

# Persona Stories

**Facilitating change:  
addressing gender-based  
violence in co-creation  
activities through fictional  
characters**

**UniSAFE Toolkit**



# Persona Stories

## Facilitating change: addressing gender-based violence in co-creation activities through fictional characters

Developed and compiled by Yellow Window

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# Introduction

This document introduces a cast of personas, or fictional characters, that represent diverse individuals who have different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives related to gender-based violence in research and higher education. These personas serve as a dynamic tool to enrich co-creation and participatory activities, training sessions to facilitate discussions, empathy, and a better understanding of the challenges faced in addressing gender-based violence.

This reference document aims to support the use of participatory techniques in co-creation workshops on the topic of gender-based violence in research and higher education. It is meant for a variety of professionals to help them review and develop policies and build skills. The target group of this guide is those acting as change facilitators, practitioners, managers in charge of policy development as well as trainers and lecturers.

# Table of Contents

Charlie (Exchange undergraduate student) .....	3
Alicia (PhD candidate) .....	5
Jaap (Undergraduate student) .....	7
Patricia (Assistant Professor) .....	9
Simon (Professor) .....	11
Dragan (Post-doc researcher) .....	13
Fatima (Cleaning staff) .....	15
Katerina (Administrative staff) .....	17
Manuel (Vice-Rector) .....	19
Amélie (External contractor working on European projects) .....	21
Egle (Lecturer) .....	23



## **Charlie (Exchange undergraduate student)**

**Name:** Charlie  
**Age:** 22  
**Gender:** Non-binary  
**Status/Position:** Exchange Undergraduate Student  
**Nationality:** German  
**Location:** Brussels, Belgium  
**Scientific Field:** Philosophy

### **Summary**

Charlie, a non-binary philosophy student struggling with mental health issues, faces a distressing incident while studying abroad in Belgium. After being insulted and feeling unsafe on campus, Charlie encounters a traumatic incident when a drunk student harasses them. Seeking help, Charlie discovers that the helpline for harassment is unavailable, leaving them feeling helpless and alone. The following day, attempting to report the incident, Charlie faces bureaucratic obstacles and language barriers that further exacerbate their distress. This narrative shed light on the challenges and difficulties faced by individuals dealing with harassment and discrimination while navigating systems that should offer support and protection.

### **Story**

Charlie, a master's student in philosophy, has been struggling with mental health issues for years. Earlier this year, they came out as non-binary, but unfortunately, this revelation has not made life any easier. Charlie no longer feels safe in and around campus due to several instances of other students insulting them. Although currently experiencing a semester abroad in Belgium as an exchange student, Charlie still faces challenges in engaging with other students.

One evening, after class, around 7 pm, Charlie returned to their dormitory. A drunk student followed them and grabbed Charlie from behind, holding one arm firmly around their upper body while pushing his hips against their back. The student then hissed that Charlie was arousing him before pushing them away, calling them a "joke," and laughing as he disappeared. Charlie was frozen for a moment, distressed and unsure of what to do.

Charlie then remembered that there was a helpline available for cases of harassment. They found the number on a poster in the dormitory's kitchen and ran there in tears, shaking.

Despite other students being present eating dinner and having seen that something was wrong, no one paid attention to Charlie.

Charlie tried to reach out for help by calling the helpline, but unfortunately, no one answered as the line was only available during the university staff's working hours. Feeling helpless and unable to muster the courage to call the police, Charlie spent the night crying alone. They didn't have anyone to turn to for support, and they had to wait until the next morning to report the incident to the university.

The following day, Charlie went to the Diversity & Inclusion office to report the incident. However, they were informed that they needed to report it to the Helpline desk for gender-based violence, which was located 3 km away on the main campus. Alternatively, they could report the incident through an online form, which was only available in French and thus not accessible to Charlie. Despite not feeling safe leaving the campus, the manager insisted that the mandated procedures needed to be followed.

Charlie then went to the support unit to report the incident and requested immediate relocation to another dormitory. However, the Officer of the Unit was not fluent in English, making the process more painful and time-consuming for Charlie. The officer informed Charlie that the dorm relocation process would take time as approval was needed from her supervisor and she added, being doubtful, that relocation would be granted since nothing serious really happened. She then reminded Charlie that false allegations were punishable under criminal law.

Charlie left devastated, feeling confused as they were not informed clearly about the next steps. They were only informed that the procedure will follow the steps of the "Code of Conduct" and "Policy against gender-based violence". What happens to the perpetrator? How will Charlie protect themselves the next days?

## Notes for the trainer/facilitator:

This persona provides an opportunity to explore the experiences of marginalised individuals within the institutional context and explore challenges they face when seeking support. Participants can engage in discussions about the importance of **Prevention, Protection, Provision of Services, Prosecution** and **Partnerships**. The facilitator can guide participants in critically examining existing support structures and procedures within the university, highlighting the gaps and areas for improvement. Discussions can revolve around the accessibility of helplines and reporting mechanisms, language barriers, and the need for clear communication and guidance for victims of harassment. Participants can look for ways to improve any intersectional aspects in accessibility of services with partnerships. They can explore the potential consequences for the perpetrator and the measures that can be taken to protect Charlie and ensure their safety moving forward. The facilitator can facilitate a conversation about the responsibilities of the university in responding to such incidents, including the role of the Diversity and Inclusion office and any other support offices. Participants can also explore ways to prevent future incidents.



**Alicia**  
**(PhD candidate)**

**Name:** Alicia  
**Age:** 28  
**Gender:** Female  
**Position:** PhD Candidate  
**Location:** London, UK  
**Scientific Field:** Mechanical Engineering

### Summary

Alicia, a PhD student in Mechanical Engineering, has been facing harassment and exploitation by her supervisor, Simon. Despite Simon's reputation for research contributions, he takes credit for Alicia's work without acknowledgement. He pressures her to work long hours, often in late-night meetings that become increasingly uncomfortable and irrelevant to her research. During one encounter, Simon becomes drunk and attempts to get close to Alicia, causing her to react and report him for harassment. Simon retaliates by removing Alicia from the research team without a salary. The Dean suggests informal mediation to resolve the issue, while a witness professor remains silent due to lack of support.

### Story

Alicia is a PhD student in Mechanical Engineering who has been working closely with her supervisor, Simon, for the past two years. While Simon is well-known in academia for the significant research funding contributions that he and his team have made to the faculty, he puts Alicia under constant pressure to contribute to speeches and scientific articles, taking credit for her work without recognition.

This extra workload has affected Alicia's mental health, and her interactions with Simon have gone out of line during the last 6 months. Simon has started asking her to have meetings late in the evening at his office, after all the faculty members left the office. Most of their discussions are often irrelevant to work, and when Alicia tries to change the subject, Simon is always asking her to "relax" and usually asks questions about her personal life.

Alicia is feeling that she cannot turn down his invitations, as she feels that she owes him a lot for all the opportunities he offers her. During one such meeting, Simon is drunk and tries to get close to her. Alicia decides to leave immediately and explicitly mentions that she is not feeling comfortable with these late-night meetings.

Simon gets angry with her reaction and tries to grab her by her wrist preventing her from leaving. He says "Why you are reacting like this? I know that you want this. You gave me all the signs."

You have accepted all my invitations and requests for extra work.". Alice can't believe what she was hearing, "I am going to report you, this is harassment. Let me go." she responds. Alicia escapes with tears in her eyes. Another Professor who was also at the office working until late, sees her leaving Simon's office in tears. He heard the loud screams, but he couldn't clearly understand what they were saying. He decides to turn a blind eye. Anyway, Simon gets away with everything, he thinks...

Alicia reports Simon to the unit for gender-based violence and a few weeks later Simon is invited for an interview with the disciplinary committee. He denies all the accusations and explains that Alicia's accusations are false, and she made up the story because of some mental health struggles she has. He denies that they had a fight, or that he was drunk during that evening. The Committee decides not to file a complaint against Simon, but rather "monitor" his behaviour for six months. Most of the committee members have been friends with him for years, and they couldn't believe that the story was true. They are also concerned about the consequences for the funding he has, if he is accused of sexual harassment...

Many weeks have passed and Alicia hasn't been informed about the decision of the disciplinary committee. In the meantime, Simon has been ignoring Alicia and ultimately removes her from the research team without a warning, leaving her without a salary. The university does not have a mechanism for supporting students, such as an ombudsperson, so she requests a meeting with the Dean of the Faculty to try to save her career. The Dean proposes an informal mediation meeting between the two parties to resolve the issue, and "get over with it".

Rumours are spreading fast within the university and the professor who witnessed Alicia that night decides to speak up. He requests a meeting with the Dean. The Dean repeats to him what he also said to Alicia "Why are you speaking up only now? In any case, the committee decided it was not serious to merit proceeding further?". The witness-professor decides not to speak up.



## Notes for the trainer/facilitator:

This persona provides an opportunity for in-depth discussions on various aspects related to **Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Provision of Services**. Participants can explore the lack of bystander intervention actions and the importance of implementing policies and codes of conduct that prevent late-night meetings after official working hours to create a safer environment. The facilitator can engage the participants in discussions on the need for witness protection and effective measures to protect individuals like Alicia after reporting incidents, including measures such as relocation with another supervisor to ensure their safety and well-being. Additionally, the facilitator can address the challenges related to conflicts of interest within committees, highlighting the importance of unbiased investigations and avoiding any form of preferential treatment based on personal relationships. Participants can also discuss the significance of providing comprehensive support services, including legal and psychological support, to ensure that victims/survivors like Alicia have access to the necessary assistance.





**Jaap**  
**(Undergraduate student)**

**Name:** Jaap  
**Age:** 23  
**Gender:** Male  
**Nationality:** Dutch  
**Position:** Chair of the student association at his faculty  
**Location:** Amsterdam, Netherlands

## Summary

Jaap is a 23-year-old Dutch student who holds the position of chair within his faculty's student association. He is seen as a charismatic leader and enjoys organising social events and trips for association members. However, Jaap has been involved in a serious incident that has had a devastating impact on a fellow female student.

## Story

Jaap, a charismatic 23-year-old Dutch student and chair of his faculty's student association, he takes pride in organising enjoyable social events and memorable trips for the association's members.

During a skiing trip arranged by the student association, things took an unpleasant turn. Jaap and his close friends indulged in excessive drinking and drug use, creating an environment of recklessness. Tragically, they targeted a female student during the trip, pressuring her to consume dangerous amounts of alcohol. When the young woman lost consciousness, Jaap and two of his friends took advantage of her vulnerability, engaging in a reprehensible act of sexual abuse.

The horror of the incident remained concealed for months until a brave witness mustered the courage to report the events to a trusted person at the university. Shocked and appalled by the revelation, the university took immediate and decisive action. To protect the campus community and uphold the principles of justice, the university implemented stringent measures. All activities of the student association were temporarily suspended, and Jaap, along with the two students involved, received a campus ban. Though they could continue attending courses online, they were strictly prohibited from entering the university grounds.

## Notes for the trainer/facilitator:

This persona can serve as a valuable case study for exploring gaps in **Prevention, Protection, Provision of Services** and **Prosecution**. Participants can address the lack of bystander intervention training and awareness raising and the importance of preventing such incidents. They can also explore options for incidents occurring outside working hours and ensure the availability of support services such as a dedicated office for diversity and inclusion, accessible helpdesk units, etc. In addition, they can discuss the importance of providing reporting procedures with an intersectional aspect e.g. in multiple languages to ensure accessibility for all. The facilitator can highlight the need for efficient and supportive procedures for informing and protecting the victim-survivors and explore the available services.



**Patricia**  
**(Assistant Professor)**

**Name:** Patricia  
**Age:** 49  
**Gender:** Female  
**Nationality:** Italian  
**Position:** Assistant Professor  
**Location:** Rome, Italy

### Summary

Patricia is a 49-year-old assistant professor at a university. She recently engaged in a conversation with a colleague, sharing her impressions and opinions about the oral exams that took place. During the conversation, she made denigrating comments about the language skills of male students of migrant origin. Without her knowledge, the conversation was recorded as part of the video recording of the exams and subsequently shared anonymously on social media.

### Story

As an experienced assistant professor at the university, Patricia had a wealth of knowledge to share with her students. After a series of oral exams, she engaged in a casual conversation with a colleague in the same examination room. In this discussion, Patricia voiced her impressions and opinions about the language abilities of male students of migrant origin, making denigrating remarks that belittled their linguistic skills.

Unknown to her at the time, the oral exams were being video recorded for evaluation and documentation purposes. The recording captured the entirety of her conversation with her colleague, including the derogatory comments she had made about the students. Someone within the university community uploaded the video to social media anonymously, causing the harmful content to spread rapidly.

The university was quick to respond to the distressing situation. Upon discovering the video on social media, the administration took immediate action to address the inappropriate behaviour. Patricia and her colleague were suspended from their positions while the university launched a formal disciplinary procedure to thoroughly investigate the incident.

### Notes for the trainer/facilitator:

This particular persona can serve as a valuable case study for discussions on intersectionality and **Policy**. Participants can analyse whether such cases are covered in their institutional policy on gender-based violence and discuss the measures that should be in place to address issues related to discriminatory language and attitudes. Policy considerations may include training programmes on cultural inclusivity, guidelines on appropriate code of conduct and language, as well as disciplinary actions to hold individuals accountable for discriminatory behaviour.



**Simon**  
**(Professor)**

**Name:** Simon  
**Age:** 62  
**Gender:** Male  
**Nationality:** Hungarian  
**Position:** Professor  
**Location:** Budapest, Hungary

## Summary

Simon is a 62-year-old professor working at a Hungarian university. He leads a comfortable life and is financially well-off. Recently, he found himself entangled in a complicated situation when he unknowingly became involved with one of his students named Diana, who was seeking a sugar daddy. The university is now faced with the challenge of addressing the situation and determining their course of action as an employer.

## Story

Simon, a distinguished professor at a Hungarian university, had been single for a considerable time and was happy with his lifestyle. Without prior knowledge, Diana, one of his students, had seen an opportunity to improve her financial situation by seeking a sugar daddy. Diana had recently appeared on a TV show where she openly expressed her desire to find a sugar daddy. Driven by curiosity and a desire for companionship, Simon responded to Diana's appeal and started a relationship with her. They would meet discreetly outside of the university setting, and Simon was unaware that Diana was his own student.

As time passed, rumours began to circulate among students and faculty members about Simon's involvement with Diana. The situation soon reached the attention of the university administration, leaving them in an uncomfortable position. They were unsure of how to address the matter, particularly because Simon had not been aware of Diana's status as his student. The university was torn between respecting the privacy of their staff members and ensuring a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students. They wondered if they should intervene in Simon's personal life or take disciplinary action considering the potential ethical implications.

## Notes for the trainer/facilitator:

This persona provides an opportunity to discuss the complexities of addressing situations where a professor becomes involved with a student in a non-academic context. Participants can discuss the ethical implications, power dynamic and potential consequences of such relationships in an academic context. The facilitator can encourage discussions on **Policies**, **Code of Conduct** and **Protocol** to address relationships between students and faculty members. The facilitator can help the participants explore topics such as personal and professional boundaries and the potential harm caused by blurred lines.



**Dragan**  
**(Post-doc researcher)**

**Name:** Dragan  
**Age:** 30  
**Gender:** Male  
**Nationality:** Moroccan  
**Position:** Assistant Professor  
**Location:** Bordeaux, France

### Summary

Dragan, a post-doc researcher, becomes aware of a colleague's inappropriate emails to a young PhD student. He reaches out to check on her and help, but she initially asks him not to take action. However, when the situation escalates and she feels threatened, she contacts Dragan again. Despite lacking concrete evidence, he feels compelled to intervene. Yet, he hesitates due to his colleague's influential connections and his own concerns as a person of migrant origin and being gay.

### Story

Dragan, a dedicated post-doctoral researcher at the university, becomes increasingly concerned about a situation unfolding between his colleague and a young PhD student. It starts with Dragan noticing inappropriate messages sent by his colleague to the student, with Dragan copied in the emails. Disturbed by what he sees, Dragan decides to reach out to the young woman to check on her well-being and help if needed. Grateful for his concern, she thanks him but requests that he doesn't take any action at that point.

Two weeks later, however, the situation takes a distressing turn. The student contacts Dragan again, this time in a state of panic and fear. The inappropriate messages have escalated, and she now feels threatened and stalked. Although she doesn't explicitly ask Dragan to take action, her distress compels him to consider intervening. But he faces a dilemma.

As a post-doc, Dragan is aware of the power dynamics at play. His colleague holds a prominent position within the university, and he himself is a person of migrant origin and gay. He worries about potential consequences and retaliation if he were to expose his colleague's behaviour. The evidence he has gathered so far is circumstantial, making the situation even more challenging. Dragan has conflicting emotions, wanting to protect the young student. As Dragan thinks of his next steps, he realises that taking action requires courage and a commitment.



### Notes for the trainer/facilitator:

In this scenario, Dragan faces a dilemma of deciding whether to step forward and protect the student or remain silent to safeguard his own position. The story highlights the importance of effective **Prevention** and **Protection** measures, ensuring clear Policies, comprehensive training, and support systems for victims of harassment and misconduct. Dragan's story emphasises the complexities individuals encounter when addressing such situations. The facilitator can guide participants in exploring the factors that influence Dragan's decision-making process, such as power dynamics, personal identity and fear of repercussions. A conversation on the importance of establishing clear reporting mechanisms, providing protection for bystanders and addressing concerns related to potential retaliation can take place.



## **Fatima** **(Cleaning staff)**

**Name:** Fatima  
**Age:** 42  
**Gender:** Female  
**Nationality:** Turkish  
**Position:** Cleaning staff  
**Location:** Munich, Germany

### Summary

Fatima works as cleaning staff at the university. She repeatedly witnesses how a professor behaves improperly with female students and colleagues. Particularly how he puts his hand on the bottom of a young female student, which she saw happen already three times. Fatima is shocked but is afraid of the consequences of reporting what she saw and does not do anything.

### Story

Fatima, a 42-year-old cleaning staff at the university carries out her responsibilities, ensuring the halls and classrooms are kept clean and presentable. However, her everyday routine takes a distressing turn when she witnesses a specific incident involving a professor's inappropriate behaviour towards a young female student.

One day, as Fatima is tidying up a lecture hall, she notices the professor entering with a group of students. The atmosphere quickly changes when the professor approaches a young female student and deliberately places his hand on her bottom. Over the course of the following weeks, Fatima finds herself repeatedly witnessing similar encounters between the professor and different female students.

Each time, she is filled with a mix of shock, anger, and concern for the victims. However, her fear of the potential consequences of reporting the incidents prevents her from taking any action. Fatima chooses silence. She is aware that speaking up could potentially jeopardise her job and invite retaliation from powerful individuals within the university.

### Notes for the trainer/facilitator:

This persona presents an opportunity to explore the complexities of reporting and addressing incidents of sexual misconduct from the perspective of a marginalised staff member. Participants can discuss the challenges faced by individuals like Fatima who witness inappropriate behaviour addressing the **Provision of Services, Protection** and **Policies**. Participants can explore the power dynamics and the potential impacts on the institutional culture. The facilitator can emphasise the need for comprehensive policies, effective reporting mechanisms and support systems from an intersectional aspect. By engaging in discussions, participants can gain insights on the barriers that prevent reporting and brainstorm on solutions



**Katerina**  
**(Administrative staff)**

**Name:** Katerina  
**Age:** 37  
**Gender:** Female  
**Nationality:** Greek  
**Position:** Administrative staff  
**Location:** Thessaloniki, Greece

### Summary

Katerina, a 37-year-old Greek woman works as an administrative staff member at a university in Thessaloniki. Despite her dedication to her job, she has been facing ongoing harassment from some of her fellow colleagues. They make demeaning comments, spread rumours and create a hostile environment for her. Katerina desperately seeks support as the situation has seriously impacted her ability to cope with the environment, but she struggles to speak up feeling the potential consequences of addressing the issues with her supervisor.

### Story

Katerina, a 37-year-old administrative staff member at a university in Thessaloniki, had always been dedicated to her job. She was responsible for managing various administrative tasks ensuring a smooth functioning of the financial department for international funds. However, her work environment took a distressing turn when she started facing ongoing harassment from a group of fellow colleagues.

At first, it was subtle remarks and jokes by a group of male colleagues undermining her contributions saying things like "Oh! Don't worry, we'll let you handle the "typical" registrations and administrative work", implying that her role was less important because of her gender. These remarks made Katerina feel undervalued and unwelcome in the department, but she tried to ignore them.

As time went on, the situation escalated, and the colleagues started spreading false rumours about Katerina.

They would whisper behind her back, implying that she is getting professional opportunities through improper means, not acknowledging her hard work and qualifications.

The rumours harmed her reputation within the department, and she began to notice a shift in how other treated her. In team meetings, Katerina often found herself interrupted or ignored when she tried to contribute her ideas or suggestions. Her colleagues would dismiss her input, making her feel like her opinions didn't matter. When she raised concerns about certain administrative processes, they would mockingly refer to her as the "office watchdog" further belittling her role and expertise.

The hostile environment extended beyond just verbal remarks. On one occasion, Katerina discovered that her desk had been tampered with, with someone rearranging her files and documents, making it difficult for her to find what she needed. Although seemingly trivial, this act of sabotage added to her growing sense of isolation and discomfort in the workplace. Additionally, Katerina often found herself excluded from informal gatherings or social events that her colleagues organised. She would hear about these gatherings after the fact, realising that she had not been invited. This exclusion further deepened her feeling of being an outsider in her own workplace.

Despite her struggles, Katerina was hesitant to speak up about the harassment. She feared that reporting the incidents to her supervisor might lead to retaliation from her colleagues, making her work life even more unbearable. She worried that she might be labelled as a troublemaker or face further discrimination if she voiced her concerns.

## Notes for the trainer/facilitator:

This persona highlights the issue of workplace harassment and the challenges faced by individuals in seeking support. Participants can discuss issues related to the organisational culture, **Prevention, Provision of Services** such as seeking psychological support and explore the impact of a hostile work environment on an employee's well-being and job performance. The facilitator can initiate discussions on the importance of creating a safe and respectful workplace culture, where harassment and demeaning behaviour are not tolerated and discuss **Prosecution** measures for the perpetrators. Participants can examine the barriers that prevent individuals from speaking up, such as fear of retaliation or negative consequences. The facilitator can guide conversations on the role of supervisors and leaders in addressing harassment complaints and providing support to affected employees. Additionally, participants can explore the need for effective reporting mechanisms, confidential channels, and support systems within the organisation to encourage individuals like Katerina to come forward. By examining Katerina's situation, participants can gain insights into the importance of fostering a positive work environment and implementing measures to prevent and address workplace harassment and gender-based violence.



## Manuel (Vice-Rector)

**Name:** Manuel  
**Age:** 47  
**Gender:** Male  
**Nationality:** Spanish  
**Position:** Vice-Rector  
**Location:** Cartagena, Spain

### Summary

Manuel is a 47-year-old male Vice Rector at a prestigious university in Spain. With a long and distinguished career in academia, he holds a position of power and influence within the institution. As a Vice-Rector, he is responsible for overseeing various departments and committees, including the gender equality committee. During a gender equality committee meeting, he unexpectedly loses his temper and directs inappropriate and demeaning comments towards a female committee member.

### Story

Manuel, a 47-year-old male Vice Rector at a prestigious university in Spain, had built a long and distinguished career in academia. As a Vice Rector, he held a position of power and influence within the institution. One of his responsibilities was overseeing the gender equality committee, which aimed to promote gender equality and create an inclusive environment within the university.

During a routine gender equality committee meeting, Manuel unexpectedly lost his temper and directed inappropriate and demeaning comments towards a female committee member. The meeting was discussing strategies to improve gender representation in leadership roles at the university when the female committee member expressed her concerns about the lack of progress in implementing the proposed initiatives.

Manuel was frustrated by her remarks responding that her ideas were impractical and irrelevant in a rude tone. He implied that her presence on the committee was for "her own agenda" and that she should focus on more "suitable" tasks. The other committee members were shocked by Manuel's outburst, and an uncomfortable silence filled the room. The female committee member, who had been contributing valuable insights to the committee, was visibly hurt and humiliated by Manuel's remarks. She felt undermined and belittled in front of her colleagues, despite her genuine dedication to promoting gender equality at the university.

The incident left a gloomy atmosphere in the meeting, with other committee members uncertain about how to respond to Manuel's inappropriate behaviour. Some looked uncomfortable, while others chose to ignore the incident, not wanting to confront the Vice Rector.

## Notes for the trainer/facilitator:

This persona highlights the issue of workplace behaviour, especially in positions of authority. Participants can engage in discussions about the impact of power dynamics and the role of leadership and the ethical obligations of academic leaders to uphold respectful and inclusive environments for everyone within the institution discussing relevant Policies and the respect of **Code of Conduct**s. The facilitator can guide conversations on the significance of maintaining respectful communication and fostering an inclusive and supportive atmosphere during committee meetings. Participants can analyse the response of other committee members who were present during the incident. This presents an opportunity to discuss the responsibility of bystanders in intervening or addressing inappropriate behaviour. The facilitator can encourage discussions on reporting mechanisms (**Prosecution** and **Protection**) and **Prevention** measures on a higher management level to address incidents of inappropriate behaviour by establishing clear procedures for reporting and protecting the victim/survivors. The facilitator can also lead discussions on impartial investigations and avoid conflicts of interest within committees responsible for handling such cases.





**Amélie**  
**(External contractor**  
**working on European**  
**projects)**

**Name:** Amélie  
**Age:** 52  
**Gender:** Female  
**Nationality:** French  
**Position:** External contractor working on European projects  
**Location:** Copenhagen, Denmark

### Summary

Amélie, as 52-year-old French woman, works as an external contractor on European projects for a prestigious university in Copenhagen, Denmark. As part of her responsibilities, she frequently attends international conferences to collaborate with colleagues from different organisations. However, during one conference, she finds herself in a distressing situation as she becomes the target of sexual harassment by a male colleague who is a well-known Professor in his field. Amélie is deeply troubled by the situation but is caught in a dilemma. As an external contractor, she worries about the consequences of speaking up against a senior representative who holds influence within the academia. She fears that reporting the harassment could result in her losing professional opportunities or damaging her reputation in the field.

### Story

Amélie, a 52-year-old French woman, works as an external contractor for a prestigious university in Denmark and she frequently attends international conferences as part of her responsibilities. During one international conference, Amélie finds herself excited to engage with fellow academics, exchange knowledge and build her networking portfolio for future opportunities. However, her excitement turns into distress as she becomes the target of sexual harassment by a male colleague who is a well-known Professor in his field.

It started at the beginning of the conference with sexist jokes and inappropriate comments about Amélie's appearance. During the opening reception, Amélie was engaged in conversation with a group of fellow researchers. Among them the Professor who seemed professional and engaging but as the night went on, the Professor's behaviour took an unsettling turn.

As the evening progressed alcohol was involved, and he started invading her personal space in front of other colleagues, standing too close and touching her arm inappropriately. She tried to distance herself from him, but he persisted in following her around the reception, making suggestive remarks that left her deeply uneasy.

Feeling increasingly distressed and anxious, Amélie found her "safe space" with a group of female colleagues, hoping that staying with them would help her stay away from the Professors inappropriate behaviour. However, he continued target her going as far as cornering her alone in a dimly lit area away from the main crowd. There, he made advances ignoring her obvious discomfort and verbal attempts to get away.

Amélie managed to break away from the situation and returned to her hotel room. She felt violated and humiliated, distressed and unsure of how to proceed, fearful of the consequences of confronting a senior academic in her field. After the distressing event, she considered skipping the next day of the conference. This was important for her career and did not want to let the harassment undermine her professional opportunities. She confided one female senior faculty member that offered to stay with her accompanying her during the sessions and networking events.

## Notes for the trainer/facilitator:

This persona highlights the challenges faced by external contractors and professionals working in academia. Participants can explore the vulnerabilities and dilemmas that external contractors might encounter, especially when subjected to harassment by influential figures within their working environment, which might be outside the office in an international setting. The facilitator can guide discussions on the importance of **Protection** measures and **Provision of Services** for covering external events and field trips such as international conferences. They can also investigate the coverage of their reporting mechanisms to include all types of employees including contractors and discuss the institutional responsibility to ensure robust reporting mechanism in light of **Prevention** and **Prosecution measures**. An intersectional approach can be highlighted to resolve challenges faced by members in similar situations.



## **Egle (Lecturer)**

**Name:** Egle  
**Age:** 36  
**Gender:** Female  
**Nationality:** Russian  
**Position:** Lecturer  
**Location:** Kaunas, Lithuania

### **Summary**

Egle, a 36-year-old Russian lecturer, finds herself facing harassment at the university where she teaches in Kaunas, Lithuania. Despite her qualifications and expertise in the field, Egle becomes the target of harassment and discrimination from her students and a particular Professor who enable and contributes to the hostile environment. Egle decides to document each incident and seek support from a trusted senior faculty member.

### **Story**

Egle, a 36-year-old Russian lecturer, had been excited to start her new position at a university in Kaunas. With her qualifications and expertise in the field, she was determined to make a positive impact on her students. However, her enthusiasm quickly changed as she found herself facing harassment and discrimination at the university.

From the beginning, Egle noticed that some of her students treated her differently due to her migrant status coming from Russia. They made demeaning comments about her accent and questioned her qualifications, undermining her authority in the classroom. They laughed at her adding comments such as "Hey, Egle, I heard Russian women are supposed to be really wild and adventurous. Is that true?". Despite her efforts to remain professional and provide a supportive learning environment, Egle felt alienated and unwelcome.

The situation escalated when she encountered a particular Professor who seemed to enable and contribute to the hostile environment. During departmental meetings, the Professor would dismiss Egle's ideas and proposals, often interrupting her and taking credit for her contributions.

He made sexist remarks about female academics and openly expressed scepticism about Egle's abilities, solely based on her nationality. One day, during a departmental meeting, Egle proposed a new research project she had been working on, excited to share her ideas with her colleagues. As she started presenting her project, the particular Professor, known for his dismissive attitude towards her, interrupted her saying "Oh, Egle, do you really think your research is up to the standards of this department? Coming from Russia, you must have a long way to go to catch up with the rest of us." Egle felt utterly discouraged. She had prepared extensively for the presentation, and the Professor's comment not only undermined her work but also made her nationality a basis for questioning her abilities as a researcher. Egle started to recognise that these incidents were not isolated, and the constant harassment contributed to her sense of being undervalued and disrespected in the university community.

## Notes for the trainer/facilitator:

Egle's persona highlights several aspects regarding gender harassment and discrimination within an institutional environment. Participants can explore topics related to **Prevention, Protection, Provision of Services, Prosecution** as well as Policies with an intersectional aspect of understanding how multiple identities intersect (gender, nationality, race, age, etc.) to shape one's experience in academic environments. Participants can discuss the existing policies and reporting mechanisms at their institution to address gender harassment and discrimination. The facilitator can lead discussions on the effectiveness of current policies and whether the institution provides clear paths for reporting incidents without fear of retaliation. Additionally, participants can analyse the existing **Code of Conduct**, if any, to identify any gaps or shortcomings, and propose improvements to ensure it provides clear guidelines for acceptable behaviour and consequences for violations. Finally, this persona provides an opportunity to explore the challenges of holding perpetrators accountable for their actions. Participants can discuss the existing mechanisms for investigating and prosecuting cases of harassment and examine whether they effectively deliver justice. The facilitator can also facilitate conversations about ensuring fair and unbiased investigations to protect the rights of both the victim/survivors and the accused.

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