide, emphasising how marginalised groups—such as women in post-conflict societies—face heightened risks due to factors like firearm accessibility and institutional inaction . This supports intersectional feminist perspectives, which argue that gendered violence cannot be understood in isolation from other forms of structural oppression (Segato, 2010).

The analysis demonstrates that femicide is deeply entrenched in social structures that sustain gender inequality. The themes emerging from the UNIGEM research reinforce existing feminist and criminological theories, highlighting the need for a multi-sectoral approach to prevention. Legal reforms, improved institutional accountability, economic empowerment programs, and education are all necessary to disrupt the cycle of violence. The voices of the respondents illustrate the urgent need for systemic change to ensure that femicide is no longer normalised or ignored, but rather actively prevented through targeted interventions.

Conclusion

This study has explored femicide as the most extreme form of gender-based violence, deeply rooted in patriarchal structures that perpetuate male dominance and female subjugation. By examining the theoretical foundations and qualitative thematic analysis, it is evident that femicide is not an isolated phenomenon but part of a broader pattern of violence against women that is normalised, tolerated, and often inadequately addressed by institutions.

The feminist theoretical framework used in this research underscores the structural and systemic dimensions of femicide, situating it within a continuum of violence. The analysed interviews highlight key issues such as male entitlement, economic dependence, inadequate institutional responses, and the normalization of violence through media and cultural narratives. These findings align with previous research indicating that femicide is not simply an issue of individual perpetrators but a societal problem that demands structural solutions.

The qualitative analysis has revealed that students and university staff perceive femicide as the culmination of long-term patterns of control and abuse, exacerbated by economic and social barriers that prevent women from leaving violent situations safely. Participants expressed concerns over the failure of institutions to provide effective legal protection, pointing to weak

enforcement of restraining orders and victim-blaming attitudes within the justice system. Furthermore, there is a striking gap in awareness and education on femicide, reinforcing the urgent need for systematic interventions in schools, public discourse, and policymaking.

From a legal perspective, while Southeast European countries have made progress in recognising and addressing gender-based violence, femicide remains underreported and under-prosecuted. The Istanbul Convention and other international mechanisms provide a foundation for addressing these issues, but without strong political commitment and cultural shifts, legal reforms alone will not be enough.

The UNIGEM project plays a relevant role in addressing gender-based violence, including femicide, within academic institutions. By fostering gender-sensitive policies, conducting research, and raising awareness, UNIGEM contributes to the broader goal of combating femicide by transforming institutional cultures that often perpetuate gender inequalities. Through education, research, and policy advocacy, such initiatives can play a significant role in challenging the societal norms that enable violence against women and ensuring that femicide is recognised as a systemic issue that demands urgent action.

The findings of this research indicate that future efforts should focus on comprehensive, intersectional approaches that integrate legal, social, and educational reforms. Community-based interventions, improved law enforcement training, and survivor-centred policies must be prioritised to prevent femicide and protect vulnerable women. Further research should explore intersectional dimensions of femicide, particularly how race, class, disability, and migration status shape women's exposure to violence and their access to justice. The qualitative voices presented in this study reaffirm the urgency of this issue and serve as a call to action for policymakers, academics, and activists to work towards a future where femicide is no longer tolerated or excused.

Chapter 14.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of UNIGEM follow-up research underscore the persistent and deeply embedded nature of gender-based discrimination and violence within academic institutions. Issues such as sexist humor, gender-insensitive language, and gender-based violence (GBV) continue to shape institutional cultures, reinforcing structural inequalities and limiting the full participation of women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and persons with disabilities in academic and professional environments. Despite some progress, including increased awareness and institutional recognition of these issues, resistance remains evident, particularly from anti-gender movements and conservative ideological groups that challenge gender equality efforts.

The role of universities in fostering gender-sensitive environments cannot be overstated. The UNIGEM project has played a crucial role in initiating gender sensitivity and mainstreaming gender equality in academia. Through research, policy advocacy, and capacity-building programs, the project has contributed significantly to shifting institutional narratives and equipping stakeholders with the necessary tools to address gender inequality. However, the challenges identified underscore the need for sustained efforts to ensure long-term and meaningful change.

Gender-sensitive language and the mainstreaming of gender studies in university curricula have emerged as essential mechanisms for challenging entrenched biases and fostering inclusive environments. However, resistance, lack of institutional support, and socio-cultural constraints continue to hinder the full realization of these efforts. Moreover, the intersectionality of gender discrimination with disability, and socio-economic status

complicates the implementation of effective interventions. The anti-gender movement remains a significant obstacle, actively opposing gender equality initiatives and fueling moral panic that normalizes toxic masculinity, justifies discriminatory practices, and deters progress in inclusive education.

The findings also reaffirm the urgent need for a multidimensional approach to combating GBV and femicide. Socio-cultural norms, economic dependence, and inadequate institutional responses continue to perpetuate violence against women and marginalized groups. While legal reforms are necessary, they must be accompanied by systemic cultural transformation to address the root causes of gender inequality and violence. Furthermore, universities must adopt a proactive stance in dismantling structural and cultural barriers that limit the effectiveness of gender equality measures.

Moving forward, universities must not only design gender-sensitive policies but ensure their enforcement through continuous education, institutional accountability, and leadership commitment. Sustainable change requires more than symbolic gestures—it demands a commitment to reshaping institutional cultures, amplifying the voices of marginalized groups, and fostering a safe and equitable environment for all. Universities must take a leadership role in challenging societal norms that perpetuate discrimination and violence, ensuring that gender equality is embedded at every level of academia and beyond.

To effectively address gender disparities and promote an inclusive academic culture, universities must adopt a holistic and proactive approach. Institutional policies should not only comply with legal standards but also serve as catalysts for cultural transformation. The academic community—including students, faculty, and administrative staff—must be actively engaged in gender equality efforts through awareness campaigns, inclusive curricula, and the establishment of strong support networks for marginalized individuals. Universities, as centers of knowledge production and social change, bear the responsibility of leading by example, demonstrating that equity and inclusivity are not abstract principles but foundational values embedded in their mission and everyday operations.

Equally crucial is the integration of intersectional perspectives in gender equality initiatives. Recognizing that discrimination is compounded by factors such as disability, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic background, universities should tailor their interventions to address the unique challenges faced by different groups. Collaboration with civil society organizations, policymakers, and international networks is necessary to exchange best practices, develop data-driven solutions, and ensure that efforts to mainstream gender equality are consistent and effective.

Universities also play a vital role in challenging regressive ideologies that seek to undermine gender equality. By fostering open dialogues, encouraging critical thinking, and actively countering misinformation, academic institutions can resist the influence of anti-gender movements and reaffirm their commitment to progress. Institutional leadership must stand firm in advocating for gender justice, ensuring that their campuses remain spaces of safety, respect, and equal opportunity for all.

With these guiding principles in mind, the following recommendations outline concrete steps universities should take to advance gender equality and create more inclusive academic environments:

Institutional Policy and Reform

- Universities should rigorously enforce GAPs and clear policies that prohibit sexist humor, gender-insensitive language, and all forms of gender-based violence (GBV). These policies should be regularly reviewed to ensure alignment with international human rights standards.

- Mechanisms for institutional accountability must be strengthened, ensuring that complaints related to gender discrimination and violence are handled with transparency, efficiency, and due process. Independent oversight bodies should be established to prevent internal biases from influencing outcomes.

- Gender-sensitive leadership must be actively promoted through mandatory training programs for university leaders and decision-makers. Leadership positions should reflect gender parity to model inclusivity and demonstrate institutional commitment to change.

Education and Awareness-Raising

- Universities should integrate gender-sensitive language and gender studies into their curricula across all disciplines. This includes developing compulsory gender courses, fostering research in gender studies, and supporting student-led gender equality initiatives.

- Continuous and compulsory training programs should be implemented for faculty, administrative staff, and students on recognizing and preventing GBV, discrimination, and bias. These programs should be interactive, scenario-based, and regularly updated.

- Universities should develop large-scale campaigns to raise awareness of gender issues, utilizing social media, academic conferences, and partnerships with local and international advocacy groups.

Support for Victims and Survivors

- Universities must provide comprehensive support systems for victims of gender-based violence, including confidential reporting mechanisms, psychological counseling, and legal aid. Victim-centered policies should be prioritized to ensure safety and confidentiality.

- Safe spaces should be created within campuses where victims and survivors can access support without fear of retaliation or stigma.

- Collaborations with specialized organizations should be established to offer expert assistance, particularly in handling cases involving vulnerable groups such as LGBTQIA+ individuals and persons with disabilities.

Cultural and Structural Transformation

- Universities should actively challenge harmful gender norms by engaging students and faculty in discussions that deconstruct traditional power structures and promote gender-equitable values.

- Institutional cultures should be redefined to prioritize inclusivity, ensuring that marginalized voices are amplified in decision-making processes and university governance structures.

- Faculty and students should be encouraged to conduct research on gender issues, with funding opportunities dedicated to projects that explore gender, intersectionality, and social justice in academia.

Gender-Sensitive Leadership and Representation

- Universities must strive to increase women representation in senior leadership roles, ensuring that institutional decision-making reflects gender diversity and inclusivity.

- Transparent hiring and promotion policies should be adopted, with clear criteria to eliminate gender biases in recruitment and career progression.

- Participatory governance models should be encouraged to include diverse perspectives, ensuring that gender equality remains a priority in institutional strategies and policies.

Achieving gender equality in academia requires a sustained and collective effort from university leadership, faculty, students, and policymakers. The UNIGEM project has demonstrated significant progress in raising awareness and fostering institutional change, yet deeply rooted biases and resistance highlight the need for ongoing advocacy, research, and policy reform. By integrating intersectional approaches, fostering cultural transformation, and reinforcing institutional commitment, universities can become truly inclusive spaces where gender equality is not merely an aspiration but a lived reality for all. Sustained efforts, adequate resource allocation, and institutional accountability will be key to ensuring that gender equality becomes an irreversible norm in higher education.

Universities are not just centers of knowledge; they are transformative spaces that have the power to shape the values of future generations. Gender equality must be seen as a fundamental academic and ethical principle, not just a compliance requirement. Ensuring meaningful representation, fostering an inclusive academic culture, and actively combating discrimination require both structural reforms and a commitment to cultural change. Faculty and students alike should be encouraged to engage critically with gender issues, challenge discriminatory practices, and advocate for equity both within and beyond their institutions.

Moreover, institutions must recognize that gender equality is a dynamic process that demands continuous reflection, adaptation, and proactive engagement. Investing in gender-responsive policies, comprehensive training programs, and long-term advocacy will yield lasting benefits—not just for universities but for society at large. As higher education institutions increasingly play a role in shaping public discourse, they must also take the lead in setting high standards for gender justice and inclusion.

The future of gender-inclusive academia depends on proactive engagement, decisive leadership, and a commitment to ensuring that gender equality remains at the forefront of educational policies and practices. By embracing this responsibility, universities can not only foster an inclusive academic environment but also contribute to a broader societal shift towards justice, equity, and human dignity. Every step taken towards inclusivity

strengthens the academic community as a whole, creating a space where knowledge thrives in an environment of mutual respect and shared progress.

Literature

Abazović, D. (2006). *Za naciju i boga: sociološko određenje religijskog nacionalizma*. Sarajevo: Magistrat – University Press.

Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender & Society, 4*(2), 139–158. http://www.jstor.org/stable/189609

Adanu, R., & Johnson, T. (2009). Migration and women's health. *International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics, 106*(2), 179–181. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijgo.2009.03.036

Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life.* Duke University Press.

Ahmed, S. (2017). *Living a feminist life*. Duke University Press.

Ahmed, S. (2021). *Complaint!*. Duke University Press.

Anicha, C., Burnett, A., & Bilen-Green, C. (2015). Men faculty gender-equity advocates. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, *23*(1), 21-43. https://doi.org/10.1177/1060826514561974

Anić, J. R. (2012). Gender, politics and the catholic church. *Concilium*, 48, 4, 26-35.

Anić, J.R. (2011). *Kako razumjeti rod? Povijest rasprave i različita razumijevanja u Crkvi*. Zagreb: Institut društvenih znanosti Ivo Pilar.

Anić, J. R., & Spahić Šiljak, Z. (2020). Secularisation of religion as the source of religious gender stereotypes. *Feminist Theology*, *28*(3), 264-281.

Anitha, S. & Lewis, R. (2018). *Gender-based violence in university communities*. Policy Press, Kindle Edition.

Annan, E. (2022). An evaluation of gender mainstreaming efforts in a public university in Ghana: A case study of university of education. *Open Journal of Educational Research, 2*(6), 367-380. https://doi.org/10.31586/ojer.2022.434

Archer, M. S. (1995). *Realist social theory: The morphogenetic approach*. Cambridge University Press.

Archer, M. S. (2000). *Being human: The problem of agency*. Cambridge University Press.

Archer, M. S. (2003). *Structure, agency and the internal conversation*. Cambridge University Press.

Aycock, L., Hazari, Z., Brewe, E., Clancy, K., Hodapp, T., & Goertzen, R. (2019). Sexual harassment reported by undergraduate female physicists. *Physical Review Physics Education Research, 15*(1). https://doi.org/10.1103/physrevphyseducres.15.010121

Barada, V. (2000). Diskusija s Biljanom Kašić: Feminizam – Izazov za 21. stoljeće. *Diskrepancija, 1*(1), 41 – 49. https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/32359

Barnes, C., & Mercer, G. (2003). *Disability*. Polity Press.

Barton, L., & Oliver, M. (1997). *Disability studies: Past, present and future*. Leeds University Press.

Bencivenga, R. & Drew, E. (2021). Promoting gender equality and structural change in academia through gender equality plans: harmonising EU and national initiatives. *Gender – Zeitschrift Für Geschlecht Kultur Und Gesellschaft, 13*(1), 27-42. https://doi.org/10.3224/gender.v13i1.03

Berger-Estilita, J. (2024). European anesthesiologists' experiences with gender-based mistreatment in the workplace: A secondary multilevel regression analysis. *Korean Journal of Anesthesiology, 77*(1), 46-57. https://doi.org/10.4097/kja.23392

Bhaskar, R. (1978). *A realist theory of science*. New York: Harvester Press.

Bhaskar, R. (1989). *Reclaiming reality: A critical introduction to contemporary philosophy*. Verso.

Bhaskar, R. (1993). *Dialectic: The pulse of freedom*. Routledge.

Bhaskar, R. (1998). *The possibility of naturalism: A philosophical critique of the contemporary human sciences* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Bhopal, K. (2018). *White privilege: The myth of a post-racial society*. Policy Press.

Bilić, B. (Ed.). (2019). *U mrežama drugosti: Intersekcionalnost i LGBT aktivizam u Srbiji i Hrvatskoj*. Novi Sad: Mediteran.

Bobić, L. & Anić, J. (2023). Recognizing the influence of religion on gender-based violence. In Z. Spahić Šiljak, J. Kovačević and J. Husanović (Eds.). *Mainstreaming gender equality at universities in the Balkans: Fighting gender-based violence*. Scholars Press.

Bonacci Skenderović, D. (2024). *"Ili moja ili ničija!" Analiza intimnog partnerskog femicida u Hrvatskoj 2016.-2023*. Bonacci.

Bourdieu, P. (2001). *Masculine domination*. Stanford University Press.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE Publications.

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge

Butler, J. (2021). *Excitable speech: A politics of the performative*. Routledge.

Butterfield, N. (2019). Imaginarni ruralni prostori: Nenormativne seksualnosti u malim gradovima i ruralnim područjima Hrvatske. In B. Bilić (Ed.). *U mrežama drugosti: Intersekcionalnost i LGBT aktivizam u Srbiji i Hrvatskoj* (pp. 269-293). Novi Sad: Mediteran.

Calogero, R. M., & Pina, A. (2011). Body guilt: Preliminary evidence for a further subjective experience of self-objectification. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 35*(3), 428–440. https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684311408564

Campbell, J. C. (2002). Health consequences of intimate partner violence. *The Lancet, 359*(9314), 1331–1336. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(02)08336-8

Campbell, J. C., Webster, D., & Glass, N. (2009). The danger assessment: Validation of a lethality risk assessment instrument for intimate partner femicide. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 24*(4), 653–674. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260508317180

Campbell, J. C., Webster, D., Koziol-McLain, J., Block, C., Campbell, D., Curry, M. A., Gary, F., McFarlane, J., Sachs, C., Sharps, P., Ulrich, Y., Wilt, S. A., Manganello, J., Xu, X., Schollenberger, J., Frye, V., & Laughon, K. (2003). Risk factors for femicide in abusive relationships: Results from a multisite case-control study. *American Journal of Public Health, 93*(7), 1089–1097. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.93.7.1089

Campbell, J., Glass, N., Sharps, P. W., Laughon, K., & Bloom, T. (2007). Intimate partner homicide: Review and implications of research and policy. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 8*(3), 246–269. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838007303505

Caputi, J., & Russell, D. E. H. (1990). Femicide: Speaking the unspeakable. *Ms.: The World of Women, 1*(2), 34–37.

Carcedo, A. (2010). *No olvidamos ni aceptamos: Femicidio en Centroamérica 2000-2006*. Asociación para los Derechos de la Mujer.

Carvalho, T., Jordão, C., Diogo, S., & Breda, Z. (2020). Learning organisations – a case study of changes in gender equality in decision-making bodies. *INTED 2020 Proceedings* (pp. 6082-6090). IATED. https://doi.org/10.21125/inted.2020.1650

Čaušević, J., Miloš, B., Demiragić, A., & Subašić, L. (2023). Language and gender equality in an academic context: a regional perspective. In Z. Spahić Šiljak, J. Kovačević, and J. Husanović (Eds.). *Mainstreaming Gender Equality at Universities in the Balkans: Fighting Gender-Based Violence.* Scholars Press.

Ćavar, I. & Opačić, A. (2023). Percepcija i iskustvo rodne diskriminacije studenata i studentica na Sveučilištu u Zagrebu. *Revija za sociologiju, 53* (2), 179-212. https://doi.org/10.5613/rzs.53.2.2

Ćeriman, J. & Spahić Šiljak, Z. (2023.) "I'm just kidding": An analysis of sexist comments and offensive humor at Balkan Universities. In Z. Spahić Šiljak, J. Kovačević, and J. Husanović (Eds.). *Mainstreaming Gender Equality at Universities in the Balkans: Fighting Gender-Based Violence.* Scholars Press.

Cho, S., Crenshaw, K. W., & McCall, L. (2013). Toward a field of intersectionality studies: Theory, applications, and praxis. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 38*(4), 785–810.

Clavero, S. & Galligan, Y. (2021). Delivering gender justice in academia through gender equality plans? Normative and practical challenges. *Gender Work and Organization, 28*(3), 1115-1132. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12658

Cohen, S. (1972). *Folk devils and moral panics: The creation of the mods and rockers*. London: MacGibbon and Kee.

Cole, K., & Hassel, H. (2017). *Surviving sexism in academia. Strategies for feminist leadership*. Routledge.

Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Collins, P. H., & Bilge, S. (2016). *Intersectionality.* Polity Press.

Connell, R. W. (2009). *Gender in world perspective*. Cambridge: Polity Press;

Connell, R.W. & Messerschmidt, J.W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender and Society, 19*(6), 829-859.

Connell, RW. (1995). *Masculinities*. Cambridge, Polity Press; Sydney, Allen & Unwin; Berkeley, University of California Press.

Conrad, P., Carr, P., Knight, S., Renfrew, M. R., Dunn, M. B., & Pololi, L. (2010). Hierarchy as a barrier to advancement for women in academic medicine. *Journal of Women's Health*, *19*(4), 799-805.

Corradi, C., Marcuello-Servós, C., Boira, S., & Weil, S. (2016). Theories of femicide and their significance for social research. *Current Sociology, 64*(7), 975–995. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392115622256

Council of Europe. (2011). *The Istanbul Convention: Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence*. Retrieved from CETS 210 - Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989*(1), 139–167.

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review, 43*(6), 1241–1299.

Cvitković, I. (2016). *Religija u zrcalu teorija*. Sarajevo: Centar za empirijska istraživanja religije u Bosni i Hercegovini.

Daly, M., & Wilson, M. (1988). *Homicide*. Aldine De Gruyter.

Davis, A. (1981). *Women, race, & class*. Random House.

Dawson, M., & Mobayed Vega, S. (Eds.). (2023). *The Routledge international handbook on femicide and feminicide*. Routledge.

Deonna, J., Rodogno, R., & Teroni, F. (2012). *In defense of shame: The faces of an emotion.* Oxford University Press.

Derks, B., Ellemers, N., van Laar, C., & de Groot, K. (2011). Do sexist organizational cultures create the Queen Bee? *British Journal of Social Psychology, 50*(3), 519-35. doi: 10.1348/014466610X525280.

Duderija, A. (2024). *Essays on critical and progressive islam*. Available at TPO Foundation: http://www.tpo.ba/b/dokument/Crtical-progressive-Islam-Djuderija.pdf (accessed on December 14, 2024)

Eagly, A. & Carli, L. (2007) *Through labyrinth: The truth about how women become leaders*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Eagly, A., Johannesen-Schmidt, C., van Engen, M., & Marloes, L. (2003). Transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles: A meta-analysis comparing women and men. *Psychological Bulleting, 129*(4), 569.

EIGE, Eurostat (2024). *EU gender-based violence survey – Key results. Experiences of women in the EU-27.* Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

EIGE (2021). *Gender equality index*. Retrieved from https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2021/domain/money/disability

EIGE (2024). *What is gender-based violence*. Retrieved from: https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence

EIGE (2024a). Gender equality in academia and research - GEAR. Retrieved from https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear

European Commission (2020). *Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025*. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/just/items/682425/en

European Commission (2021). *Union of equality: Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021–2030*. Retrieved from https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/disability/union-equality-strategy-rights-persons-disabilities-2021-2030_en

Evans, M. L., Lindauer, M., & Farrell, M. E. (2020). A pandemic within a pandemic—Intimate partner violence during COVID-19. *New England Journal of Medicine, 383*(24), 2302–2304. https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMp2024046

Faqir, F. (2001). Intrafamily femicide in defense of honour: The case of Jordan. *Third World Quarterly, 22*(1), 65–82. https://doi.org/10.1080/01436590020022583

Ferguson, Mark A., & Ford, Thomas E. (2008). Disparagement humor: A theoretical and empirical review of psychoanalytic, superiority, and social identity theories. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research. 21*(3), 283–312.

Fernandez, L. (2023). Unveiling gender dynamics: an in-depth analysis of gender realities. *Influence International Journal of Science Review, 5*(3), 61-70. https://doi.org/10.54783/influencejournal.v5i3.182

Fetahagić S. (2012). Islam in socialism and post-socialism. In Z. Spahić Šiljak (ed.) *Contesting female, feminist and muslim identities. Post-socialist contexts of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo*. Center for Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Studies, University of Sarajevo.

Fletcher, A. J. (2020). The reality of gender (ideology). Using abduction and retroduction in applied critical realist. In M. van Ingen, S. Grohmann, & L. Gunnarsson (Eds.). *Critical realism, feminism, and gender: A reader* (1st ed., pp. 205-224). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315112138

Flinders, J. D. & Thornton, J. T. (2004). *Curriculum studies reader* (2nd ed.). Routledge, 2004, Kindle Edition.

Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language*. Vintage.

Foucault, M. (1990). The history of sexuality: An introduction, volume I. *Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage*, *95*, 1-160.

EIGE, Eurostat. (2024). *EU gender-based violence survey – Key results. Experiences of women in the EU-27.* Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Franklin-Corben, P., & Towl, G. (2023). Responding to gender-based violence in higher education: changes as a function of Covid-19. *Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research, 15*(3), https://doi.org/10.1108/jacpr-06-2022-0721

Fraser, N. (2022). *Cannibal capitalism: How our system is devouring democracy, care, and the planet and what we can do about it*. London-New York: Verso.

Fregoso, R. L., & Bejarano, C. (2010). *Terrorizing women: Feminicide in the Américas*. Duke University Press.

Fulu, E., & Miedema, S. (2015). Violence against women: Globalizing the integrated ecological model. *Violence Against Women, 21*(12), 1431–1455. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801215596244

Garland-Thomson, R. (2002). Integrating disability, transforming feminist theory. *NWSA Journal, 14*(3), 1–32.

Gavrilović, D., Anić, J.R., Užarević, F., & Puzek, I. (2022). The correlation of religiosity and traditionality in the field of gender relations in Croatia and Serbia, *Religija i tolerancija, 20*(35), 5-32.

Graph Steenhuysen, J & Hesson, T. (2015). US health agencies scrubbing websites to remove 'gender ideology'. Retrieved from: https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-health-agencies-scrubbing-websites-remove-gender-ideology-2025-01-31/ (accessed on January 31, 2025)

Gunnarsson, L. (2017). Why we keep separating the "inseparable": Dialecticizing intersectionality. *European Journal of Women's Studies, 24*(2), 114–127. https://doi.org/10.1177/135050681557711

Hall, R. M. & Sandler, B.R. (1985). A chilly climate in the classroom. In A.G. Sargent (eds.) *Beyond sex roles*, New York: West.

Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies, 14*(3), 575–599.

Harding, S. (1991). *Whose science? Whose knowledge? Thinking from women's lives*. Cornell University Press.

Harding, S. (1993). Rethinking standpoint epistemology: What is 'strong objectivity'? In L. Alcoff & E. Potter (Eds.), *Feminist epistemologies* (pp. 19-82). Routledge

Hearn, J. (2014). Introduction: International studies on men, masculinities, and gender equality. *Men and Masculinities, 17*(5), 455-466. https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X14558232

Heise, L. L. (1998). Violence against women: An integrated, ecological framework. *Violence Against Women, 4*(3), 262–290. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801298004003002

Hochschild, A. R. (1989). *The second shift: Working families and the revolution at home*. Viking.

hooks, b. (1984). *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. South End Press.

hooks, b. (1999). *Yearning: Race, gender, and cultural politics*. Boston: South End Press.

hooks, b. (2000). *Feminism is for everybody*. Boston: South End Press.

hooks, b. (2000). *Where we stand: Class matters*. Routledge.

Humbert, A. L., & Strid, S. (2024). Institutional confidence, underreporting and academic consequences of gender-based violence among university staff and students in Europe. *Studies in Higher Education*, 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2024.2440544

Jašarević, M. (2023). Sociocultural aspects of gender-based violence: family, media and education. In Z. Spahić Šiljak, J. Kovačević, and J. Husanović (Eds.). *Mainstreaming Gender Equality at Universities in the Balkans: Fighting Gender-Based Violence*. Scholars Press.

Kandiyoti, D. (1988). "Bargaining with patriarchy". *Gender and Society, 2*(3), Special Issue to Honor Jessie Bernard, pp. 274-290.

Konstantinović Vilić, S., & Petrušić, N. (2021). *Pokušaj femicida i femicid u Srbiji: Sprečavanje i procesuiranje*. FemPlatz.

Kovačević, J. (2019). Teškoće u karijernom napredovanju. In A. Ždralović (Ed.) *Rod i ekonomija*. Sarajevo: Sarajevski otvoreni centar.

Kovačević, J. & Spahić Šiljak, Z. (2025). *Cijena nečiste krvi: kulturni i ekonomski aspekti menstruacije u Bosni i Hercegovini*. Sarajevo: TPO Fondacija.

Kuhar, R. & Paternotte, D. (2017). *Anti-gender campaigns in Europe mobilizing against equality*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

LaFrance, M., & Woodzicka, J. A. (1998). No laughing matter: Women's verbal and nonverbal reactions to sexist humor. In J.K. Swim, & C. Stangor (Eds.). *Prejudice: The target's perspective* (pp. 61–80). Academic Press. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-012679130-3/50038-7

Lagarde, M. (2005). *El feminicidio, delito contra la humanidad. Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas*. UNAM.

Lagarde, M. (2006). *Los cautiverios de las mujeres: Madresposas, monjas, putas, presas y locas*. UNAM.

Lewandowski, L., McKenry, P. C., & Fitzpatrick, M. L. (2004). 'He killed my mommy!': Murder or attempted murder of a child's mother. *Journal of Family Violence, 19*, 211–220.

Lomazzi, V. (2023). The Cultural Roots of Violence against Women: Individual and Institutional Gender Norms in 12 Countries. *Social Sciences, 12*(3), 117. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12030117;

Lomazzi, V., Israel, S., & Crespi, I. (2018). Gender equality in Europe and the effect of work-family balance policies on gender-role attitudes. *Social Sciences, 8*(1), 5. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci8010005

Lombardo, E. & Bustelo, M. (2021). Sexual and sexist harassment in Spanish universities: policy implementation and resistances against gender equality measures. *Journal of Gender Studies, 31*(1), 8-22. https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2021.1924643

Loots, S. & Walker, M. (2015). Shaping a gender equality policy in higher education: which human capabilities matter?. *Gender and Education, 27*(4), 361-375. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2015.1045458

Lopes, M., Ferreira, V., & Santos, C. (2023). Gendered micropolitics in academic work environments: Uncovering microaggressions during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Social Sciences, 12*(8), 443. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12080443

Lynch, K. (2010). Carelessness: A hidden doxa of higher education. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education, 9*(1), 54–67.

MacKinnon, C. A. (1979). *Sexual harassment of working women: A case of sex discrimination*. Yale University Press.

Mahmood, S. (2005). *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton University Press.

Makhene, A. (2022). Gender-based violence in higher education: An integrative review. *Open Journal of Social Sciences, 10*(3), 234-247. doi: 10.4236/jss.2022.103017.

Martin, S. L., Macy, R. J., Sullivan, K., & Magee, L. (2007). Pregnancy-associated violent deaths: The role of intimate partner violence. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 8*(2), 135–148. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838007301223

McIntosh, P. (1988). *White privilege and male privilege: A personal account of coming to see correspondences through work in women's studies*. Wellesley College Center for Research on Women.

McNay, L. (2008). *Against recognition*. Polity Press.

Michau, L., Horn, J., Bank, A., Dutt, M., & Zimmerman, C. (2015). Prevention of violence against women and girls: lessons from practice. *The Lancet*, *385*(9978), 1672-1684.

Minto, R. & Mergaert, L. (2018). Gender mainstreaming and evaluation in the EU: comparative perspectives from feminist institutionalism. *International Feminist Journal of Politics, 20*(2), 204-220. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2018.1440181

Miralles-Cardona, C., Chiner, E., Tichá, R., Esteve-Faubel, J. M., Abery, B. H., & Sanhueza-Henríquez, S. V. (2025). Teacher educators' perceptions of factors influencing gender mainstreaming implementation in university teaching 30 years after Beijing. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 29-44.

Miralles-Cardona, C., Chiner, E., & Moltó, M. (2021). Educating prospective teachers for a sustainable gender equality practice: survey design and validation of a self-efficacy scale. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education, 23*(2), 379-403. https://doi.org/10.1108/ijshe-06-2020-0204

Miralles-Cardona, C., Chiner, E., & Moltó, M. (2021). Measurement invariance of the sensitive assessment for gender equality index across degree: findings from two teacher education programs in Spain. *Journal of New Approaches in Educational Research, 10*(1), 157-174. https://doi.org/10.7821/naer.2021.1.611

Mirza, H. S. (2015). Decolonizing higher education: Black feminism and the intersectionality of race and gender. *Journal of Feminist Scholarship, 7*(1), 1–12.

Mirza, H. S. (2017). *Black British feminism: A reader*. Routledge.

Mladenov, T. (2014). *Critical theory and disability. A phenomenological approach*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Mohanty, C. (1988). Under western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses. *Feminist Review, 30*(1), 61-88. https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.1988.42

Mohloakana, R. & Wet, A. (2023). Women working at universities in South Africa – a gender equality perspective. In *Education and New Developments Proceedings*. 296-300. https://doi.org/10.36315/2023v2end062

Morley, L. (2011). Misogyny posing as measurement: disrupting the feminisation crisis discourse. *Contemporary Social Science, 6*(2), 223–235. https://doi.org/10.1080/21582041.2011.580615

Morley, L. (2013). The rules of the game: Women and the leaderist turn in higher education. *Gender and Education, 25*(1), 116–131. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2012.740888

Morley, L. (2015). Troubling intra-actions: gender, neo-liberalism and research in the global academy. *Journal of Education Policy, 31*(1), 28–45. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2015.1062919

Morris, J. (1991). *Pride against prejudice*. The Women's Press.

Morris, J. (1996). *Encounters with strangers: Feminism and disability*. The Women's Press.

Mršević, Z. (2013). Nediskriminativno obrazovanje: Utopija, nekstopija, ili realnost. In V. Vukotić, D. Šuković, M. Rašević, S. Maksimović, & V. Goati (Eds.) *Obrazovanje i razvoj*. Centar za ekonomska istraživanja Instituta društvenih nauka, Beograd, 233-240.

Nash, J. (2017). Intersectionality and its discontents. *American Quarterly, 69*(1), 117–129.

Nash, M., & Churchill, B. (2020). Caring during COVID-19: A gendered analysis of Australian university responses to managing remote working and caring responsibilities. *Gender, Work and Organization, 27*(5), 833–846. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12484

O'Connor, J. (2014). Gender mainstreaming in the European union: broadening the possibilities for gender equality and/or an inherently constrained exercise?. *Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy, 30*(1), 69-78. https://doi.org/10.1080/21699763.2014.888012

Ocio, A. (2023). 'The theory is beautiful': resistance and counter-resistance to gender equality in teacher training. *Higher Education Quarterly, 78*(3), 693-708. https://doi.org/10.1111/hequ.12478

Oliver, M. (1990). *The politics of disablement*. St. Martin's Press.

Olsson, E. & Sörensen, J. (2020). What price equality? the academic cost of government supervised gender mainstreaming at Swedish universities. *Societies, 10*(4), 87. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc10040087

Ovseiko, P., Chapple, A., Edmunds, L., & Ziébland, S. (2017). Advancing gender equality through the athena swan charter for women in science: an exploratory study of women's and men's perceptions. *Health Research Policy and Systems, 15*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12961-017-0177-9

Palma-Solis, M., Vives-Cases, C., & Alvarez-Dardet, C. (2008). Gender progress and government expenditure as determinants of femicide. *Annals of Epidemiology, 18*(4), 322–329. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annepidem.2007.11.007

Papić, Ž., & Sklevicky, L. (2003). *Antropologija žene*. Beograd: Čigoja štampa.

Perez-Felkner, L. (2018). Conceptualizing the field: Higher education research on the STEM gender gap: Conceptualizing gaps. *New Directions for Institutional Research* (179):11-26. DOI:10.1002/ir.20273

Persell, C. H, James, C, Kang, T. & Synder, K. (1999). "Gender and education in global perspective". In J.S. Chafetz (ed.) *Handbook of the sociology of gender*, New York: Kluwer.

Pešić, J. (2017). *Promena vrednosnih orijentacija u postsocijalističkim društvima Srbije i Hrvatske. Politički i ekonomski liberalizam*. Beograd: Univerzitet, Filozofski fakultet, Institut za sociološka istraživanja.

Peterman, A., Potts, A., O'Donnell, M., Thompson, K., Shah, N., Oertelt-Prigione, S., & Van Gelder, N. (2020). *Pandemics and violence against women and children*, 528, (pp. 1-45). Washington, DC: Center for Global Development.

Puwar, N. (2004). *Space invaders: Race, gender and bodies out of place*. Berg.

Pyke, K. D. (2018). Institutional betrayal: Inequity, discrimination, bullying, and retaliation in academia. *Sociological Perspectives, 61*(1), 5-13. DOI:10.1177/0731121417743816

Radford, J., & Russell, D. E. H. (1992). *Femicide: The politics of woman killing*. Twayne Publishers.

Radončić, Dž. & Lendák-Kabók, K. (2023). Gender mainstreaming in university curricula. In Z. Spahić Šiljak, J. Kovačević and J. Husanović (Eds.), *Mainstreaming Gender Equality at Universities in the Balkans: Fighting Gender-Based Violence* (pp. 179 – 191)

Reay, D. (2004). "It's all becoming a habitus": Beyond the habitual use of habitus in educational research. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 25*(4), 431–444. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4128669

Reddy, R. (2008). Gender, culture and the law: Approaches to 'honour crimes' in the UK. *Feminist Legal Studies, 16*(3), 305–321.

Rosenkranz, G. B. (2024). Intersectionality and feminist movements from a global perspective. *Sociology Compass, 18*(5). https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.13211

Ryan, R. & Connell, J. (1989). Perceived locus of causality and internalization: Examining reasons for acting in two domains. *Journal of Personality and Sosical Psychology, 57*(5), 749-761.

Sanghavi, P., Bhalla, K., & Das, V. (2009). Fire-related deaths in India in 2001: A retrospective analysis of data. *The Lancet, 373*(9671), 1282–1288.

Schlytter, A., & Linell, H. (2010). Girls with honour-related problems in a comparative perspective. *International Journal of Social Welfare, 19*(2), 152–161.

Segato, R. L. (2010). 'Territory, sovereignty, and crimes of the second State'. In R.L. Fregoso, & C. Bejarano (Eds.) *Terrorizing women: Feminicide in the Americas* (pp. 70–92). Duke University Press.

Settles, I., Cortina, L., Buchanan, N., & Miner, K. (2012). Derogation, discrimination, and (dis)satisfaction with jobs in science. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 37*(2), 179-191. https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684312468727

Shakespeare, T. (2006). *Disability rights and wrongs*. Routledge.

Sharoni, S., & Klocke, B. (2019). Faculty confronting gender-based violence on campus: Opportunities and challenges. *Violence Against Women, 25*(11), 1352-1369. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801219844597

Shifman, L., & Lemish, D. (2010). Between feminism and fun(ny)mism: Analysing gender in popular internet humour. *Information, Communication & society*, *13*(6), 870-891.

Shilliam, R. (2021). *Decolonizing politics: An introduction*. Polity Press.

Silfver, E., Gonsalves, A., Danielsson, A., & Berge, M. (2021). Gender equality as a resource and a dilemma: interpretative repertoires in engineering education in Sweden. *Gender and Education, 34*(8), 923-939. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2021.1963419

Skeggs, B. (1997). *Formations of class and gender: Becoming respectable*. Sage.

Smith, C. P., & Freyd, J. J. (2014). Institutional betrayal. *American Psychologist, 69*(6), 575–584.

Spahić Šiljak, Z. (2010). *Women, religion and politics: Impact analysis of interpretative religious heritage of judaism, christianity and islam on the engagement of women in public life and politics*. Sarajevo: IMIC, TPO.

Spahić Šiljak, Z. (2019). *Sociologija roda – feministička kritika*. Sarajevo: TPO fondacija.

Spahić Šiljak, Z. (2021). *The Balkans labyrinth: Culture, gender and leadership*. Scholars Press.

Spahić Šiljak, Z. & Anić,J.R. (2023). Gender and religion in the Balkans: The example of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. In S. Odak, & Z. Grozdanov (Eds.). *Balkan contextual theology*, London - New York: Routledge, 92-118

Spahić Šiljak, Z., Kovačević, J. & Husanović, J. Husanović (Eds.) (2023). *Mainstreaming gender equality at universities in the Balkans: Fighting gender-gased violence*. Scholars Press.

Spahić Šiljak, Z., Kovačević, J. & Husanović, J. (Eds.) (2022). *Izazovi integracije rodne ravnopravnosti u sveučilišnoj zajednici: Protiv rodno uvjetovanog nasilja*. Sarajevo: TPO.

Stöckl, H., Devries, K., Rotstein, A., Abrahams, N., Campbell, J., Watts, C., & Moreno, C. G. (2013). The global prevalence of intimate partner homicide: A systematic review. *The Lancet, 382*(9895), 859–865. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(13)61030-2

Thomas, C. (1999). *Female forms: Experiencing and understanding disability*. Open University Press.

Tildesley, R. (2023). Transforming academic research? Resistances to gender mainstreaming implementation in universities. *European Journal of Women's Studies, 30*(4), 486-501. https://doi.org/10.1177/13505068231207034

Tomić-Koludrović, I., & Kunac, S. (2000). *Rizici modernizacije: Žene u Hrvatskoj devedesetih*. Split: Udruga građana "Stope nade".

Tsekeris, C., & Lydaki, A. (2011). The micro-macro dilemma in sociology: Perplexities and perspectives. *Sociologija, 53*(1), 67-82. https://doi.org/10.2298/SOC1101067T

UN Women (2019). *Handbook on addressing violence and harassment in the world of work*. Retrieved from: https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/03/handbook-addressing-violence-and-harassment-against-women-in-the-world-of-work

UN Women (2021). *Measuring the shadow pandemic: Violence against women during COVID-19*. Retrieved from: https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/documents/Publications/Measuring-shadow-pandemic.pdf

UN (2006). *Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities*. United Nations. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf

UN (2024). *Disability and development report 2024*. Retrieved from https://social.desa.un.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/DDR%202024%20Full%20report%20-%20Unedited.pdf

UNESCO (2020). *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Gender Report – A new generation: 25 years of efforts for gender equality in education*. Retrieved from: https://www.unesco.org/gem-report/en/2020-gender-report

United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNESC) (2013). *Vienna declaration on femicide*. Retrieved from: https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CCPCJ/CCPCJ_Sessions/CCPCJ_22/_E-CN15-2013-NGO1/E-CN15-2013-NGO1_E.pdf

UN (2023). *Religious leaders stand up to violence against women*. Retrieved from: https://bosniaherzegovina.un.org/en/190046-religious-leaders-standing-violence-against-women (accessed on December 18. 2024)

UNODC & UN Women. (2022). *Statistical framework for measuring the gender-related killings of women and girls (also referred to as "femicide/feminicide")*. Retrieved from: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/Statistical_framework_femicide_2022.pdf

UNODC & UN Women. (2024). *Femicides in 2023: Global estimates of intimate partner/family member femicides*. Retrieved from: https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/femicides-in-2023-global-estimates-of-intimate-partner-family-member-femicides-en.pdf

UNODC (2018). *Global study on homicide: Gender-related killing of women and girls*. Retrieved from: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/GSH2018/GSH18_Gender-related_killing_of_women_and_girls.pdf

Vaggione, J.M. (2005) Reactive politicization and religious dissidence: The political mutations of the religious. *Social Theory and Practice, 31*, 2, 233-255.

Van Gelder, N., Peterman, A., Potts, A., O'Donnell, M., Thompson, K., Shah, N., & Oertelt-Prigione, S. (2020). COVID-19: Reducing the risk of infection might increase the risk of intimate partner violence. *EClinicalMedicine, 21*, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eclinm.2020.100348

Van Ingen, M. (2020). After constructivism: Rethinking feminist security studies through interdisciplinary research. In M. van Ingen, S. Grohmann, & L. Gunnarsson (Eds.), *Critical realism, feminism, and gender: A reader* (1st ed., pp. 225-262). Routledge.

Van Ingen, M., Grohmann, S., & Gunnarsson, L. (2020). Philosophical preliminaries: Critical realism, feminism, and gender. In M. van Ingen, S. Grohmann, & L. Gunnarsson (Eds.), *Critical realism, feminism, and gender: A reader* (1st ed., pp. 9-15). Routledge.

Verge, T., Ferrer-Fons, M., & González, M. (2017). Resistance to mainstreaming gender into the higher education curriculum. *European Journal of Women's Studies, 25*(1), 86-101. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506816688237

Vrcan, S. (2001). *Vjera u vrtlozima tranzicije*. Split: Dalmatinska akcija.

Walby, S. (2009). *Globalization and inequalities: Complexity and contested modernities*. Sage.

Walby, S. (2023). What is femicide? The United Nations and the measurement of progress in complex epistemic systems. *Current Sociology, 71*(1), 10–27. https://doi.org/10.1177/00113921221084357

Walby, S., Towers, J., & Francis, B. (2017). *The concept and measurement of violence against women and men*. Policy Press.

Weeks, J. (2016). *What is sexual history?* Malden, MA: Polity.

Weil, S., Corradi, C., & Naudi, M. (2018). *Femicide across Europe*. Policy Press.

Wendell, S. (1997). *The rejected body: Feminist philosophical reflections on disability*. New York: Routledge.

Women's Rights Center Montenegro (2022). *Femicide: Murder of women in Western Balkans Region 2021 Report*. Retrieved from: https://womensrightscenter.org/en/report-on-femicide-2021/

World Health Organization (WHO) (2012). *Understanding and addressing violence against women: Femicide*. Retrieved from: https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-RHR-12.38

World Health Organization (WHO) (2021). *COVID-19 and violence against women*. Retrieved from: https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-SRH-20.04

Yusuf, M. & Yahaya, K. (2022). Assessment of gender mainstreaming among managers of universities in Osun state, Nigeria. *Journal of Education in Black Sea Region, 8*(1), 96-110. https://doi.org/10.31578/jebs.v8i1.282

Yuval-Davis, N. (2006). Intersectionality and feminist politics. *European Journal of Women's Studies, 13*(3), 193-209. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506806065752

Zeoli, A. M., & Webster, D. W. (2010). Effects of domestic violence policies, alcohol taxes and police staffing levels on intimate partner homicide in large US cities. *Injury Prevention, 16*(2), 90–95. https://doi.org/10.1136/ip.2009.024620

There are multiple social interests in the publication of this work. On the one hand, there is an exceptional need within the academic community itself for a comprehensive, interdisciplinary, and intersectional approach to the issue of gender equality. On the other hand, there is a need to analyze the challenges within the student population and raise awareness of stereotypes, various forms of discrimination, and gender-based violence.

Snježana Vasiljević, PhD (University of Zagreb)

This is an impressive academic endeavor—a comprehensive study on gender-based violence that, from a comparative perspective, examines the state of GBV by comparing findings from the initial research with the results of a more recent study. The book offers a wealth of qualitative and quantitative evidence, shedding further light on the unexplored and overlooked aspects of gender-based violence in universities across our region.

Nerzuk Ćurak, PhD (University of Sarajevo)

Echoes of Change represents a significant study that not only documents the state of gender (in)equality in universities but also offers recommendations for future action. This book is a valuable contribution to the academic debate on gender equality and serves as an important resource for researchers, policymakers, and all those engaged with this issue.

Gordana Lalić-Krstin, PhD (University of Novi Sad)

This study delineates the trajectory of a new form of active humanism, one that necessitates a critical examination and deconstruction of the patriarchal (and misogynistic) foundations of our societies. It further interrogates the inherent patriarchal exclusivity, which serves as the structural basis from which various other forms of exclusion.

Anisa Avdagić, PhD (University of Tuzla)

This research analyzes highly evident barriers that are often invisible and systemically deeply rooted within the academic community, which remains largely traditional in the Balkans.

Merima Jašarević, PhD (Džemal Bijedić University of Mostar)

9 789926 422509