

# 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](https://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.



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# 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 Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey (2021-2022) showed 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 15<sup>1</sup>. The Australian Institute of Criminology states that 34 women were killed by an intimate partner between 2022 and 2023<sup>2</sup>.

The National Student Safety Survey<sup>3</sup>, 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 survey<sup>4</sup>, 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 across all our campuses and environments which people study and work, and enable a timely, supportive and fair response to gender-based violence wherever it is experienced by members of the ECU community.

This Plan demonstrates our commitment to safety, equity, and respect, and fulfills our legal and ethical obligations, particularly our response to the National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence.

Gender-based violence is a preventable societal issue driven primarily by gender inequality. Through this Plan, we commit the primary prevention of gender-based violence in the wider community. As a higher education provider serving over 30,000 students, we are uniquely positioned to drive social change through both our curriculum and our teaching approach.

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.

<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey (2021-2022)

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

<sup>3</sup> National Student Safety Survey, 2021

<sup>4</sup> 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; Disability, Access and Inclusion sub-Committee; and the Respect at ECU Advisory Group.

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.

**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.

An outcomes framework will be used to track and measure ECU's progress towards implementation of the Plan and the effectiveness of actions. The University will hold itself accountable to the university community through annual public reporting, bi-annual reporting to Council, and regular meetings of the Respect at ECU Advisory Group. Reporting will consider the University's progress in implementing the Plan against the outcome framework, and analysis of incidents of gender-based violence experienced by the ECU community. This approach enables the University to identify emerging trends, assess what is working, and adapt strategies to better meet the needs of the university community.



# 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 results 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.**

## National Student Safety Survey

By April 2021, ECU had successfully completed all nine recommendations from the AHRC.

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

In 2022 the Respect at Work Act passed and was designed 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 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 norms<sup>6</sup>. 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.

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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.



## Cisheternormativity

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.

## Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a framework for understanding how different aspects of a person's identity – such as race, gender, class, sexuality, disability, age, and religion – overlap and intersect to shape their unique experiences of discrimination, privilege, and oppression.

Intersectionality recognises that people face multiple, interconnected forms of disadvantage that cannot be examined separately.

## 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 safety<sup>8</sup>.

## 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.



<sup>8</sup> 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** and informed by evidence about the nature and extent of gender-based violence.

The Plan represents the latest phase in ECU's ongoing commitment to creating a safe and respectful university environment. It has been developed through consideration of factors relevant to ECU's unique context, analysis of available institutional data, and informed by the findings from the University 2024 Sexual Harm Prevention and Response audit.





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 living in student accommodation, environments of power imbalance such as between supervisors and higher degree by research (HDR) candidates or senior and early career researchers or staff, and sites of work integrated learning and clinical placement. 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.

- 2 Strengthen, develop and implement policies that proactively prevent gender-based violence, clearly communicate that it is unacceptable, enforce appropriate consequences for violations, and ensure all allegations are taken 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 and coherent in how they apply to students, staff, affiliated organisations and other relevant entities.
- 2.2 Ensure policies and procedures address the needs of our diverse student and staff community, particularly those at higher risk of experiencing gender-based violence – this includes providing consistent, trauma-informed support wherever gender-based violence is experienced, including in student accommodation, on campus, at university events, online spaces, and work placements.



- 2.3** Consistent policy implementation across all campuses, including international campuses, so that students and staff have access to appropriate support, reporting mechanisms and training and education, regardless of location.
- 

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

#### **Objective**

- 4.1** Systematically capture incidents and complaints, with regular internal review, reporting and communication of findings to drive continuous improvement.
- 4.2** Report publicly each year on the rates of gender-based violence and the actions taken to prevent and respond to it.
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### **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.

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### 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 and strengthen agreements with student accommodation providers, clubs and societies, work placement providers and service providers to ensure shared expectations and responsibilities for preventing and responding to gender-based violence.
- 9.2** Develop and deliver prevention toolkits and training for student accommodation providers, work placement providers, clubs and societies, and campus service providers to build their capacity to prevent gender-based violence and respond effectively when it occurs.

# 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

- |             |  |
|-------------|--|
| <b>10.1</b> | Ensure students and staff are aware of avenues to access reporting mechanisms and support services.  |
| <b>10.2</b> | Identify training needs across the university to determine what role-specific training staff require on inclusive environments and gender-based violence prevention and response, and evaluate and report on the effectiveness of this training.   |
| <b>10.3</b> | Develop and implement training and education for students on gender-based violence prevention and response, including tailored training for work placement students, students living in student accommodation and HDR students.  |
| <b>10.4</b> | Provide education and training for staff and students that addresses the drivers of gender-based violence, is trauma-informed and culturally safe, reflects the experiences of specific groups, is informed by experts, and is regularly updated based on new evidence and ongoing community consultation. |
| <b>10.5</b> | Deliver specialised, trauma-informed training on responding to disclosures to staff and students in leadership positions and other relevant people. This training must include strategies to reduce vicarious trauma and be regularly evaluated for effectiveness.   |
| <b>10.6</b> | Through curriculum, develop the capability of 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, are timely and reduce the risks of causing further trauma for victim-survivors, and that outcomes are safe, proportionate and, as applicable, consider the views of the discloser and respondent.
- 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 disclosers, respondents and bystanders/witnesses.

- 12** Following a disclosure, people receive appropriate and trauma-informed support through the entire process.

**Objective**

- 12.1** Provide multiple pathways to report and to manage a disclosure, supporting trauma-informed and culturally appropriate support plan for disclosers and respondents.
- 12.2** Provide appropriate and trauma-informed support to staff who experience or witness relevant unlawful conduct.

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

**Objective**

- 13.1** Define requirements and establish collaboration mechanisms for external providers and partnerships to ensure safe environments are maintained, align policies and processes, and to eliminate the requirements of victim-survivors to recount traumatic experiences multiple times.

