

exploitation
power games
discrimination
sexual innuendo
smile suggestively rape
unwanted touching or kissing
(Sexual) Harassment
unwanted phone calls
unwanted closeness
sexual assault: bullying vulgar jokes
threats stalking devaluation
intimidation

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Gender-based harassment

Unfortunately, sexual harassment can happen anywhere, including at a university. This information has been summarized for all those potentially affected.

Sexual or gender-based harassment or violence has many different forms and includes, but is not limited to, sexual innuendo, unwanted touching or kissing, rape, sexual assault, discrimination, pull-out views, suggestive smiles, exploiting, devaluing, threatening, unwanted phone calls, stalking, bullying, vulgar jokes, power plays, intimidation and unwanted closeness.

Sexual harassment does NOT take place when there is a mutually desired approach. In order to recognize whether the other party is also interested in contact, it is advisable, for example, to pay attention to body language, to ask directly and, above all, to accept hesitation or rejection.

Why is this handout available?

With these guidelines, the GDM-C attempts to communicate possible courses of action for those affected and to provide information for the entire operation of the University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria. Unfortunately, sexual harassment can occur in any company, in any university, in any place, especially if it is a meeting place for people of different genders and in hierarchies. As a university, we must recognize this fact and dedicate ourselves to prevention, education and support for those affected.

In accordance with the guiding principles of the University of Applied Sciences Upper Austria, all staff and students are expected to respect interpersonal boundaries and not to approach other staff or students in an unwanted, dignity-impairing manner, be it non-verbal, verbal or physical and thus (sexually) harass them. In this sense, for example, refusal of contact, disinterest and (physical) rejection/dislike are to be perceived as rejection. At the same time, we want to give all those who feel (sexually) harassed the feeling that they are not alone and encourage them to accept or ask for help.

I am affected by sexual harassment and/or violence - what can I do?

All members of the FH Upper Austria can expect help and support at any time via the [GDM-C](#), the [Works Council](#) or the [ÖH](#).

[What those affected can do themselves is explained here.](#)

I have witnessed or heard about sexual harassment and/or violence - what can I do?

- Clarify with the person concerned what kind of support they would like. Contact points within the UAS include the [GDM-C](#), the [Works Council](#) and the [ÖH](#).
- If the incident is serious, you can report it to the police yourself.
- Be available as a witness if required.
- Get support from competent advisory services.

GDM-C can also be contacted anonymously using the [form on the website](#).

I am a supervisor and have been informed of sexual harassment and/or violence - what can I do?

- As a supervisor, you are obliged to react quickly and take appropriate remedial action.
- If necessary, seek support from the [GDM-C](#) or the [Works Council](#). The [Ombud for Equal Treatment](#) is also available as a non-university advisory body.
- We strongly advise against inviting the persons concerned to mediation or any other discussion/meeting.
- Any activities you undertake should be documented by you.

What is violence?

According to the World Health Organization, violence is defined as the intentional use of threatened or actual physical coercion or physical force against oneself or another person, group or community that results in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation, either actual or very likely ([WHO, 1996](#)).

There are different forms of violence, for example:

- Violence in intimate partnerships
- Violence outside of intimate partnerships
- Stalking
- Sexual harassment in the workplace
- Violence in childhood
- Assaultive behaviour during leisure time or when going out

The following describes in more detail what **sexual harassment at the workplace or place of study** is and how it can be dealt with.

What is (sexual) harassment or sexualized violence?

The difference between sexual harassment and sexualized violence lies in the type and severity of the behaviour.

Sexual and gender-based harassment is a form of discrimination that is prohibited under the Equal Treatment Act ([GIBG](#)). Employers are obliged to take appropriate remedial action in the event of sexual harassment. This means that they must take action to prevent further harassment. Employers who do not react or do not react appropriately can be sued for damages by affected persons ([Gleichbehandlungsanwaltschaft, 2021, p. 2](#)).

According to the Equal Treatment Act, sexual harassment includes behaviour from the sexual sphere, violation of dignity, undesirability and impairment of the working environment (ibid.).

Behaviour from the sexual sphere includes all behaviours that involve sexuality or sexual advances. These are divided into physical assaults, gestures and looks, words and images.

Physical assaults are attacks, kisses, hugs, "accidental touching", etc.

Gestures and gazes include persistent staring at certain parts of the body, sexualized gestures, etc.

What constitutes sexual harassment is decided by those affected. This means that the victims themselves define whether and when a boundary has been crossed. The form of violence experienced by those affected is to be determined based on their feelings and not on the intention of the perpetrators. It is not about establishing supposedly objective criteria that must be met for certain definitions of violence¹. This means that every person's behaviour must be examined to see whether it goes "too far" for the other person. "**I didn't mean it that way**" is not a possible excuse for perpetrators of sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment is...

...**unwanted**:

→ unwanted phone calls or messages with sexual innuendos, pictures, unwanted invitations, "accidental" touching,

...**impairing dignity**:

→ pin-up girls or screensavers, whistling, ambiguous looks, statements or innuendos, misogynistic anecdotes, derogatory comments about professional competence while emphasizing gender roles, filming and photographing intimate body areas without clear consent

...**non-verbal**:

→ derogatory gestures, showing pornographic/sexist images, unwanted gifts

...**verbal**:

→ offensive comments about physical characteristics, appearance, clothing, sex life or

¹ see <https://awareness-institut.net/glossar/definitionsmacht/> [26.02.2024]

sexual orientation, annoying questions about relationships and sex life, sexist jokes, offensive requests or demands, ambiguous invitations

...physical:

→ unwanted physical contact and touching, intrusive or exhibitionist behaviour, sexual assault, blackmailing or forcing sexual acts or relationships up to and including coercion and rape

Typical examples of sexual harassment in a university context:

- A supervisor stands behind his employee and pats her on the shoulder/strokes her arm while explaining the next task or discussing something with her.
- A professor invites a student to her home/for coffee/lunch and wants to kiss her goodbye.
- A "working lunch" serves as a rapprochement attempt.

What can I do as a victim?

The crossing of personal boundaries, (sexual) harassment, usually triggers intense feelings of pain, fear, anger, helplessness, shame, powerlessness or despair in those affected. They are often speechless and cannot understand what has happened, let alone talk about it. This results in the need to forget the incident(s) or to question themselves and their own perceptions. However, ignoring the harassment(s) or avoiding the harasser is not a solution.

It is important to know that you are not alone. (Sexual) harassment is unfortunately still a widespread phenomenon in Austria.

Here are some recommendations for action:

- Always trust your own perception and subjective feelings. If you feel harassed, this is (sexual) harassment.
- Make it clear that these actions are undesirable and inappropriate and demand as clearly as possible that they stop immediately.
- Inform trusted persons and/or managers about the incident(s) and seek support there. The right contact person is the one you trust - this does not have to be your direct supervisor. You can also contact the [GDM-C](#), the [Works Council](#) within the UAS or the [Equal Treatment Ombud](#) outside the UAS.
- Keep any existing evidence and write it down as precisely as possible
 - o **When, where** and **how** did what happen?
 - o **What** exactly was done to **whom**?
 - o What **words** were used?

What can I do as a colleague or fellow student?

(Sexual) harassment affects the working atmosphere through uncertainty and mistrust, weakens teams, reduces the quality of work of those affected and colleagues, spreads rumours and divides teams, promotes an increase in sick leave and is unpleasant to intolerable for those affected and often punishable by law for perpetrators. As a colleague or fellow student, it is therefore important to take action if you notice or suspect an incident.

You can do this in concrete terms:

- **Do not look away.** Even if you only know the person concerned "from afar", take action!
- Give the person concerned the feeling that they are being taken seriously and understood.
- Address the harassing person directly in the situation, e.g: "I don't think my colleague would like that." "My fellow student doesn't want to be alone in a room with you during the exam. I will sit at the back and just watch."
- Openly discuss the topic of (sexual) harassment with trusted colleagues or other students. They are often unsettled and laugh or trivialize the issue. Nevertheless, people affected will recognize that you stand behind them.
- Inform your manager, the head of degree program, deans, the [GDM-C](#) or other persons of trust about your observations.
- Speak directly to the person concerned and ask what kind of support they would like.
- All your activities should be discussed with and approved by the person concerned.

What are my tasks as a manager?

As a manager, it is your responsibility to ensure an environment in which (sexual) harassment and discrimination have no place. In the event of specific incidents, you must act immediately, support those affected, clarify the circumstances and take appropriate (protective) measures.

Managers are obliged to investigate any suspicion or indication of sexual harassment, to take it seriously and to take the appropriate steps:

- **Talk to the person concerned:**

Tips for the interview:

- It is advisable to ask those affected whether a trusted person should be present.
- What happened? The discussion atmosphere should be confidential and the accounts of those affected must be taken seriously.
- Reporting harassment requires courage - recognizing this is important.
- Try to clarify the next steps. How can harassment-free working be made possible?
- Agree on the next steps and arrange for counselling services.

It is not advisable to give guarantees of confidentiality or similar, as remedial measures must in most cases be perceived and communicated internally.

However, information and incidents must be kept absolutely confidential from persons not involved.

- **First remedy**

During the initial remedial action, it is often advisable to separate the affected parties locally until the entire situation can be clarified. Colleagues could, for example, be asked to work from home on different days or to move to other offices/components at short notice. **Under no circumstances should the initial remedy be at the expense of the person making the complaint and it must be proportionate.**

Ideally, the situation is actively addressed within the team in order to prevent rumours, uncertainty and team divisions.

- **Clarify the facts**

The third step is to attempt to clarify the situation. Depending on the evidence available, this conversation with the alleged harasser should be conducted cautiously or very clearly. A statement from the harassed person must be heard at in any case, and they must be informed about further steps and discretion.

- **What exactly happened?**

Confrontation: make sure you take responsibility! Perpetrators often try to distract, appease or present themselves as victims: Was there an incident with the person concerned? Even if it wasn't meant that way, what exactly happened?

It may then be necessary to speak to other people (witnesses) before a preliminary, conclusive picture of the events can be formed.

- **Adjusting the corrective action**

After reviewing the allegations, it is often necessary to adapt remedial measures and to tighten or soften them. It is important to pay attention to proportionality: The measures taken must in any case protect the person(s) concerned from further harassment in the long term. At the same time, they must not be excessive towards the person(s) causing the harassment. Further information can be found [here](#).

- **Post-processing**

It is advisable to continue to support the persons involved even after the incidents have been clarified and corrective measures have been taken and to ensure in regular discussions that the measures taken remain effective.

In order not to jeopardize the group dynamics in the company, it makes sense to provide open information about the steps taken, but not to take sides.

Who can I contact?

- Within the FH, you will find the right contact persons in the [GDM-C](#).
- The [Ombud for Equal Treatment](#) specializes in cases of discrimination and harassment and can be contacted at any time.
- The [Works Council](#) is available to all FH employees for advice and support.
- The [ÖH](#) is divided into various departments and also offers special contact persons for difficult situations in the form of student representatives

All contact persons only act in consultation with those affected!

Legal Situation

(Sexual) harassment can lead to transfer, fines, compensation and dismissal for those carrying out the work.

Harassing students can be banned from the building.

Students can contest examination results and it is possible to change supervisors for Bachelor's and Master's theses. Students can insist that examinations are held in visible locations and/or that other people are present.

Sources, references and further information:

Focus on the world of work:

- [Quick guide to \(sexual\) harassment State of Salzburg](#)
- [Diversity Talk on the topic of "Sexual harassment" on February 2, 2023](#)
- [AK: Safety in the workplace: Strengthen protection against sexual harassment!](#)
- [Ombud for Equal Treatment: Sexual and gender-based harassment](#)
- [Federal Ministry of Labor and Economic Affairs: Sexual harassment in the workplace](#)
- [WKO: Equal treatment - women and men](#)
- [AK: What to do about sexual harassment in the workplace](#)
- [Act4Respect: sexual harassment in the workplace](#)
- [TARA counseling center: sexual violence and trauma](#)

Focus University:

- [University of Vienna: Folder Gleichbehandlung 2018_web.indd \(univie.ac.at\)](#)
- [Der Standard \(2023\): What do universities do when professors harass their female students?](#) and (2022) [12 percent of students have experienced sexualized violence at university](#)
- [ÖH: Survey on sexualized violence at universities](#)

- [Orf.at: One in eight students sexually harassed](#)
- [University of Klagenfurt: Setting boundaries - information brochure on sexual, gender-related and sexualized and sexualized harassment at the University of Klagenfurt](#)
- [FH St. Pölten: I feel it in my fingers, I feel it in my toes](#)
- [University of Vienna: Against sexual harassment at the university](#)
- [Women against violence](#)
- Brockhaus Encyclopedia Online (2023): Violence. Online:
<https://brockhaus.at/ecs/enzy/article/gewalt>. Retrieved on 11.07.2023.
- Ombud for Equal Treatment (2021): Remedy against sexual harassment.
- Guide for employers. Ombud for Equal Treatment: Vienna.
- Schröttle M, Heitmeyer W, eds (2006): Violence. Descriptions, analyses prevention. Series of publications by the Federal Agency for Civic Education. Bonn: BPB; 2006.
- WHO Global Consultation on Violence and Health (1996): Violence: a public health priority. Geneva, World Health Organization, 1996 (document WHO/EHA/SPI.POA.2)