



Statement on sexual harassment and psychological violence in the higher education system

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Klaipėda, Lithuania

Baltic Organizational Meeting (hereinafter - BOM) is a regional cooperation agreement between national unions of students in the Baltic states: Federation of Estonian Student Unions (*Eesti Üliõpilaskondade Liit*), Student Union of Latvia (*Latvijas Studentu apvienība*) and Lithuanian National Union of Students (*Lietuvos studentų sąjunga*). It aims to promote closer cooperation between student organizations both on the national and local level and to ensure the exchange of knowledge concerning political, economic, social and educational processes in the Baltic countries. 20 years after the BOM agreement was signed, we as student representatives shall be the lead in tackling sensitive and challenging issues faced by students in the Baltics such as sexual harassment and psychological violence in the higher education system.

Sexual harassment is a form of gender-based violence encompassing acts of unwanted physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature, which have a purpose or effect of violating the victim's dignity and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.¹

Psychological violence (sometimes referred to as psychological abuse) is meant as any intentional conduct that seriously impairs another person's psychological integrity through coercion or threats.² Although this is only one of many definitions, for there is no clear consensus on the matter, which is characterized as rejecting, degrading, terrorizing, isolating, corrupting/exploiting and "denying emotional responsiveness".³

¹ Definition for sexual harassment. <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1376>

² Definition for psychological violence. <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1334>

³ Definition for emotional abuse. https://web.archive.org/web/20050407201522/http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ncfv-cnivf/familyviolence/html/fvemotion_e.html

It is important to take into account that sexual harassment and/or psychological violence in the higher education (hereinafter - HE) system takes the form of both horizontal (student-student) and vertical (staff-student or student-staff) interaction. The involved parties may be in their respective roles either as victims, offenders or third-parties. Sexual harassment and psychological violence come in many forms that happen both in and outside the classroom. Cases of aforementioned behaviour can often be of a similar nature but can be highly complex and, thus, need to be treated in a specific way regarding measures of action.

We as BOM, together with our national student unions, stand for equal treatment of people in all levels of the HE system. This stance must eventually result in an inclusive, non-discriminatory and fair system for all.

Therefore, taking into account the available background information, all of the undersigned have agreed on the following statements:

- sexual harassment and psychological violence should not be tolerated in the academic environment; hence, all students regardless of their nationality, sex, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status or any other personal conditions or social circumstances shall experience safe, inclusive and non-discriminatory academic space throughout their study time in any of the Baltic state higher education institutions (hereinafter - HEIs);
- surveys and research should be carried out and representative data gathered with a concrete action plan to understand the severity and dynamics of the challenges in each country;
- terms “sexual harassment” and “psychological violence” should be clearly defined in all 3 national legislations;
- an internal policy on the matter and/or a protocol of action in the case of sexual harassment and/or psychological violence must be created, implemented, and revised regularly in HEIs;
- clear prevention systems must be created and implemented to prevent future occurrences of aforementioned matters;
- accessible and free of charge system of psychological support in HEI must be designed and implemented. Moreover, the evaluation of the system shall be included in the accreditation criteria of the respective HEI;
- in order to overcome the identified challenges, widespread awareness on the gravity of the matter must be raised by all involved stakeholders.



All HEIs must consider the impact sexual harassment and psychological violence can have on mental health.⁴ As good mental health is the basis for students to meaningfully engage in their studies, special attention should be paid to ensure that the institutional environment promotes healthy behaviour. Due to the complex challenge, all decisions should be evidence-based and follow the latest research. As a network, BOM strives to achieve these goals.

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⁴ Definition for Mental health.
https://www.who.int/mental_health/en/