

Gender-based Violence: Prevention and Response 2025-2027



Creative
thinkers
made here.



At ECU, we are committed to creating a safe and respectful environment where gender-based violence has no place. If you've experienced gender-based violence, including sexual harassment or sexual assault, know that you are not alone—help is available.

Our priority is to ensure that all students and staff have access to safe and confidential support services. Whether you need someone to talk to, guidance on what to do next, or wish to disclose an incident, ECU is here for you.

Seek support at ECU: Visit ecu.edu.au/harassment to access support services.

Disclose an incident to ECU: Fill out the [Disclose Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Form](#) (anonymous disclosing available) or call ECU Security on 6304 2282.

Contents

Introduction	4	Action Plan to Address Gender-based	
Consultation	5	Violence in Higher Education	7
Governance and reporting	5	Terminology	8
Respect at ECU Advisory Group	5	Vision and principles	10
Background	6	Gender-based Violence Prevention	
National Student Safety Survey	6	and Response Plan	12

Introduction

At ECU, we are committed to fostering a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment for all members of our community. Gender-based violence is unacceptable.

The detrimental effects of gender-based violence on our community members are profound and multifaceted. Victim-survivors often experience a range of emotional, psychological, and physical impacts, including trauma, anxiety, depression, and a diminished sense of safety and trust. These effects can severely disrupt their work and study performance, social interactions, and overall wellbeing.

Gender-based violence disproportionately affects women and girls, though it can impact people of all genders. People in marginalised communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disability, culturally and racially marginalised women, LGBTIQ+ people, especially transgender people, face high rates of gender-based violence due to social stigma and discrimination.

Men and boys can also be impacted by gender-based violence and often face unique barriers to reporting, such as rigid gender norms and societal expectations that discourage vulnerability or portray them as less credible victims. These norms can lead to feelings of shame, isolation, and reluctance to seek help, highlighting the need for inclusive support systems that recognise and address the experiences of all victim-survivors.

The Australia Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey (2021-2022) showed as that 1 in 4 (23% or 2.3 million) women and 1 in 14 (7.3% or 693,000) men have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner since the age of 15¹. The Australian Institute of Criminology states that 34 women were killed by an intimate partner between 2022 and 2023².

The National Student Safety Survey³, conducted at the end of 2021 across all Australian universities, showed that 1 in 6 students had been sexually harassed and 1 in 20 students had been sexually assaulted since starting university. The majority of students who had been sexually harassed and/or assaulted were female, transgender or non-binary students.

In the workplace, according to the Australian Human Rights Commission's 2022 survey⁴, one in three Australians (33%) have experienced sexual harassment in the last five years.

The Gender-based Violence Prevention and Response Plan (the Plan) is a comprehensive framework designed to prevent gender-based violence, including sexual assault and sexual harassment, and enable a timely, supportive, and fair response to incidents when they occur. This plan reflects our dedication to upholding the highest standards of safety, equity, and respect, as well as our legal and ethical responsibilities.

The Plan also details our commitment to the primary prevention of gender-based violence in the wider community. As a higher education provider, we are in a unique position to drive social change through what and how we teach our 30,000 plus students.

The Plan focuses on the following five key areas:

- Leadership and governance
- Awareness raising and community engagement
- Life on campus
- Training and education
- Response and support

We invite all community members to engage with this plan actively, to participate in training and awareness initiatives, and to support one another in fostering a safer and more inclusive campus.

1 Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey (2021-2022)

2 Miles H & Bricknell S 2024. Homicide in Australia 2022-23. Statistical Report no. 46. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

3 National Student Safety Survey, 2021

4 Time for Respect: Fifth national survey sexual harassment workplaces

Consultation

Staff and student input into the Gender-based Violence Prevention and Response Plan occurred in August and September 2024. All staff and students were invited to provide feedback on the Plan.

Specific consultation also occurred with various student and staff committees, including Professional Services Leadership Group; Learning and Teaching Leadership Group; Vice Chancellor Student Advisory Forum; Guild Senate; Equity and Diversity Committee, Pride at ECU sub-Committee; and Disability, Access and Inclusion sub-Committee.

Our Watch – an independent, not for profit organisation established to drive nationwide change in culture, behaviours and power imbalances to prevent violence against women and their children – also provided feedback on the Plan.

Governance and reporting

The Gender-based Violence Prevention and Response Plan complements **ECU's Equity and Inclusion Plan 2022 – 2026**. It continues to build on our commitment to gender equity achievements, influencing community attitudes to equity, diversity and inclusion, increasing access and participation for students from equity groups, developing a workforce that reflects the ECU community, and providing an inclusive, welcoming environment for students and staff.

Respect at ECU Advisory Group

The Respect at ECU Advisory Group is the body within ECU which has responsibility for guiding the implementation of the Gender-based Violence Prevention and Response Plan.

The Respect at ECU Advisory Group will assess and publicly report on the University's progress towards implementation of the Plan annually.



Background

The Gender-based Violence Prevention and Response Plan builds on the significant efforts ECU has made over many years to foster a safe and inclusive community.

Below is a brief overview of initiatives introduced by Universities Australia, the Australian Human Rights Commission, and the Australian Government aimed at addressing gendered violence in Australian universities, all of which have influenced ECU's initiatives in this area.

Respect. Now. Always.

Universities Australia released the *Respect. Now. Always* initiative in 2016 - a sector-wide program aiming to prevent sexual violence in university communities and improve how universities respond to and support those who have been affected.

It built on work undertaken by individual universities in Australia over many years to develop policies, reporting procedures and support services.

One of the actions was to commission the two national student surveys over a five-year period. The first survey was released at the end of 2016 and gathered data on the prevalence and nature of sexual assault and sexual harassment experiences among university students.

Change the Course: National Report on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment at Australian Universities

In 2017, the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) published the report *Change the Course: National Report on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment at Australian Universities* and was released with the result of the first survey.

ECU pledged to implement the nine recommendations from the AHRC. Our strategy for these improvements was detailed in the **Respect. Now. Always. Plan.**

In April 2021, ECU had successfully met all nine recommendations, leading to the completion of the Plan.

National Student Safety Survey

Over October - December 2021, Universities Australia commissioned the second national student survey. In March 2022, ECU released its **institution-level data from the National Student Safety Survey (NSSS)** and committed to ongoing efforts to combat sexual harassment and assault in collaboration with students.

2016

2017

2021



Respect at Work: Changes to the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 and the AHRC Act 1986

The **Respect at Work Act** is a law that was passed in Australia in 2022 that aims to protect workers from sexual harassment and other forms of discrimination in the workplace. The Act makes important amendments to the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* and the *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986*. These changes were recommended by the Australian Human Rights Commission following its inquiry **Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces**.

Universities Australia Charter on Sexual Harm

On 17 November 2023, Universities Australia released a **Charter** on sexual harm to support the ongoing work universities and other organisations in the community do to address sexual harm.

ECU committed to this course of action to build on the many initiatives already in place at universities and organisations across the country.

Action Plan to Address Gender- based Violence in Higher Education

On February 23, 2024, Education Ministers approved and released the **Action Plan Addressing Gender-based Violence in Higher Education**.

This Action Plan acknowledges the critical role that higher education institutions must play in fostering the social change necessary to combat gender-based violence, as well as their specific responsibilities in creating safe environments for study, work, and social interaction.

The Action Plan increases the accountability of the higher education sector and the student accommodation sector for protecting and promoting the safety of students and staff through a number of actions, including the introduction of a National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence (National Code) as a new form of regulation. The National Code is planned to be implemented from 2026.

2022

2023

2024

Terminology

Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence refers to harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender. It encompasses a range of physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence that occurs in both public and private spheres. This form of violence is rooted in gender inequality, power imbalances, and societal norms that perpetuate discrimination against individuals based on their gender. Gender-based violence includes family and domestic violence (also known as intimate partner violence), sexual assault and sexual harassment.

Gender-based violence can affect people of all genders. However, the term is most commonly used to refer to violence directed at women and girls, as it is most often perpetrated by men against women, specifically because of their gender.

In the context of this Plan, we use the term gender-based violence to include violence used against LGBTIQ+ people. We recognise there are shared drivers of gender-based violence and violence against LGBTIQ+ people, but that violence against the latter is also driven by rigid and hierarchical ideas and harmful beliefs about sex, gender and sexuality, rooted in cisheteronormativity. We acknowledge that in today's social climate, hostility directed at trans and gender diverse people is often specifically directed at trans women/feminine people in the form of transmisogyny.

Sexual assault

Sexual assault includes a range of behaviours, all of which are unacceptable and constitute a crime. Sexual assault occurs when a person is forced, coerced or tricked into sexual acts against their will or without their consent, including when they have withdrawn their consent.

Sexual assault is never the responsibility or fault of the person who has been assaulted. It's a misuse of power and it violates personal boundaries.

Sexual assault is a crime and is often perpetrated by someone known to them. Sexual assault can happen to anyone of any age, gender, cultural background, sexual orientation or religious belief.

Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment happens when someone makes an unwanted sexual advance, asks for sexual favours, or behaves in a sexual way that would make a reasonable person feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, or threatened. Some examples include:

- Unwanted touching, hugging, kissing, or staring in a way that makes someone feel uneasy.
- Making unwelcome jokes, comments, or gestures about someone's body or personal life.
- Asking intrusive questions about someone's relationships or sex life.
- Sending explicit pictures, texts, or emails.
- Pressuring someone to go on a date after they've said no.

Rigid gender-norms

Rigid gender norms are socially constructed expectations and stereotypes that dictate how individuals behave, look, and interact based on their gender. These norms impose specific roles, behaviours, and characteristics for men and women, often leaving little room for personal expression or deviation.

Global evidence shows that levels of gender-based violence are higher in societies, communities and relationships where there are more rigid distinctions between the roles of men and women, and where dominant forms of masculinity are rigidly adhered to.

These rigid norms have a particularly detrimental impact on trans and gender diverse people, as they reinforce a strict male-female gender binary that does not acknowledge the full spectrum of gender identities and expressions. Additionally, rigid gender norms motivates medical interventions aimed at 'normalising' intersex bodies, further marginalising those who deviate from traditional gender norms⁶. As a result, trans, gender diverse and intersex people often face discrimination, exclusion, and violence for not conforming to societal expectations of gender presentation and behaviour.

Rigid gender norms also negatively affect men by enforcing narrow ideals of masculinity that discourage emotional expression and vulnerability. This can lead to emotional isolation, increased mental health concerns such as depression and anxiety, and a reluctance to seek help, which contributes to higher rates of substance abuse and suicide among men.

5 Action Plan Addressing Gender-based Violence in Higher Education

6 Pride in Prevention: A guide to primary prevention of family violence experienced by LGBTIQ communities, Carmen et al, 2020, funded by the Office for Women in the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet.

Cisheteronormativity

Cisheteronormativity is the assumption that being cisgender (identifying with the gender assigned at birth) and heterosexual (being attracted to the opposite gender) are the default or normal conditions for everyone. This belief reinforces traditional gender roles and sexual orientations while marginalising and invalidating non-cisgender and non-heterosexual identities. It contributes to the societal devaluation and discrimination against people who do not conform to these norms.

Ableism

Ableism is discrimination or prejudice towards people with disability. It can be described as the systemic and interpersonal exclusion and oppression of people with disability.

The ableist drivers of violence against women, girls and trans and gender diverse people with disabilities are negative stereotypes about people with disabilities; accepting or normalising violence, disrespect and discrimination against people with disabilities; controlling people with disabilities' decision making and limiting independence; and social segregation and exclusion of people with disabilities⁷.

Trauma-informed response

Trauma-informed response refers to a strengths-based framework that applies the core principles of safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration for shared decision-making, empowerment and respect for diversity.

A trauma-informed response recognises the physiological, emotional, psychological and neurological effects of trauma; minimise the risk of re-traumatisation and promote healing; and emphasise physical and emotional safety⁸.

Victim-survivor

In the context of the plan, the term victim-survivor refers to an individual who has experienced gender-based violence, including misconduct, assault, harassment, or exploitation.

Using the term victim-survivor is intended to respect and validate the full spectrum of experiences and emotions that individuals may have in the aftermath of experiencing gender-based violence.



7 Our Watch, & Women with Disabilities Victoria. (2022). Changing the landscape: A national resource to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities. Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch.

8 Blue Knot Foundation National Centre of Excellence for Complex Trauma, Building a trauma-informed world, Blue Knot Foundation website, n.d.

Vision and principles

Our vision is that all members of the ECU community live, study and work in an environment that is free from gender-based violence.

In working towards this goal, the Gender-based Violence Prevention and Response Plan has drawn from **Action Plan Addressing Gender-based Violence in Higher Education, Primary Prevention of Sexual Harm in the University Sector – Good Practice Guide**, the **Our Watch Educating for Equality Framework** and **Respect @ Work Good Practice Indicators Framework for Preventing and Responding to Workplace Sexual Harassment**.

The Plan continues the work that the University has undertaken over many years, including our commitment to the university sector *Respect. Now. Always.* campaign in 2016 and our subsequent *ECU Respect. Now. Always. Plan.*



The following principles are embedded across the plan:

1

Applying an Intersectional Lens to Address Gender-Based Violence

We will apply an intersectional lens to gender-based violence, recognising how various social identities and power structures, such as race, class, sexuality, disability, ableism, and immigration status, intersect and compound the experiences of individuals experiencing gender-based violence.

This approach acknowledges that the impact and nature of violence are not uniform across all individuals but are influenced by the overlapping and interconnected systems of oppression they navigate. By incorporating an intersectional perspective, we can better understand the diverse and multifaceted nature of gender-based violence and create more inclusive and effective strategies for prevention and intervention.

2

Adapting to Emerging Knowledge and Prioritising Community Voices

We understand that evidence and education guiding best practices in the prevention and response to gender-based violence are continually evolving. We are committed to remaining informed and adapting our approach as necessary. Additionally, we recognise that efforts to address violence against diverse social identities must be led and shaped by the organisations and individuals within those communities.

3

Trauma-Informed, Collaborative Engagement with Students and Staff

We are committed to engaging with students and staff using a trauma-informed approach, actively seeking their perspectives, experiences, and suggestions to inform the development and implementation of our policies and programs. By prioritising the voices of victim-survivors, this collaborative process ensures that our Plan remains relevant, effective, and reflective of the ECU community, helping to create a safer and more supportive environment.

4

Focusing on Contexts of Increased Risk in University Life

We will prioritise situational circumstances that create a higher risk of gender-based violence within a university setting, including students living in student accommodation, higher degree by research (HDR) students, and those engaged in work practice. We are committed to focusing particular attention on the range of environments in which students and staff engage that create increased situational risk.

Gender-based Violence Prevention and Response Plan

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

- 1 Leadership (from Executive-level, through to Managers, Team Leaders and student leaders) understand what drives gender-based violence and their responsibilities relating to prevention and response.

Objective

- | | |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.1 | Leaders understand their obligations under relevant legislation and have up-to-date knowledge about relevant unlawful conduct. |
| 1.2 | Leaders are responsible for ensuring that appropriate measures for preventing and responding to relevant unlawful conduct are developed, recorded in writing, communicated to staff and implemented. |
| 1.3 | Leaders regularly review the effectiveness of measures to prevent and respond to gender-based violence and update the ECU community accordingly. |
| 1.4 | Leaders are visible in their commitment to safe, respectful and inclusive work and learning environments that value diversity and gender equality. They set clear expectations and role model respectful behaviour. |

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- 2 Strengthen, develop and implement policies that make clear that gender-based violence is unacceptable, acting against any violations of those policies, and taking allegations seriously, regardless of the seniority or status of the person against whom a claim is made.

Objective

- | | |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2.1 | People understand the guiding policy framework relating to gender-based violence prevention and response, and relevant policies – for both staff and students – are clearly linked. |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

3 Proactively collect robust data about occurrences of gender-based violence in our organisations and the effectiveness of reporting and support systems.

Objective

- 3.1 Evaluate prevention and response activity through an evaluation framework and ensure incidents and complaints are routinely captured to inform continuous improvement.
 - 3.2 Explore and revise key metrics in routine staff and student survey instruments to provide information on attitudes, norms and culture within the organisation.
-

4 Be transparent in our approach to prevent and respond to gender-based violence.

Objective

- 4.1 Routinely capture and review incidents and complaints to inform continuous improvement.
 - 4.2 Publicly report annually on prevalence, and prevention and response efforts related to gender-based violence.
-

5 Strengthen risk management considerations and processes related to gender-based violence.

Objective

- 5.1 Provide clarity and review suitability of WHS frameworks in addressing reporting on gender-based violence and consider that relevant unlawful conduct is an equality risk and a health and safety risk in order to take a risk-based approach to prevention and response.
- 5.2 Develop a whole-of-institution position on the relationship between WHS and gender-based violence in principle, policy and practice.



AWARENESS-RAISING AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

6 Establish a shared language and understanding of gender-based violence across ECU.

Objective

- 6.1 Establish clear and consistent communications and messaging across all levels of the university to contribute to changing social expectations of behaviours and norms, and to break down barriers and stigmas for people experiencing – or who are at risk of experiencing – gender-based violence to seek help.
- 6.2 Participate in sector-wide awareness raising and education campaigns where appropriate.

7 Work collectively in a research-informed manner to better understand and assist in addressing the prevalence of gender-based violence in our wider society and to develop evidence-based approaches for its elimination.

Objective

- 7.1 Leverage research excellence within ECU to provide education and awareness to the WA community.
- 7.2 Strengthen capacity and foster collaboration for gender equity and the prevention of gender-based violence by partnering with institutions and research bodies, engaging with specialist and community organisations, and building connections with government and NGOs.



LIFE ON CAMPUS

8 Facilities and infrastructure are designed and reviewed to improve the experience of safety on campus.

Objective

- 8.1** Make improvements to facilities and infrastructure based on regular monitoring and feedback from the ECU community.
- 8.2** Consider and evaluate safety when designing new infrastructure or implementing refurbishments.
- 8.3** Review and consider safe spaces for students and staff groups more likely to experience gender-based violence and that reflect the needs of the ECU community.

9 Actively partner with student accommodation providers, clubs and societies, and service providers on campus to build prevention capacity, improve practice, leverage existing resources and, where applicable, share relevant data and information.

Objective

- 9.1** Review agreements and ways of working to align practice with the principles of this Plan and with legislation.
- 9.2** Work with student accommodation providers, clubs and societies to build prevention capacity and develop a toolkit for preventing, safeguarding, and responding to gender-based violence.

10 Uplift training related to gender-based violence prevention by clearly educating and informing our communities of the drivers of gender-based violence, where and how to report concerns and incidents and how to best access support.

Objective

10.1	Uplift student and staff awareness of where to report and where to access support.
10.2	Develop a means to coordinate and communicate prevention actions across ECU to ensure up-to-date practices.
10.3	Provide education and training that is trauma-informed, culturally safe, reflects the experiences of specific groups, is informed by experts and regularly adapted in line with new evidence and ongoing consultation with the wider community.
10.4	Conduct a training needs analysis across the university to determine where staff require role-specific training, including on prevention, response, inclusive leadership, and equity and inclusion.
10.5	Develop a training plan for students, including a plan for students undertaking work-integrated learning or internships as part of their studies, study abroad and excursions.
10.6	Establish targeted trauma-informed training for key ECU staff and students likely to encounter disclosures and ensure mechanisms to reduce the risk of vicarious trauma.
10.7	Evaluate and report on the outcomes of training.
10.8	Through curriculum, develop the capability of university students to support the prevention of gender-based violence through their professional roles.

- 11** Provide confidence that ECU processes are fair, equitable and supportive in relation to gender-based violence through review and continuous improvement mechanisms.

Objective

- 11.1** Ensure that processes for investigating and resolving complaints follow procedural fairness and are timely and reduce the risks of causing further trauma for victim-survivors.
- 11.2** Provide information to students, staff and wider community on how to access an independent review of our process and work in good faith with such independent reviews.
- 11.3** Establish requirement that separate people will provide support to the victim-survivor, alleged offender, bystanders/witnesses, decision makers and investigators.

- 12** Complainants receive appropriate and trauma-informed support throughout the entirety of the complaint process.

Objective

- 12.1** Provide support to all people who report and victim-survivors, including providing access to trauma-informed and culturally appropriate support services, enabling confidential disclosure mechanisms and supporting those who choose to report to the police.
- 12.2** Provide appropriate and trauma-informed support to staff (including leaders and managers) who experience or witness relevant unlawful conduct.

- 13** Seamlessly integrate safety and support systems between ECU and external providers, including student accommodation and sport clubs.

Objective

- 13.1** Define requirements and establish collaboration mechanisms for external providers and partnerships to align policies and processes as far as practical, and to eliminate the requirements of victim-survivors to recount traumatic experiences multiple times.

