

FemIDEAS

feminism | intersectionality | decolonisation | equality | abolition | survivor-centred

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Higher Education in Argentina

January 2026

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Acknowledgements

This research was funded by the UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship awarded to Principal Investigator Dr Adrija Dey. This research would not have been possible without the invaluable support of Dr Emilio Ayos and Dr Rafael Blanco.

We are deeply grateful to all our participants for their time, insight, and trust.

How to cite this report

Dey, Adrija, Wild, Jessica, Lopez, Guadalupe & Shannon, Erin (2026, January). *Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Higher Education in Argentina*. London, UK: University of Westminster.

Summary report

This is the full-length version of the report. To access the summary version, please go to femideas.com/resources

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Abbreviations used in this report

CIN: Consejo Interuniversitario Nacional (National Inter-university Council)

FemIDEAS: Feminist, Intersectional, Decolonising, Equality, Abolitionist, Survivor-centred

HE: Higher Education

LGBTQIA+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and other identities beyond these

RUGE: Red Interuniversitaria por la Igualdad de Género y contra las Violencias (Inter-university Network for Gender Equality and Against Violence)

SGBV: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

Key terms used in this report (maintaining the Spanish original)

Acompañamiento: A relational practice of 'walking alongside' someone who seeks support, centred on listening, being present, emotional containment, and supporting the person's agency as they navigate difficult processes, and when determining solutions.

Activist: Someone who actively promotes, pushes for, or engages in efforts to bring about social or political change.

Carceral: Relating to the criminal justice system, especially the prison system.

Decolonisation (decolonising): The process of undoing or remedying colonialism, involving attempts to dismantle colonial power structures and reclaiming autonomy and culture by colonised peoples.

Escraches – with stemmed words *escrachando* (present continuous) and *escrached* (singular, past): Public acts of naming and shaming people who have reportedly caused harm, often through graffiti, social media posts, or demonstrations, when formal institutional or legal mechanisms are seen to have failed. They first emerged in the 1990s when they were used by the activist group HIJOS, children of the disappeared during the country's last dictatorship.

Faculty: A section of a university or HE institution that focuses on similar related subjects/degrees. In other geographical contexts, it might be considered a school or department within a university or HE institution.

Femicide: The killing of women because they are women.

Feminist: There are various strands of feminist thought but in general the term refers to someone who supports and advocates for the equality of all genders, with a particular focus on the rights and interests of girls and women.

Higher education (HE) institutions: Organisations such as colleges and universities that provide advanced educational programmes after secondary education.

Intersectional: A framework that examines how various social identities, such as race, gender, sexuality, and class, interlock to shape experiences of oppression, power, and privilege.

Lived experience: Personal knowledge and insights gained through direct, first-hand involvement in a particular issue, event, or phenomenon.

Naming: The act of publicly disclosing the name or identifying details of someone who has perpetrated or is alleged to have perpetrated SGBV, as well as the name of the HE institution that has allowed or enabled SGBV to occur, and/or that responded inappropriately to reports of SGBV.

Ni Una Menos: A feminist activist movement that emerged in Argentina in 2015 to protest SGBV, particularly femicide. Key demands included the need for greater state and institutional accountability for preventing and responding to violence against women and gender-diverse people.

Non-punitive measures: Responses to harm that do not use punishment and, in our case study faculty, encompass a broad range of educational and pedagogical activities that aim to change harmful attitudes and behaviour and promote accountability.

Pedagogy (Pedagogical): Teaching activities or related to teaching activities.

People who experienced harm: People who have experienced a traumatic event, particularly an act of sexual and/or gender-based violence or abuse. This also refers to someone reporting an experience of SGBV harm to the case study faculty's protocol, facilitated by the Secretariat of Gender and Human Rights.

People who have caused harm: People who have enacted SGBV harm against others. This also refers to someone whose behaviour is reported to the case study faculty's protocol who has caused some form of SGBV harm.

Promotoras: Community or institutional-based feminist organisers or 'promoters' who led awareness-raising or prevention campaigns, often serving as local points of contact for gender-related issues within institutions.

Protocol: With reference to our case study faculty, the protocol is an internal university process for responding to specific incidents of SGBV—including sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and sexist behaviour—through informal and non-punitive mechanisms. This operates alongside a separate formal administrative disciplinary process, which relies on sanctions and punitive measures.

Punitive measures: Disciplinary consequences that focus on punishing someone for breaking an institutional policy (e.g. suspension, expulsion, firing). Although these are not the same punishments available in the criminal justice system, punitive measures in HE processes borrow from carceral logic.

Safeguarding: Measures during the SGBV protocol to minimise continued harm by the person who caused harm, to protect the person who experienced harm, and to ensure both parties may continue their education unimpeded by the protocol. These measures can involve changing class schedules or ensuring the parties do not cross paths.

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV): '[A] continuum of violence that includes sexual harassment; sexual assault; rape; abusive relationships; stalking; spiking; gendered bullying; and sexualised abuses of power including grooming and consensual relationships across positions of power that were harmful to one party' (Bull & Shannon, 2023, p. 4).

Transformative justice: A non-punitive (i.e. non-disciplinary-based) form of justice that centres the needs of the victim-survivor in holding individuals accountable for harm they have caused, repairing that harm, and restoring the relationship between the harmed parties as well as the wider community. Transformative justice also looks to change the conditions that make harm possible in order to prevent further harm from happening.

Victim-survivor-centred: Refers to HE policies and practices that are designed with the input of people who have experienced harm (also known as victim-survivors) and focus on providing immediate assistance, safety, and longer-term support, if requested.

Introduction

This report presents findings from fieldwork conducted in Argentina as part of a four-country study titled FemIDEAS: Transforming Theory, Policy, and Practice to Decolonise Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Higher Education. The FemIDEAS project examines sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in higher education (HE) institutions in order to develop a deeper understanding of the issue and to inform more effective approaches to prevention, response, and support for those who experience SGBV within HE.

The project is grounded in decolonial, intersectional, feminist, and abolitionist approaches, and centres the experiences and voices of people with lived experiences of SGBV. We conducted fieldwork across four countries—Argentina, Brazil, Nigeria, and South Africa—with Argentina serving as the fourth and final fieldwork site.

We use the term SGBV throughout this report. The relatively broad terminology and scope are necessary because it can be challenging for some participants to find the precise words to describe their experiences (Bull & Dey, 2022). For this study, we use Bull and Shannon's (2023, p. 4) definition of SGBV as:

A continuum of violence that includes sexual harassment; sexual assault; rape; abusive relationships; stalking; spiking; gendered bullying; and sexualised abuses of power including grooming and consensual relationships across positions of power that were harmful to one party.

We conducted the fieldwork in Argentina in person over a two-month period, from March to April 2025. Unlike earlier phases of the study, we adopted a case study approach for this phase. We selected a single faculty within a university in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires as a descriptive case study site in order to understand how mechanisms to address SGBV were developed and implemented within that faculty. This approach enabled us to gain a detailed and contextualised understanding of the site, situated within the broader institutional framework of the university and against the wider HE landscape of Argentina.

We conducted six in-depth interviews with academics, activists, and students from the same faculty, as well as one focus group with four members of the faculty's Secretariat of Gender and Human Rights (gender office). All participants were deeply involved in various aspects of the work of addressing SGBV within the faculty, including protocol development and implementation, advocacy, training, pedagogical interventions, and activism both within and beyond the university. Many of our participants have been involved in this work in the case study faculty since its inception more than a decade ago, bringing deep institutional and experiential knowledge and reflections.

This report brings together insights drawn from what participants shared during interviews and the focus group. It offers a brief snapshot of what SGBV response, prevention, and advocacy currently look like within one faculty in Argentina, from the perspective of those who generously gave their time to participate in the study. The report also highlights potential areas for intervention, alongside examples of promising practices and policies. Importantly, all findings are shared centring the experiences of those with lived experience of harm, recognising them as experts by experience.

Summary of main findings

The following themes came through in the data:

Feminist activism driving the SGBV protocols in Argentine HE as a tool for change

Feminist activism—particularly the 2015 *Ni Una Menos* movement—played a decisive role in compelling universities to take action on SGBV. *Ni Una Menos* activism, alongside sustained support from feminist networks, was foundational to the development and implementation of the SGBV protocol within the case study faculty. Feminists working within the faculty strategically mobilised their connections to feminist movements and the broader sociopolitical momentum to advance gender-related work, secure institutional legitimacy for the SGBV protocol, and integrate feminist perspectives into teaching across the faculty.

Support from feminist networks was also crucial not only for sustaining efforts to address and respond to SGBV within the faculty, but also for providing emotional and relational support for those carrying out this work—often without dedicated financial or institutional backing and alongside their existing academic and administrative responsibilities.

The role and function of the protocol

The faculty's SGBV protocol functions as a multi-layered, holistic, victim-survivor-centred mechanism designed to address a wide range of SGBV. It applies to all stakeholders within the faculty, including students, academic staff, and workers and was extensively promoted through different channels to raise awareness.

Its primary function is non-punitive, operating alongside—but distinct from—formal disciplinary procedures. The central emphasis of the protocol is on pedagogical interventions, prevention, and wellbeing-oriented responses.

Data also indicated the importance of feminist leadership to operationalising gender-related work and implementation of the protocol within the faculty.

Despite this, the data reveals that members of the wider university community, including students, often misunderstand the protocol's purpose. Some expect punitive outcomes or perceive it as a quasi-judicial mechanism. These expectations generate tensions between the protocol's transformative aims and the varied understandings of justice and reparation held by those who experience harm and the wider university community.

Non-punitive approaches: responding to people who have caused harm

Non-punitive interventions are a core component of the protocol and are grounded in feminist principles that prioritise dialogue, reflection, and the transformation of harmful behaviours. These measures seek to support individuals who have caused harm in understanding why their behaviour was harmful and in developing non-violent ways of relating within the institutional community. Such interventions often take the form of educational processes, supported by staff in the Secretariat of Gender and Human Rights, through which those who have caused harm engage in ongoing dialogue with trained staff as they reflect on and process their learning.

Through its holistic approach to responding to SGBV, the protocol ensures that mental health support is offered to both the person who experienced harm and the person who caused harm. At the same time, safeguarding the person who experienced harm remains paramount, and interventions are designed to uphold the rights of all parties to education while ensuring safety.

Pedagogical interventions as preventing SGBV

Embedding a gender perspective across the curricula of all degree programmes has been central to the case study faculty's broader process of cultural transformation and functions as a key strategy for preventing SGBV. Rather than positioning gender as an elective or optional area of study, it has been established as a foundational analytical and conceptual lens. Courses informed by feminist theory and activism are open to students across disciplines, maximising exposure and fostering critical engagement with gender and SGBV. This pedagogical approach operates both as a preventative intervention and as a mechanism for long-term cultural change, positioning the prevention of SGBV and the understanding of gender-related issues as a collective responsibility. However, uneven resourcing and reliance on individual feminist academics present ongoing challenges to the sustainability of this approach over the longer term.

Acompañamiento and listening as key components of support

Acompañamiento—understood as walking alongside someone and providing holistic support and pedagogical mentoring—is a central pillar of the faculty's response to SGBV. The data highlights its importance not only for people who have experienced harm, but also for those receiving disclosures, teams managing cases, and individuals who have caused harm. This approach is grounded in practices of listening, care, and fostering agency, enabling those who experience harm to pursue the forms of support and resolution they seek, rather than fostering dependency on the faculty or the university. The data also underscores the need for adequate resourcing to sustain this labour-intensive work and cautions against paternalistic or overly bureaucratic responses that risk undermining the feminist principles at the heart of this approach.

Escraches and the politics of naming

The use of *escraches*—public acts of naming and shaming individuals who have reportedly caused harm—remains a highly contentious issue. The data underscores significant ambivalence surrounding their use: while *escraches* can serve to restore accountability in contexts of institutional silence or impunity, they can also expose institutional failures and reproduce further harm. In the case study faculty, *escraches* were used to draw attention to entrenched power dynamics and forms of impunity, particularly when senior professors or individuals in positions of authority were perceived to be protected and the protocol was seen as unable to address their behaviour effectively.

However, *escraches* were also directed at feminist policy-makers when their actions or decisions did not align with the expectations or demands of the wider faculty community, affecting the work of responding to and addressing SGBV. Moreover, *escraches* can collapse diverse forms of harm into a single category and often fail to account for the intersectional factors that shape behavioural norms, power relations, and expectations.

Notably, participants observed that when institutional protocols functioned effectively and transparently, the use of *escraches* declined—suggesting that trust in institutional mechanisms can reduce reliance on alternative, public forms of accountability.

Barriers to policy implementation and institutional change

The most significant challenge faced by the case study faculty is the chronic lack of resources, particularly the absence of sustainable long-term funding. Protocol implementation has relied heavily on unpaid or under-recognised labour, most often undertaken by feminist academics driven by political commitment rather than institutional support. This reliance has resulted in substantial emotional labour, burnout, and uneven implementation across departments. At times, the bureaucratic demands of securing funding and fulfilling reporting requirements have overshadowed the substance of the work itself, contributing to a depoliticisation of what is fundamentally feminist and activist work.

Beyond resourcing, participants identified a lack of intersectionality in how gender and SGBV are understood within curricula and institutional practices. Gender is frequently assumed to be binary, and SGBV is often reduced to 'violence against women', obscuring experiences of harm faced by people across different marginalised identities.

Finally, the data reveals perceptions of a double standard in the application of the protocol, whereby cases involving senior or powerful individuals frequently stall or fail. This undermines trust in institutional mechanisms and contributes to a broader sense of impunity, highlighting the protocol's limited capacity to address entrenched power hierarchies within the faculty.

Together, these structural inequalities underscore the need for sustained resourcing, deeper grounding in intersectional feminist theory and praxis, transparent processes, and stronger institutional commitments to accountability and cultural transformation.

Background information

Argentina has a large and diverse HE system, comprising public institutions funded by the state, which are free to attend, and private universities funded through other sources, which charge tuition fees. Nationwide, there are 111 universities enrolling approximately two million students, the majority of whom attend public institutions. Of these universities, 42 are located in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, with a further 31 situated in the surrounding Province of Buenos Aires, within which the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires is geographically located.

The evolution of HE and SGBV response in Argentine universities

Argentina is a country with a long tradition of political activism and educational reform, and efforts to address SGBV in HE have rapidly developed over the last decade or so. More recent reforms occur against the backdrop of progressive legal advances, fervent feminist activism, and resilient, highly embedded patriarchal cultural (hetero)norms and discourses.

HE in Argentina dates back to the founding of the University of Córdoba in 1613 under Spanish colonial rule. Over the following centuries, the system evolved alongside the nation, expanding and modernising after independence (Buchbinder, 2005; Cutrin, 2022a, 2022b; Donghi, 1993). A defining moment in this history was the 1918 University Reform, led by the student movements at the University of Córdoba (Alvarado, 2020). The reforms challenged a colonial and authoritarian university system dominated by the church and characterised by outdated teaching, limited academic freedom, and hierarchical governance (Etchichury, 2018). Students demanded free and universal education, greater institutional democracy, and a tripartite system of co-governance involving students, professors, and graduates (Cutrin, 2022a, 2022b; Pautassi & Balardini, 2020). The reforms expanded access to HE and introduced merit-based academic appointments through open competition (Etchichury, 2018).

Over the following decades, students continued to mobilise for change, particularly against authoritarian regimes (for more information, see Buchbinder, 2005; Cutrin, 2022a, 2022b; Galak et al., 2021; Reggiani & Scharagrodsky, 2022). In the next section, we discuss feminist student activism against SGBV in Argentine HE.

Emergence of gender politics and feminist movements in HE

Gender politics in Argentine HE institutions have been driven by academic and student-led feminist and political movements, most notably *Ni Una Menos* ('Not One Woman Less'). *Ni Una Menos* was a feminist activist movement that emerged in Argentina in 2015 to protest SGBV, particularly femicide. Its key demands included the need for greater state and institutional accountability for preventing and responding to violence against women and gender-diverse people. Over the past decade, *Ni Una Menos* has played a central role in advancing the rights of women and minoritised genders in Argentina, including within the university space.

Central to embedding gender equality and anti-SGBV work within HE institutions was the creation in 2015 of Red Interuniversitaria por la Igualdad de Género y contra las Violencias (RUGE, Inter-university Network for Gender Equality and Against Violence). RUGE emerged from activism within Universidad Nacional de San Martín and quickly expanded, eventually being integrated into the Consejo Interuniversitario Nacional (CIN, National Inter-university Council) in 2018. The network currently spans over 65 universities and has become a central voice in the development of institutional responses to SGBV (Torlucci et al., 2019; Vazquez Laba & Rugna, 2017).

Academic scholarship has documented the role of the RUGE and CIN networks in reshaping the institutional landscape, including the emergence of new protocols to address SGBV, the implementation of coordinated training programmes, and research initiatives centred on gender (Blanco et al., 2022; Spataro & Blanco, 2023). Moreover, feminist solidarity has occupied a critical role in enabling under-resourced institutions to develop the institutional capacity to respond to SGBV (Torricella et al., 2019).

Ley Micaela and the institutionalisation of gender policies in HE institutions

In addition to feminist activism, national legislation has impacted Argentine HE's response to SGBV. The passage of Ley Micaela (Law 27.499) in 2019 represented a key legislative milestone; an updated version was issued in January 2025 (El Tribuno, 2025). The law is named after Micaela García, a student activist of both the Evita Movement and *Ni Una Menos*, who was a victim of femicide by a man with a history of repeatedly engaging in SGBV. The legislation mandates gender and gender-based violence training for anyone who works in public office, including those working (in all roles) in HE institutions (Argentina.gob.ar, n.d.). Following the introduction of Ley Micaela, universities began to modify their structures and systems to comply, establishing gender offices, implementing mandatory gender training, and embedding gender frameworks into governance. A 2019 survey showed that 81.9% of universities had some form of gender training, but only 25% had dedicated budgets to resource their implementation (Torlucci et al., 2019).

Institutions, including the National University of Mar del Plata and National University Arturo Jauretche, are documented as case studies illustrating the effective implementation of measures set out in the legislation (Jauretche et al., 2023; Rodriguez, 2022). The National University of Mar del Plata's protocol to address SGBV has been documented as particularly effective for its inclusion of designated gender coordinators, confidential SGBV reporting systems, and institutionally coordinated responses to reported incidents. This has resulted in a year-on-year increase in reports (Torricella et al., 2019), suggesting trust in the system and an awareness of the process among students and those accessing the protocols.

There has also been substantial analysis of the process of establishing gender-specific offices within universities, including at the University of Buenos Aires (Spataro & Blanco, 2023), as well as the subsequent impact of the implementation of a gender protocol within the university space (Blanco et al., 2022; Flesler & Spataro, 2024). This has included understanding students' perceptions and awareness of the existence of gender-specific policies, including for addressing SGBV, as well as perceptions of measures such as gender-neutral toilets (Blanco & Spataro, 2019).

Challenges and limitations

Despite significant gains, the implementation of gender protocols in Argentine universities remains uneven or patchy nationwide. Challenges for implementation include:

- Significant under-resourcing,
- Limited personnel to carry out the work,
- Inadequate mechanisms for managing and responding to complaints,
- Ensuring gender parity in governance and key institutional decision-making sites,
- A lack of institutional awareness concerning Ley Micaela mandating a gender-specific approach,
- Bureaucratic inefficiencies that present obstacles to implementation,
- Inconsistent implementation across universities, with some faculties being more engaged with gender policies than others,
- Resistance from within university communities in some cases (Torlucci et al., 2019; Torricella et al., 2019).

Given these structural and institutional challenges, implementation of Ley Micaela is not straightforward. It is further complicated by increased political resistance to gender mainstreaming and gender equality under the presidency of Javier Milei. Milei disbanded the Ministry for Women, Genders and Diversity shortly after taking office in December 2023, as part of a broader strategy to reduce the size of the state and remove political organisations (James, 2024). In a 2025 speech at Davos, Milei dismissed gender rights as 'woke ideology' and stated that gender ideology constitutes 'plain and simple child abuse', before questioning the criminal classification of femicide (Luna, 2025). This type of dangerous rhetoric perpetuates broader 'backlash' trends aimed at feminist activism, which severely undermines the aforementioned policy gains and threatens institutional commitments to address SGBV and gender inequalities.

Several of the challenges highlighted here are also reflected in the data produced through our case study, as presented in the following sections. Before presenting our main findings, we provide an overview of our methodology and a description of our selected case study site.

Methodology: a case study approach

In this phase of the research, a case study approach was used to enable the research team to develop a deep and nuanced understanding of how the protocol to address SGBV was developed and implemented within a case study faculty at a university in the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. This approach also allowed us to examine the everyday practices and strategies that supported effective implementation and uptake, as well as the on-the-ground realities, experiences, and challenges associated with this work.

As noted in the previous section, the policy and practice paradigms governing how HE institutions address SGBV in Argentina are relatively advanced and well established, with protocols in place at some universities for over a decade. This context makes a case study approach particularly well-suited to the fourth phase of the study, especially given the broader aim of developing recommendations for institutions in both the Global South and the Global North, drawing on this case as an example of good practice.

The research undertaken in Argentina followed a 'descriptive case example of implementation' (Greenhalgh, 2025). This type of case study is typically used to illustrate 'real world' applications of a particular practice or policy, in order to provide guidance to others wishing to emulate this practice (Greenhalgh, 2025). Focusing on a single faculty enabled tracing how the protocol addressing SGBV was shaped by institutional histories, organisational cultures at the faculty level, localised power dynamics, and how these factors interacted to produce specific practices, strategies, and, in some cases, tensions.

This approach also allowed for an interpretive, more holistic understanding of lived experience, and was particularly useful for capturing multiple perspectives and the fine-grained detail of how the protocol was developed, understood, negotiated, and implemented by different actors (Simons, 2009). For research on SGBV in HE—where institutional responses are often robust on paper but vary widely in practice—this approach provided insight into everyday realities, constraints, and innovations. It offered a valuable mechanism for understanding the protocol 'in action', while also illustrating what this means for those working with it. It also created space for reflections from institutional actors to come to the fore, thereby providing important opportunities to learn lessons.

The name and any identifying information concerning the faculty and/or the university featured in the case study have been deliberately withheld to avoid detection, in line with the broader ethical and risk management approach employed at all stages of the study.

Interviews have been translated from Argentine Spanish to English and analysed in English. In some cases, the original Spanish word has been included in the English transcripts because there is no direct translation or because it cannot be fully captured in a single English word. This is especially true of *Porteño* words – colloquialisms particular to the people of the province of Buenos Aires.

About the case study site

The faculty examined in this case study was established in the 1980s and serves approximately 25,000 students each year. Currently, it houses both the Gender Unit (Interdisciplinary Group) and the Secretariat of Gender and Human Rights. These institutional, multidisciplinary bodies are responsible for fostering a culture of safety, respect, and equality across the faculty community.

The broader sociopolitical landscape constitutes a crucial contextual factor in the development and trajectory of the university's protocol to address SGBV, as well as its implementation within the faculty over the past decade. The most significant catalyst for this process was the wave of protests that erupted across Argentina in 2015 following the femicide of 14-year-old Chiara Páez, who was pregnant at the time, by her 15-year-old boyfriend. The feminist-led mobilisation that followed gave rise to the national *Ni Una Menos* movement, profoundly shaping public discourse, government responses, and institutional priorities around SGBV, including within the HE sector.

About the SGBV protocol in place at the case study site

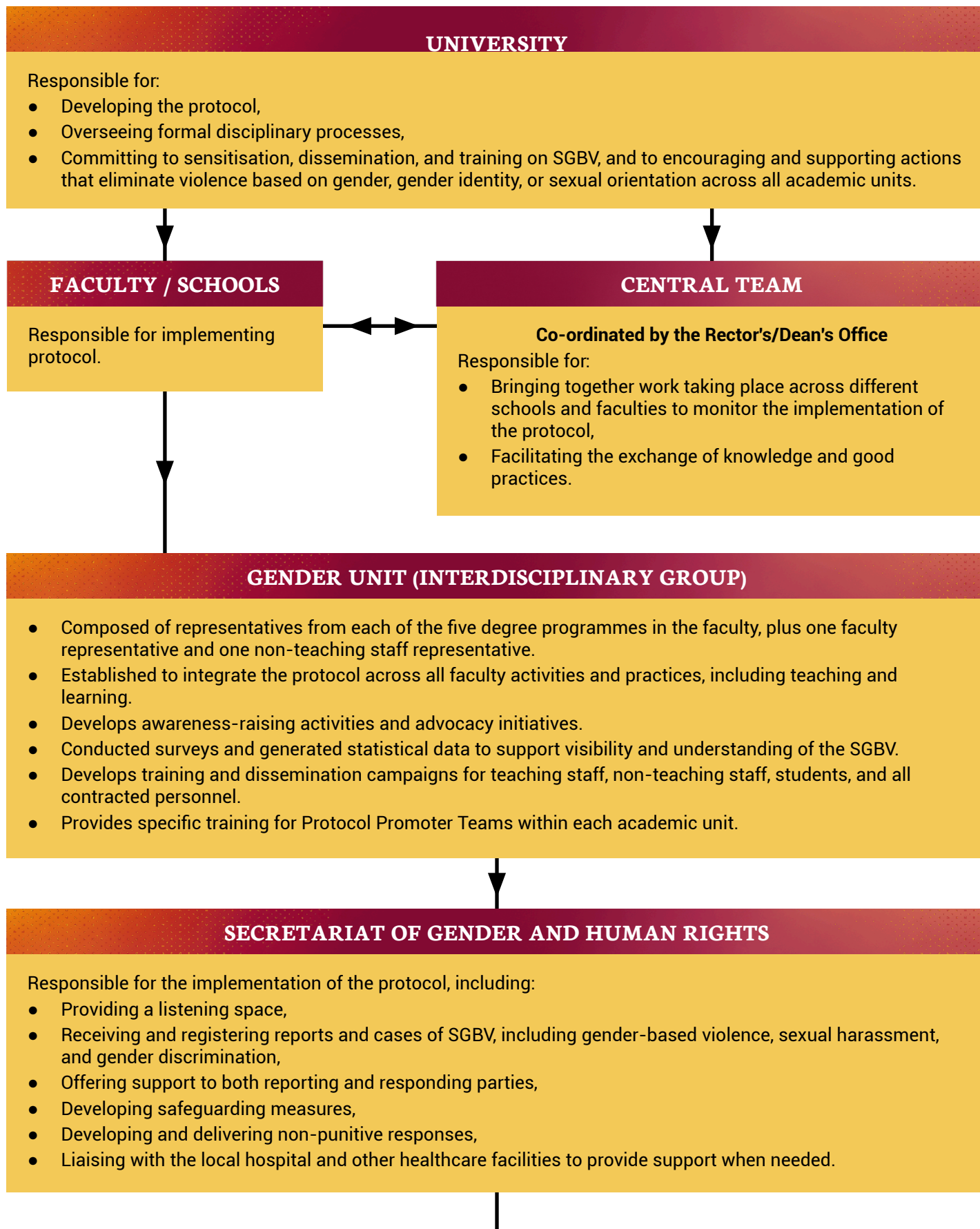
In December 2015, at the height of the *Ni Una Menos* protests, the university where the case study faculty is located approved a university-wide protocol to address SGBV. The protocol established an internal institutional process for responding to incidents of SGBV— including sexual harassment and sexual abuse—through informal, non-punitive mechanisms. In 2019, the protocol was amended to explicitly address sexist incidents, language, and forms of 'everyday sexism' (we will give a detailed overview of how the protocol works in '[The role and function of the protocol](#)').

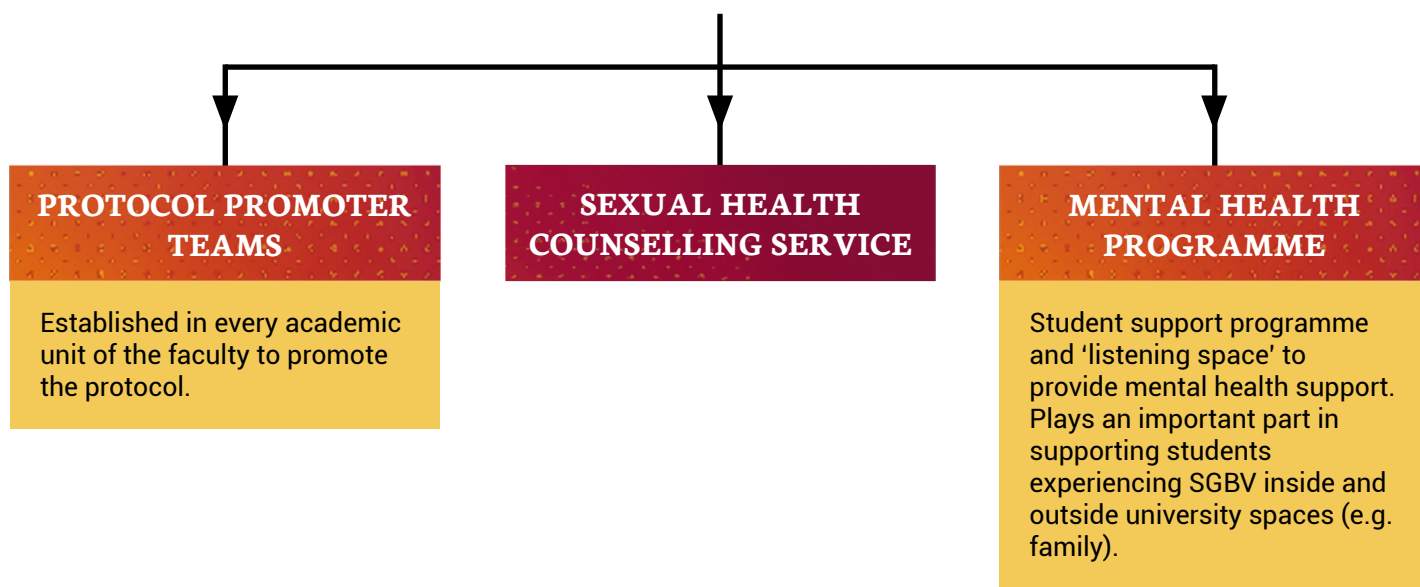
Given the size and complexity of the university, implementation of the protocol was decentralised and managed at the faculty level. This structure allowed each faculty to adapt the protocol to its specific context while operating within a shared institutional framework. However, to support consistency and coordination across the university, the Rector/Dean's Office established a Central Team. The Central Team held monthly meetings with all faculty-level teams. These meetings functioned as spaces for guidance, knowledge exchange, and alignment of the protocol, ensuring that decentralised implementation remained connected to broader institutional priorities and standards.

Following approval of the protocol, each faculty was given 180 days to establish teams responsible for its implementation. These teams brought together individuals from a range of disciplines and professional backgrounds (e.g. lawyers, psychologists, and gender specialists). The case study faculty established its Gender Unit (Interdisciplinary Group) in July 2016 to address SGBV at the faculty level. The group comprises teaching, non-teaching, and administrative staff from across the faculty's subject areas and degree programmes, and its work is guided by victim-survivor-centred principles. The Secretariat of Gender and Human Rights was also established as the 'protocol coordination' office. This office served as the primary point of contact within the faculty for anyone wishing to discuss or report experiences of SGBV.

Figure 1 illustrates the structure developed by the university and within the faculty for implementing the protocol to address SGBV.

Structure of protocol implementation (Figure 1)

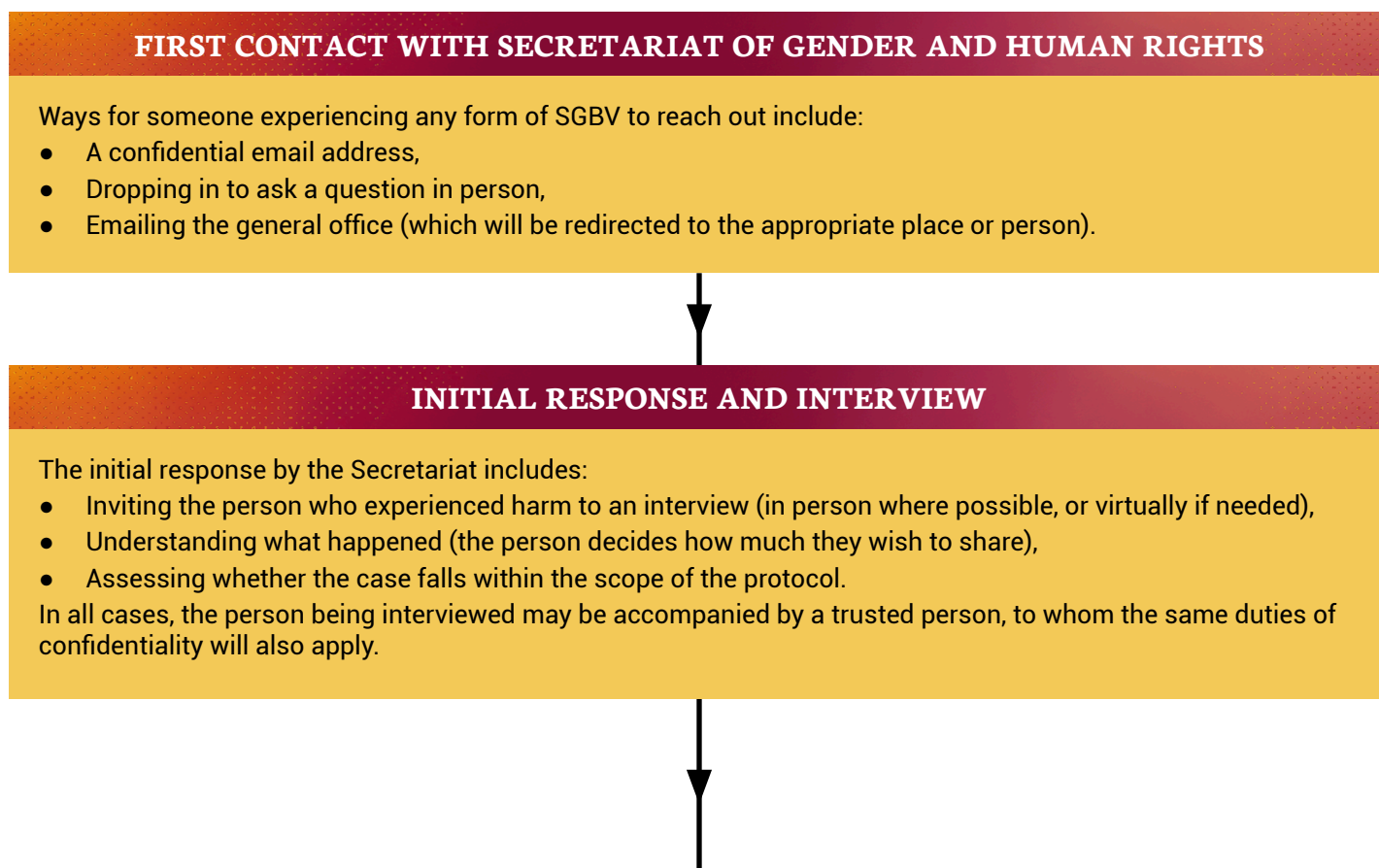


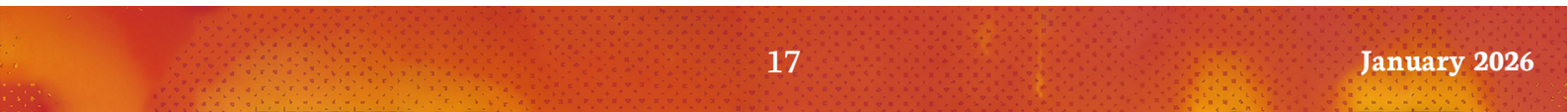


The implementation of the protocol within the case study faculty drew on feminist activism and ways of thinking and was grounded in a holistic, pedagogical, and victim-survivor-centred approach. It was based on the understanding that, alongside response strategies, both support and prevention were central to addressing SGBV within the faculty. As such, developing holistic approaches that brought together SGBV response, prevention, support, and pedagogical interventions was a core element of this work.

Figure 2 illustrates the different mechanisms available to individuals who have experienced any form of SGBV, as well as the various stages involved in responding to and preventing SGBV within the case study faculty.

Protocol implementation process (Figure 2)





STEPS IN THE FORMAL DISCIPLINARY PROCESS

- The Risk Evaluation Report is submitted to the highest authority of the institution (Rectorate or Dean's Office).
- Urgent safeguarding measures are implemented (e.g. modification of academic or working conditions).
- These are ordered in conjunction with the opening of the formal disciplinary process (investigation) and only where they are strictly necessary to safeguard the person who experienced harm.
- The investigation is initiated by the Dean or Rector.
- Preventive suspension of the person who caused harm for a specified period may be implemented. They have the right to challenge the process.
- Gender secretariats or offices at the faculty level do not intervene in the proceedings and act only in a monitoring capacity. All decisions and resolutions are made at the university level.
- In many cases, alongside a formal complaint, the person who experienced harm and the person who caused harm may also be involved in a parallel judicial process through the courts.
- Following the investigation, a range of sanctions may be imposed, from temporary suspension to expulsion.

The main findings that emerged during fieldwork are discussed in detail in the next section.

Main findings

This section presents key findings from fieldwork conducted in Argentina, beginning with the role broader feminist activism played in the development and implementation of the SGBV protocol in our case study faculty.

Feminist activism driving the SGBV protocols in Argentine HE as a tool for change

The data strongly underscores the catalytic role of feminist activism and the *Ni Una Menos* movement in Argentina. The movement's impact was far-reaching, extending into HE and compelling universities to take action on SGBV, even in cases where institutional actors previously lacked commitment or political will on gender issues. This broader context of feminist mobilisation generated a sense of urgency that drove institutional decision-makers across the HE sector to act, as seen below:

[T]here was a moment when it was impossible not to do something. The demand was 'enough violence in the university'. And that forced people, decision-makers, who even if they weren't convinced or didn't particularly care about this agenda, to have to do something. *Ni Una Menos*, in that sense, was a catalyst, it was the trigger for that. So, in the face of that urgency—since feminism has always had organisational capacity, and in this country. (N13/419, academic)

The above reflects a key dynamic of feminist institutionalism, whereby external pressure—particularly from social movements—can disrupt institutional inertia and create openings for change in policy and practice. In Argentina, *Ni Una Menos* functioned as a critical juncture, transforming SGBV from a marginal concern into both a national and institutional imperative, while simultaneously drawing on the long-standing, historically embedded organisational capacity of Argentina's feminist movement.

In their initial stages, efforts to address SGBV in HE were centred on building networks to explore institutional responses to different forms of SGBV, facilitate knowledge exchange, and support the development and implementation of SGBV protocols across universities. These efforts were strengthened through the mobilisation of existing feminist networks and long-standing relationships between feminist groups and colleagues, as illustrated in the following quote:

[I]t was like a whole network of discussions and things in which we discussed among ourselves and we went to discuss with our colleagues, often asking for help from [other] organisations that were a bit more formed as trade unions, that already had some kind of tools or protocols, and I remember that it was a complicated issue. (N06/412, activist)

Participants from our case study faculty described how, during this time, they strategically instrumentalised certain relationships within the university to advance gender-related work and initiate institutional change around addressing SGBV. These alliances were not only interpersonal but also connected to the national climate of feminist mobilisation, as the following indicates:

So I knew the institution very well, I knew the students' demands and I could respond to them, I knew my feminist colleagues and those who researched gender issues, I knew the authorities. I put myself forward, which is why I don't want to personalise it, but in my case, the example serves to show that I made my capital, which was my network, available to the management. So, it was easy for me to call someone, and my own network brought me closer to other people. (N03/409, academic)

By situating their efforts within the wider context of sociopolitical mobilisation, the feminist staff members in the case study faculty involved in developing and implementing the SGBV protocol were able to garner broader support and legitimacy for their work, thereby strengthening its impact. A feminist lens also provided the analytical tools and political impetus to embed gender perspectives into faculty infrastructure, including pedagogical practices (as discussed in '[Pedagogical interventions as preventing SGBV](#)').

Feminist networks also played a key role in developing the protocol within the case study faculty. One participant described how a colleague within their feminist network connected them with someone at another university who had already developed a protocol. This protocol subsequently became the foundation for the protocol currently in place at the case study institution. The excerpt below highlights not only the value of this form of knowledge-sharing, but also the emotional support that participants received through feminist networks:

[Another] University was very important. I knew [a colleague there] from teaching with her [...], and she told me, 'Hey, here [...] there is a specific person who works on protocol in her political group and then at the university'. In 2014, when this didn't even exist, she put me in touch [...] and that's where I learned from her. So, in my particular case, what I can say is that I had professional and also emotional ties at my disposal, [...] emotional in a network that provided me with support, which I always prioritised and recognised. And I think that everything I did was because it was possible to do it that way, otherwise there was no way, because there was no one who was really interested in this subject. (N13/419, academic)

Some students from a political grouping [...] knew the people in [the other university]. So they brought that protocol over. We adapted it—asked, 'What do we do now?'—and organised discussion workshops in the faculty. That's how the process of drafting the local protocol began. (N13/419, academic)

The impact of networks formed through feminist movements on the implementation of the protocol within the case study faculty cannot be overstated. Participants consistently drew on their feminist networks to learn from one another and to share knowledge.

I would say that everything that was achieved was achieved, as I said before, by building a network, by the prior knowledge that those of us who participated in these spaces had, by a lot of willpower and persistence. (N13/419, academic)

This learning extended beyond the protocol and immediate responses to incidents of SGBV and included data collection and evidence-building to strengthen institutional approaches. For example, participants drew on resources and expertise within feminist networks to develop and conduct surveys on gender-based violence and discrimination based on gender or sexuality within the faculty. These surveys were part of broader,

evidence-informed efforts to understand and respond to students' and staff members' experiences. The survey was then passed to colleagues from other universities within the network:

[F]our surveys had been conducted so far [...] What we set out to do when we thought about it in 2016, and only did in 2019, was to identify the most common situations of violence at the university, right? We're not here to prevent femicide, thankfully, but there are situations of violence in everyday life, and we wanted to know what they were. There was a previous experience at the [other] University, which had conducted a survey. That survey was later improved [...], and we took it from there, and then [...] [others] also took it. (N03/409, academic)

Now that we have established the importance of feminist activism and networks in shaping the development and implementation of the protocol, in the next section, we discuss how the protocol works in practice.

The role and function of the protocol

Below, we discuss how the protocol works in practice, the common misunderstandings people in the university have about the protocol, and how it works additionally to—and separate from—the university's administrative disciplinary procedure.

As outlined in '[About the case study site](#)', the protocol constitutes an internal university process for responding to specific incidents of SGBV—including sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and sexist behaviour—through informal and non-punitive mechanisms. This operates alongside a separate formal administrative disciplinary process, which relies on sanctions and punitive measures. While the protocol was developed at the university level, responsibility for its implementation was devolved to individual faculties, whereas the formal disciplinary process is administered centrally by the university. Below, a participant speaks about the holistic, non-punitive approach adopted by the protocol:

I think that, as the years went by, the focus was more on prevention and information. First, about what gender-based violence is within the faculty. Not only between us, at that time students, but also between teachers and students, between workers in the faculty, it's like a much wider world than just students and nothing else. And, also, as the years went by, it was like a more comprehensive response to these problems of violence. [A comprehensive sexual health counselling] was opened, and now I understand that the faculty has a new programme [on listening] [...] I understand that it is more about mental health in general, but it is a space for listening that is in the faculty. (N06/412, activist)

The quote above illustrates how the protocol moved beyond a sole focus on harm occurring within the student community, expanding its scope to address staff–student violence as well as harm experienced by non-academic workers within the faculty—experiences that are often obscured by a primary focus on students and academic staff. Central to the protocol was also collaboration with sexual health counselling and mental health services in order to develop a more holistic approach to addressing SGBV. Importantly, the protocol extended beyond the receipt of complaints to position 'listening' as a core practice in itself. This emphasis on listening as a form of care, recognition, and response is discussed in greater detail in '[Acompañamiento and listening as key components of support](#)'.

Data also shows how campaigns were created within the faculty to spread awareness about the protocol:

And then I remember that there was also an institutional campaign that was quite clear and concise, saying: if something happens to you, send an email here, someone will contact you immediately, and everything is anonymous, confidential [...] everything was very private and confidential, and it was only when you went to ask for some kind of help that the doors were opened (N06/412, activist)

Participants working within the Secretariat of Gender and Human Rights described how the holistic response to SGBV also prioritised non-punitive, pedagogical interventions and safeguarding, as elaborated in the extract below:

If it is a protocol case, then depending on the situation, we have two courses of action. One is what's called the 'special monitoring procedure' which was created because the protocol was approved in 2015 but updated in 2019. That reform included sexist incidents that weren't originally covered. These are situations that may not rise to the level of abuse or harassment but are still problematic in everyday life. The special monitoring procedure is [a] non-punitive measure, meant to correct the situation and has a pedagogical purpose.

And there are multiple options: requiring someone to take the gender course, reorganising class schedules so the parties don't coincide, supervising exam situations, and so on. If the situation is more serious or poses danger, we can impose urgent measures, to prevent certain types of contact. Alternatively, the person can choose to initiate a formal administrative complaint. (N14/420, focus group)

The above indicates the extent to which the protocol allows for a range of non-punitive, pedagogically oriented interventions tailored to the needs and preferences of the person who experienced harm. These measures—such as requiring the person who caused harm to participate in gender training, modifying timetables, or supervising academic interactions—are collectively designed to address, stop, and change harmful behaviours. Crucially, they prioritise continued access to education for all parties, including the person who caused harm, as discussed further in '[Non-punitive approaches](#)'.

Also evidenced in the data is the importance of feminist leadership to operationalising gender-related work or the protocol:

I don't think it's a coincidence that when a woman, in my view, a social worker, is in charge of the faculty, these policies actually began to be implemented and to carry real weight. When men were in charge, the approach was much more relaxed. They would say that something was being done, but when you looked into it, asked around, investigated—it had all come to nothing. (N05/411, activist)

The above aligns with assertions made by other participants, highlighting the risk of uneven implementation of protocol measures, depending on who is leading the work at the faculty or institutional level. In this case, participants have drawn these divisions along gendered lines; however, notwithstanding this contention, the importance of sustained feminist advocacy to ensure consistent implementation across the faculty is made clear.

Misplaced expectations of the protocol

Data also indicates the extent to which the university community has misunderstood the role and function of the protocol at various points during its development and implementation. One of the most significant areas of misunderstanding relates to the extent to which the protocol can or does fulfil a punitive function:

[I]n Argentina the university protocols have no legal force. They're administrative procedures; they don't have judicial power. [...] However, people tend to think of protocol as if they were judicial instruments. As if their function were to expel someone or ban them from setting foot in the university again [...] but that's not something a protocol can do—although the expectation is that they do. So, there's a judicial expectation in the protocol that the protocol itself does not have. (N13/419, activist)

[T]he protocol doesn't override the university's disciplinary system. It's an additional tool. If someone decides to file an administrative complaint, then a 'summary instructor' is appointed—a legal figure. With the 2019 reform, [the Secretariat's] role in that process became more significant: we can accompany, provide information, and so forth. But again, the protocol itself is not punitive. We don't impose sanctions. What matters most to us is applying special procedures, breaking harmful patterns and behaviours, rather than punishing for punishments sake. (N14/420, focus group)

Together, these excerpts illustrate the deliberate positioning of the protocol as a non-punitive mechanism that operates alongside, but does not replace, the university's formal disciplinary system. The protocol functions as a set of 'tools', oriented towards support, guidance, and behavioural transformation, thereby reflecting a commitment to transformative rather than carceral logics.

Regardless of the protocol's foundation in holistic, non-punitive, pedagogical interventions in SGBV, some staff and students believe it should be used to punish those who have caused harm and been reported. Some people within the university community believe that sanctions would themselves be reparative, as one activist discussed:

[F]or some people, punishment itself can be a form of reparation, and for others it's not. So, keeping that dimension in mind when proposing different ways to respond to a situation is important, right? That is, those responses go beyond what the protocol can offer—they're a major challenge. (N14/420, activist)

What is particularly notable here are the diverse ways in which individuals within the same institutional community understand justice, accountability, and reparation. For some, punitive outcomes may feel reparative, while for others they do not. This divergence underscores the inherent tension between a non-punitive framework and the varied expectations and needs of those affected SGBV and the wider faculty community. Taken together, these dynamics point to a central challenge for institutional responses to SGBV: while the protocol is grounded in principles of education, prevention, and behavioural change, it must also recognise and contend with the expectations of community members who may seek or anticipate punitive responses.

These differing perspectives highlight the complexity of implementing a non-punitive, feminist-informed approach to SGBV within an institutional environment shaped by legalistic procedures, entrenched cultural norms, and multiple understandings of justice.

The following section elaborates on the non-punitive measures employed and examines how they operate in practice.

Non-punitive approaches: responding to people who have caused harm

As mentioned, the protocol places a strong emphasis on non-punitive responses for people who have caused harm within the faculty setting, which primarily takes the form of education (as discussed in '[Pedagogical interventions as preventing SGBV](#)'). A key aspect of the faculty's response to individuals who have caused harm is focusing on facilitating behavioural and attitudinal change, so that those who have engaged in harmful conduct—typically cisgender heterosexual men—understand the impact of their actions and develop alternative, non-violent ways of relating to others.

This approach is grounded in the recognition that harmful or violence-supportive behaviours often stem from broader belief systems that are shaped by misogynistic, culturally embedded heteronormative patterns about gender and sexuality. By addressing these underlying structures, this approach seeks to foster reflection and accountability, rather than punishment and exclusion:

Firstly, I believe that if we are talking about a university protocol, it must be an educational tool. In other words, primarily educational. I fought hard for that. When the accused person is summoned, they must be summoned. This is not an interrogation, it is not the police, it is not the police station, it is not 144¹. But they have to be summoned to a conversation, to tell them if they approached a person who felt uncomfortable, who was affected, who is distressed by an action that [they] carried out [...]. If we are telling you this, it is because it is not appropriate, it is not appropriate in a university setting. (N03/409, academic)

The above underscores the centrality of an educational, rather than punitive ethos in the university's response to SGBV, aimed at cultivating a 'safer' faculty environment through learning, rather than coercion.

Alongside educational responses, the protocol also provides mental health support within the faculty for both the person who experienced harm and the person who caused harm. The protocol enables the person who caused harm to speak with staff in the Secretariat of Gender and Human Rights while processing their behaviour and what they are learning; this ensures that they are supported in the learning process:

But I think [the approach] has the strength of being able to think with that person [who has been reported of causing harm], to problematise perhaps for that purpose—so that it allows them, in the future, to be alert in certain situations, to understand that this is good, that maybe this isn't so good, or that this could end up harming other people. (N02/408, other employee)

Notable here is the emphasis on 'think[ing] with that person', thereby positioning the faculty's response as a collaborative process, in line with the principles of *acompañamiento* (discussed in '[Acompañamiento and listening as key components of support](#)'). This approach can play an important role in fostering greater awareness and facilitating the potential for long-term behavioural change.

This supportive, educational approach deliberately rejects carceral measures and instead positions the protocol as a pedagogical intervention grounded in a reflexive, dialogic praxis. This framing aligns with broader feminist critiques of carceral responses to SGBV, which argue that punitive systems often reproduce harms

¹ 144 Víctimas de Violencia is a free and confidential hotline offering information and support for people in Argentina facing domestic violence, issues of gender and sexual identity, family issues, sexual violence, and physical illness.

(Tapia Tapia, 2018) and fail to address the underlying norms that enable harmful behaviours, as the next quote shows:

But this debate, what can we really demand of the protocol? That it expels people? No, it's not going to do that, that happens through another channel [...]. In general, the harsher positions around this generate dissonance for me, the strong penal approach—not because there shouldn't be sanctions, but because I think about the possibilities of intervening in other ways. And again, not only for the person making the complaint, but also for the person being accused. (N13/419, academic)

Central to the above framing is the recognition that those who cause harm are part of the university community and must therefore be engaged in the broader project of cultural change, rather than excluded from it.

Even though responses to people who cause harm are educational in nature, the protocol still prioritises the safety and wellbeing of the person who experienced harm. This can take many different forms, including ensuring that they do not come into contact with one another, as described below:

[I]n some cases we have had to intervene so that they [the students concerned] don't share classes, so we set up mechanisms to ensure that neither party's right to study is affected; while ensuring they don't cross paths, etc.—in cases when they are students. Then, in some cases, we've had to intervene—especially with teaching or non-teaching staff—by changing workplaces and things like that. (N14/420, focus group)

This dual emphasis on safeguarding those who experience harm while creating opportunities for reflection and change among those who cause harm further embeds the protocol's holistic and pedagogical approach. All measures are implemented with the understanding that every member of the university community retains the right to education. Accordingly, interventions directed at those who cause harm must not undermine their access to study. This approach illustrates the careful balance the protocol seeks to maintain between accountability, prevention, and the protection of fundamental rights. As one participant, an activist, described it, this work involves balancing one person's right to education with another's right to a violence-free education (N14/420, activist).

In the next section, we continue our analysis of educational measures to respond to SGBV by examining faculty-wide pedagogical interventions in curricula as SGBV prevention.

Pedagogical interventions as preventing SGBV

An educational approach to SGBV is not only used to respond to incidents in the case study faculty after they occur, but also to prevent them in the first place. This prevention work involves integrating gender issues, or the 'gender perspective', across the curricula of all degree programmes offered by the faculty. Rather than locating gender as an elective or optional topic of study, gender is positioned as a foundational analytical and conceptual lens that should inform teaching and learning in every disciplinary area:

I remember that at one point we submitted a proposal to ensure that the gender perspective wouldn't only come into play when something bad happened and you had to go ask for help. We presented [...] a [feminist network of courses], and it included courses with a gender perspective that anyone in the faculty, from any degree programme, could take without having to do any paperwork or go through any

process. And it was cool because it brought that perspective into the academic space, involved professors, and led to the emergence of other initiatives. (N06/412, activist)

Course content is strongly informed by feminist activism, theory, and praxis, and access to the course(s) is not restricted to a particular programme or student cohort. This broad accessibility maximised the capacity for change while also developing broad-based foundational understandings of SGBV, gender relations, and feminist perspectives across the whole faculty community. One of the ways the faculty accomplished this was through creating a feminist network of courses:

[Feminist network of courses] was the best policy we came up with because, apart from being long-lasting, it was later copied by other departments [...] I saw that there were a lot of teachers working on similar topics, and the difficulty that the faculty has in thinking of itself as a faculty, and not as five degree programmes, all that was resolved by creating this circuit, which was filled with students in interdisciplinary classrooms. So that was a Trojan horse, because no one was interested in that project, but they approved it, and it really transformed the discussions in the degree programme meetings, because all the degree programmes wanted to have a subject. It transformed what was happening in the classrooms, and it transformed the faculty. (N03/409, academic)

This embedding of a gendered lens within all curricula serves multiple functions. It raises awareness of the issues addressed by the protocol and supports critical engagement with gender-related issues more broadly. It also serves as a key mechanism for SGBV prevention, enabling an approach that moves beyond a purely reactive one. Together, these efforts facilitate longer-term attitudinal and cultural change, both within the institution and beyond:

I think that introducing the discussion [about gender and SGBV] into the curriculum and the classroom was key, because all of us who participated in those groups had feminist training and or activism. And that was what transformed everything. (N03/409, academic)

Locating cultural and behavioural change work within pedagogical approaches enhances the collective capacity for responding to SGBV as it involves all actors within the faculty community. This includes teaching staff, non-teaching staff, students, and trade union representatives. Such a model reinforces the notion that cultural transformation is a shared, collective responsibility rather than the domain of a single unit or specialist team, but (as discussed in '[Barriers to policy implementation and institutional change](#)') this must be accompanied by adequate and sustainable resourcing:

I think something that would have been great, but I couldn't do it because I lacked the resources, is to create a 'bank of experiences', of what happens in each degree programme—which is a lot. [A] 'bank of experiences' that highlights what does exist and the efforts of the people who do it, of the departments that do it, and that also serves as inspiration. Because it happened to me a lot that teachers would say to me, 'I want to include the gender perspective in the subject and I don't know how to do it', and, well, the truth is that I wasn't a source of answers for everything either. If someone from [a certain degree course] came to me, then I would show them [what] exists and is available and that others can copy it—in a good way. (N03/409, academic)

The account above signals an ongoing demand for guidance among teaching staff, many of whom express a willingness to incorporate a gender perspective but lack concrete models or discipline-specific knowledge to do so in practice. This account also points to the need to preserve institutional memory of this work, prompting calls for initiatives such as a 'bank of experience'—a structured and accessible repository of resources that would enable more equitable knowledge-sharing, reduce reliance on a small number of feminist academics,

and strengthen capacity-building across the faculty. Such a repository would also serve to recognise the often-invisible labour undertaken by staff in relation to SGBV and act as a practical tool for those seeking to integrate gender perspectives into their teaching (we discuss resource issues in greater detail in '[Barriers to policy implementation and institutional change](#)').

In all, the case study faculty utilised pedagogy as a method to prevent SGBV in several ways: it integrated gender content across the curricula of all degree programmes and engaged with feminist theory and praxis. In doing so, the faculty makes preventing SGBV and understanding gender-related issues a collective responsibility. Though resourcing remains a challenge, embedding a gender perspective throughout the faculty's curricula contributed to cultural change. While this section examined pedagogical interventions as preventive work, the next section examines some core ways in which faculty responded to SGBV following reports.

Acompañamiento and listening as key components of support

Data indicates the centrality of *acompañamiento* as a central pillar in the case study faculty's response to SGBV; *acompañamiento* is a concept that extends far beyond the direct English translation of the word, which is 'accompaniment' (for more information regarding this concept, see Instituto Internacional de Acompañamiento, 2023). In this context, *acompañamiento* refers to a practice more closely aligned with notions of holistic support and/or pedagogical mentoring (Oñate Bastidas et al., 2025; Sánchez & López-Yáñez, 2022), depending upon the circumstances in which it is delivered.

Common across definitional understandings is the notion that *acompañamiento* is a relational practice involving 'walking alongside' a person as they navigate a difficult or emotionally challenging experience. The following quote illustrates this framing:

So, I think there is something about support [*acompañamiento*], containment, listening, that is fundamental. And at least for three actors: for the one who receives the complaint, for the one who makes it, and for the person who is reported. And I also think about forms of collective support. [...] That is, supports that are symbolic or emotional, but also economic. (N13/419, academic)

The above foregrounds the importance of relational, well-resourced support that prioritises listening first and foremost for the person who experienced harm, but also for those receiving the complaint—including the teams that case-manage complaints—and for the person who caused harm. This type of approach incorporates a holistic understanding of institutional responsibility and reflects a broader feminist commitment to relationality, recognising that harm and its resolution are emotionally laborious and should occur within a community rather than in isolation from the broader faculty ecosystem. The next extract indicates what this listening looks like in practice:

It's much more a conversation with her [the person who experienced harm]: is she in agreement, is this what she wants, does she feel comfortable with this resolution, does she want to say something more. [...] I think part of the work, and something positive to highlight, is that this is a safe, trustworthy space that provides a response—that also gives an institutional response, in this case to the report, to the complaint that is brought. (N14/420, focus group)

In fact, the intervention is often more about her [the person who experienced harm]: for example, being able to move him to another class, so that she can stay, or if she wants to stay or wants to change. I think there's also something in the protocol conceived not in a punitive way, but more as an integral approach. It is a strategy, not a penal code. (N14/420, focus group)

As the above extracts indicate, the person who experienced harm is at the centre of the response delivered, ensuring that their experience and interests remain central to the process and any action taken. This is coupled with the creation of a 'safer' space in which the person who experienced harm can articulate their needs, an approach underpinned by a recognition of their capacity to make decisions and to contribute to shaping the faculty response.

In *acompañamiento*, as walking alongside someone, these accounts also reflect a broader faculty commitment to fostering the agency of the person who experienced harm within institutional procedures. It means being present for the person seeking support—listening to them, providing a space for them to be heard, and enabling them to develop solutions themselves rather than simply directing or determining solutions on their behalf:

[I]nstitutional paternalism doesn't solve things either. I don't want to be a feminist for that either. I don't want to be a feminist to multiply the spaces where people have to go to ask for help. Institutions should also be able to regulate themselves. People who feel uncomfortable should be able to put a stop to it. And those who make others uncomfortable should understand that it is not appropriate. (N03/409, academic)

This extract represents a departure from a more paternalistic response to SGBV, driven by patriarchal protectionism, while simultaneously resisting any notion of feminist praxis that reproduces dependency on the institution or undermines the agency of the person who experienced harm, including the agency to help themselves if provided the requisite (institutional) support to do so. Also notable are concerns about the potential for institutional 'overreach' and the risk of bureaucratic expansion, which would, in turn, undermine the feminist aims and principles underpinning the protocol more broadly.

This approach also emphasises the importance of decentralised, feminist-informed strategies of prevention and accountability. In line with assertions made by others from the case study site, this participant also strongly endorses a pedagogical approach that enables people who have caused harm to recognise and understand why their conduct is harmful and to modify it, accordingly, as discussed in the next section.

Escraches and the politics of naming

Even where options for resolution exist, justice—as experienced and felt by individuals—may remain elusive for some who have been harmed. In this section, we examine how individuals have gone beyond the university's existing mechanisms—whether the informal protocol or the formal administrative disciplinary process—to draw attention to incidents of harm that they felt were not adequately addressed by the university.

In recent years, some parts of the feminist movement have adopted *escraches* as a mechanism for accountability and performative justice. In Argentine *lunfardo*, (a slang language developed and used by the working classes in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the Río de la Plata region) the term *escrachar* refers to the act of 'bringing to light what is hidden' or 'exposing what power conceals' (Grupo de Arte Callejero,

2020). In practice, *escraches* are broadly defined as public acts of shaming or denunciation directed at the state and/or its officials and are used by some groups as a tool for cultivating institutional and social accountability (Popescu, 2021).

Escraches emerged as a tool used by activists in the 1990s, shaped by the legacy of Argentina's dictatorships (Kaiser, 2002, 2024). Individuals who had experienced harm, alongside activists, mobilised to challenge state impunity by removing the anonymity of known people who had harmed and imposing a form of 'social sentence' where the legal system had failed. In the context of HE, the data reveals significant tensions regarding the role *escraches* can or should play in responding to—or naming—people who have caused harm. These tensions arise from uncertainties surrounding the legitimacy of *escraches* as a reparative practice, as well as concerns about their potential unintended consequences.

Naming people who have caused harm

While the protocol has been successful in many respects, participants described particular difficulties in cases involving members of staff—especially senior professors or other individuals in positions of authority. One participant highlighted how *escraches* have been used in the faculty following the lack of protocol action in one case:

So the practice of naming—of publicly identifying those untouchable figures — emerged as a response to that. To target those whom the protocol never reached. And yes, that's another meaning of *escrache*: to name the powerful. The dean of a faculty, a secretary, a prestigious professor—those who were seen as untouchable [*intocable*], beyond suspicion. [...] when you reach the stage of public naming, it's because everything else has already failed. Because even in the case of one professor from this faculty being denounced like that, after he was reported, everyone started saying, oh I had heard, yes, it was known, there was a rumour that [...] And yet nothing ever set off any alarms. [...] I can't stop thinking that [naming is] also the expression of a failure—of a missed possibility for those involved to process it in another way. (N13/419, academic)

The framing of naming as an expression of institutional failure highlights how people fail to mobilise the protocol when the person who caused harm occupies a position of power, as in the case of the professor mentioned in the above quote.

In such instances, public naming through mechanisms such as *escraches* may be perceived by some as a means of restoring accountability or achieving a sense of justice, as the following extract suggests:

This is a foundation, let's say, to repudiate the impunity of people who were living their lives comfortably, without condemnation, leaving their homes, more relaxed than me, so, well, on the one hand, it made me re-evaluate the act, put it in a context, let's say, more determinedly professorial, the tool of *escraches*. (N14/420, activist)

This quote highlights the ambivalence surrounding public naming practices through *escraches*, illustrating the tensions between collective accountability, institutional failure, and the limitations of the protocol and formal mechanisms. Here, the use of *escraches* is regarded as a last resort when institutions fail to act or when informal cultures of silence permit harmful behaviour to persist.

But while they may be viewed as effective tools for some people who have experienced harm or activists in contexts of institutional neglect and accountability, they also expose the limits of community capacity to

address harm without publicly naming those who harm.

Naming people building the SGBV protocol

These limits and tensions become especially apparent when considering the experiences of participants who themselves were subjected to *escraches* while actively working to address SGBV through the development and implementation of the faculty's protocol and dedicated offices. This includes women faculty members involved in work to challenge SGBV within the faculty, highlighting how the use of *escraches* is not limited to individuals named as people who have caused harm:

Later, they began *escrachando* officials, the gender office staff—the ones processing the reports. They were *escrachadas* for 'not responding'. When there was an institutional process, it took time for people to accept it, to wait, we [...] Unfortunately, it takes time. (N13/419, academic)

It was a real challenge, it was a very lonely job, and all of us who were in those places were publicly shamed [*escrachadas*], because the community felt that little was being done, the protocols are not expulsive, nor do they apply sanctions, and yet that is what was being asked for. So, if you didn't expel the accused student or the accused official, you were an accomplice, you were publicly shamed [*te escrachaban*]. (N03/409, academic)

So those people [...] [became] very burned out, very exhausted, very disillusioned, very [...] because they were caught in that double tension: immediate demands for answers from the actors, and delays, waiting, lack of support from [...] not all, but many of those making decisions. (N13/419, academic)

The deployment of *escraches* in this context can undermine the aims and objectives of the SGBV protocol, while also revealing the complexities and contradictions inherent in practices of public naming. In the excerpts above, *escraches* function as a form of backlash against feminist policy-makers when their actions or decisions do not align with the expectations or demands of the wider faculty community, including—but not limited to—student activists.

These tensions are intensified by several factors: the inability to communicate details about case progress or actions taken due to confidentiality requirements and the need to centre the person who experienced harm; and the absence of visible punitive outcomes expected by some members of the university community, which were beyond the scope of the protocol (as discussed in '[The role and function of the protocol](#)') or not desired by the person who experienced harm. Participants also highlighted a lack of resources to enable more effective communication with the wider community or to sustain awareness-raising around the protocol—both of which were seen as crucial for building trust and managing expectations.

These dynamics expose the emotional, material, and political costs borne by those working to address SGBV at both policy and practice levels. They also highlight the importance of institutional mechanisms that respond in timely, proportionate, and accountable ways to those who have experienced harm, thereby reducing the likelihood that public naming or *escraches* come to function as substitutes for institutional action.

Escraches and intersectionality

Another contention that emerged in the data centred on the extent to which *escraches* can collapse different forms of harm into a single category, while also failing to account for the intersectional factors that shape behavioural norms or expectations, as the following alludes to:

I remember interviewing a student about this topic. He told me, 'And they *escrached* me because, in an assembly, it's true, when I was arguing with a female classmate, I shouted'. He said, 'I shouted because that's how we argue in assemblies', and he said to me, 'I shout because at home, in my neighbourhood, people shout'. [...] He was a guy who was a shoemaker, working eight hours a day in a shoe factory, from a working-class background. [...] And he said to me, 'They *escrached* me, and made me take a course on "new masculinities"'. (N13/419, academic)

The extract above shows how certain classed modes of communication and political participation can, at times, be complicated by discourses of 'acceptable' behaviour that are separated out from the intersectional aspects of people's lives. This issue is further complicated by the disproportionate application of accountability measures, with individuals occupying positions of authority seemingly less likely to be subject to *escraches* or formalised protocol measures (as discussed in '[Barriers to policy implementation and institutional change](#)').

Corroborating this point further, another participant recounted a situation where someone in a position of authority within a student trade union was subject to an *escrache*, but no action was taken against him at the level of the faculty or the union:

And there were also other situations of violence that *compañeras*, within the logic of activism, managed to make visible as violence. And the faculty didn't act either, because you had all the [...] buildings plastered with posters naming men who supposedly committed violence, but nothing happened. (N05/411, activist)

It is situations such as the one described above that often give rise to the use of *escraches*, as members of the faculty or trade union community reach a point where continued inaction or impunity becomes intolerable. However, the limitations of publicly naming in the absence of institutional intervention are also visible in this extract, indicating that increased awareness and public naming of individuals do not necessarily trigger formal processes or safeguarding measures via the protocol or otherwise. These actions also risk delegitimising both activist efforts and institutional mechanisms, as neither appears capable of producing tangible change.

In contrast, when institutional mechanisms are regarded as adequate by members of the faculty community, the perceived need for *escraches* is significantly reduced:

I don't know if the *escraches* stopped working or not, for me they stopped being a tool, but because others appeared. (N06/412, activist)

And we don't have proof of this, but, we've observed that where the protocols worked best, the levels of *escraches* were lower. I mean, when institutional policies can be close to the actors involved—support, respond—that reduces the noise, let's say. (N13/419, academic)

The extracts above substantiate the notion that when a functional, trusted protocol is in place, the need for alternative mechanisms to address SGBV, such as *escraches*, is significantly reduced. However, the presence of a protocol alone is insufficient to drive the broader cultural change required to address SGBV across the faculty. Meaningful transformation is contingent upon sustained, nuanced awareness-raising and capacity-building efforts that equip the faculty community with the knowledge, confidence, and skills to recognise, prevent, and respond to SGBV. These measures must accompany the work of handling and responding to complaints, as detailed in the following section.

Awareness-raising and capacity-building

Data from the case study site highlighted the importance of collective ownership and shared responsibility for cultivating and sustaining an effective institutional response to SGBV, which is achieved in large part via a coordinated programme of awareness-raising and capacity-building activities across the faculty. This work included a range of activities, as the following shows:

[T]here were some more institutional ones [awareness-raising courses], like the compulsory course, [the feminist circuit], the proliferation of postgraduate courses, diploma courses, a lot of them emerged; masculinities, gender and sport, and they all touched on violence and so on. [...] The teachers' unions also began to set up gender commissions, to work with teachers and non-teachers. (N13/419, academic)

In addition to the measures outlined above, a range of initiatives support the practical implementation of the protocol and broader prevention work. These include a mandatory protocol workshop for faculty officials, members of the governing council, and programme directors. Training sessions are routinely delivered following changes in leadership, while teacher training programmes also incorporate gender-related topics as part of ongoing efforts to strengthen institutional capacity. Historically, these initiatives have been complemented by collaboration with former government members and coordination with faculty-level student bodies.

The Gender Unit and the Secretariat of Gender and Human Rights employ a range of mechanisms to disseminate information about, and raise awareness of, the protocol. Participants described several measures currently in use, including:

- Dissemination through faculty social media and faculty-wide weekly email communications, which regularly highlight the protocol,
- Communication with staff and students, including featuring the protocol in welcome emails to new staff and students—both sent by individual degree programmes and more institutional communications at the programme level,
- Placement of stickers with QR codes linking to information about the protocol in classrooms, at faculty headquarters, in management and administrative buildings, student centre spaces, cafeterias, and other campus spaces,
- Information points at building entrances where students can access information about the protocol,
- Circulation of flyers through various faculty WhatsApp groups,
- Use of different moments and contexts to raise awareness of the protocol—for example, drawing on high-profile cases in the media about SGBV to prompt discussion with students and staff about the protocol through events and workshops,
- Use of roles within student practice centres—such as social work clinics, law clinics, or counselling clinics—to engage students in understanding the protocol,
- Ongoing collaboration with the student centre and the students' union.

As seen in this list, the implementation of the protocol involved all members of the faculty community, extending beyond a small group of specialist actors or a dedicated team. Activism led by students and staff also played a crucial role in collective ownership for awareness-raising:

When the protocol emerged, for example, in our faculty, the political student organisations, activists, many of them printed the protocol and put together their own 'pocket protocol'. Like the people who hand out little bibles in the subway [...]. Well, the students printed out protocols and it was, 'take your pocket protocol'. In other words, 'you know what to do if it happens'. So, on the one hand, activism was an ally in distributing the protocol, making it known, making people aware that it exists. It was also an ally in demanding the implementation of the protocol [...]. (N13/419, academic)

[T] here was a lot of activism from the student organisations that had been involved in the issue. I also remember that groups were set up [...] it was like a group of faculty authorities, teachers and students, where there were people who were obviously trained in the subject, and it was open to the whole community, especially students, who were always the largest group, to find out about the protocol, to get trained, to ask the questions they had to ask. (N06/412, activist)

This democratised diffusion of knowledge, in which all members of the faculty community are equipped with information on how to respond when someone discloses experiences of SGBV, reflects a decentralised, community-based model of support. This approach is grounded in principles of horizontal governance, standing in contrast to the hierarchical and bureaucratic structures that typically characterise university settings.

Also notable is the involvement of diverse representatives from across the faculty community in the Gender Unit, alongside the establishment of Protocol Promoter Teams. These teams are tasked with building awareness of the protocol and equipping students and staff with the tools to respond more effectively to their peers, regardless of professional or disciplinary background:

There was something great that the faculty did with this group of promoters [promotoras] [...]—it's like the protocol was shared and everyone took ownership of it. Maybe I wasn't a trained psychologist who could help someone, but I knew what I had to do and what I had to say to support someone. It felt like we were all part of it, and for me, that was really great—like we all advocated for it, in a way, even those who weren't part of any political group. For me, that was really good at the time, for spreading awareness about these things—and it also helped push other changes forward. (N06/412, activist)

A lot of effort was then put into further developing the prevention component, the more educational side, with workshops that were open to the community, which had a lot of turnout. And the idea of establishing a network of 'promoters' was to make it more open and participatory, not just something akin to a judicial process [...] So there was a whole process of work, but that took place over years. (N14/420, activist)

The above accounts illustrate how the faculty's coordinated approach fostered a sense of collective ownership and shared responsibility in addressing SGBV. This helped to create a 'safer' institutional environment, as the two extracts allude to. This is because rather than limiting responsibility to specialists, the protocol facilitated the development of basic skills, confidence, and awareness among a broad set of actors, enabling a wider network of informal first responders.

Ultimately, this collective 'buy-in' contributed not only to awareness-raising but also to driving change within the faculty. Moreover, the support mechanisms within the faculty were more effective because they were embedded within the everyday spaces students and staff occupy. In the next section, substantive barriers to achieving this type of change and policy implementation are discussed.

Barriers to policy implementation and institutional change

While the protocol has made significant strides in addressing SGBV, it is not without its challenges. In this section, we examine some of the barriers to policy and institutional change identified by our participants.

Resourcing

The most significant challenge faced by employees in the case study faculty is one of resources. While the faculty fully endorses the protocol and its aims, there is a dearth of resourcing to implement it, especially in the longer term, as the quotes below illustrate:

But the resources were essentially just the salaries of the people involved, which in some cases came with pretty aggressive restrictions, let's say. And what didn't exist then—and still doesn't today—is a specific budget allocation, a dedicated budget line for the work. (N08/414, activist)

But in the concrete reality of day-to-day life, there were no resources in the universities. In other words, I was not paid for that work, nor was anyone else paid for that work. (N09/415, academic)

This has created a situation where there are institutional and bureaucratic structures in place to address SGBV, but which are almost entirely reliant on the largely free labour of individual (feminist) faculty members willing to design and take this work forward:

They appointed feminists, who of course were committed to the cause, and [they] thought: if this is a demand, a debt, how could I not [...] But then everything was done without money, without teams, so there weren't enough people to listen, to accompany [*acompañamiento*], to accompany those who were themselves accompanying. And all of this, I think, was a very flawed process in its implementation. (N13/419, academic)

I think a lot of things are missing. First, there's no budget. I mean, you can't think about change without a budget, but for me, one of the things that's missing is staff, someone who can accompany those processes. And without a budget, that's not going to happen. I mean, you can have all the political goodwill in the world to try to make changes. But if you don't have the material resources, you're very limited. (N05/411, activist)

In many cases, it was about pulling from our own pockets to cover certain costs—obviously not everything, because we couldn't—but still, it was all pretty informal, with personal contributions from authorities who'd say, 'this proposal is great, let's do it. How? With what money?' So, it was all very, very 'uninstitutional', and obviously dependent on the goodwill of those in charge. (N14/420, activist)

Taken together, these extracts indicate that implementation of the protocol often required staff members to take on responsibility for leading this work in addition to their existing roles. This placed significant pressure on those tasked with supporting people who had experienced harm. Participants also described how processes of securing funding and institutionalisation involved extensive, ongoing bureaucracy that diverted time and energy from the core work of addressing SGBV and transforming institutional cultures. At times, this bureaucratisation was experienced as contributing to the depoliticisation of what had originated as activist work.

Our findings further reflect a pattern observed across other fieldwork sites, whereby institutional management implicitly expects certain faculty members to provide not only material resources, including financial contributions, but also substantial non-material resources, often without receiving adequate support themselves. This dynamic speaks to a broader discourse that frequently shapes institutional spaces, in which feminist labour is assumed to be voluntary, inexhaustible, and self-sustaining. Such expectations place a considerable emotional burden on staff and create unsustainable conditions for those engaged in feminist work within the university.

Lack of intersectionality

Beyond resourcing, several participants noted a lack of intersectionality in understanding SGBV, implementing the protocol, and embedding gender content throughout all curricula. One academic discussed this issue as follows:

When I was doing research, everyone was calling for a gender perspective, but it was not so clear what the gender perspective was. When I talked to students, for example, 'gender perspective' often meant simply 'including women authors'. (N13/419, academic)

In the faculty, 'gender' was often conflated with 'women'. This resulted in the persistence of binarised and heteronormative understandings of gender (i.e. that there are only two genders, men and women, and people are assumed to be heterosexual):

Something that was under-addressed in the protocols, a blind spot in the existing protocols [was] that they had become very womanist [mujeristas] —based on the model 'a woman always suffers violence perpetrated by a man' [...] if you read the letter of the protocol and you are thinking less about intersectionality, it was more about the urgency of this—the violence—gender-based violence, in the context of violence against women. (N13/419, academic)

Conflating gender with women also meant that there was an overwhelming focus on violence against women, which marginalised other experiences of SGBV, including those experienced by people other than women and those experienced by LGBTQIA+ people. Participants stressed the need for a broader and more intersectional understanding not only of gender itself, but also of SGBV, throughout the faculty.

Uneven application of the protocol

Another notable barrier to change concerns a perceived 'double standard' regarding how the protocol operates and who it can 'work' for. In other words, if an individual who occupied a position of power harmed someone else, the powerful person often faced limited or no consequences, as the following indicates:

It was also very difficult to make the cases work, because when situations arose with professors or well-known people, the protocol did not work. (N03/409, academic)

There's an expression in Argentina, *perejiles*, right? It refers to 'anonymous people', students, the weak. Now, if there's a strong, powerful person who is reported, the protocol takes its time, it doesn't reach them [...] It is the idea that the tool works for the weak but not for the strong. (N13/419, academic)

These extracts highlight a critical limitation in the protocol's operation, stemming from its uneven application and efficacy, which depend on the institutional power of the person who caused harm. Also evident are the

structural barriers that impede accountability for those occupying positions of authority, suggesting that the protocol and formal mechanisms, while ostensibly universal, may be selectively applied or rendered ineffective when they threaten established hierarchies or reputational interests.

Additionally, the second quote reinforces this assertion through the use of the term *perejiles*, a colloquial expression referring to anonymous or low-status individuals. This comparison highlights the perceived double standard communicated by others in this case study, thereby undermining trust in institutional responses and reinforcing perceptions of impunity. They also help explain why alternative mechanisms of accountability (e.g. *escraches*) may emerge when institutional processes are seen as incapable of addressing harm committed by powerful actors (as discussed in '[Escraches and the politics of naming](#)').

Following this same line of argument, one participant described a situation when someone from within one of the student trade unions in the faculty, in a position of power, had been found to cause harm, but was protected:

We thought about strategies, and the strategies were to remove him from the organisation [the trade union], to get rid of him, I don't know. But he ended up leaving only because he didn't want to comply, not because the organisation decided to expel him. They told us, no, that's not going to happen, because he had the potential to be an important figure for the organisation, so they didn't want to cut him loose. Their response was, 'we'll pay for his therapy'. And I was like, paying for therapy isn't enough, I don't want him near us, he can't be with us. So, he left the organisation, but more by his own choice, not because the organisation took action. (N05/411, activist)

The above suggests a lack of action against the person who has harmed, because the trade union organisation perceived him as having future value and potential importance. This suggests that calculations about talent, influence, or strategic value may override commitments to safety and accountability, particularly when the person who caused harm is viewed as an asset rather than a liability (for more on how these dynamics operate in other HE systems, such as the UK, see Phipps, 2020).

Taken together, the excerpts above highlight a critical tension regarding the uneven application of the protocol, shaped in part by the role and status of the person who had caused harm, and its limited capacity to address entrenched power dynamics operating within the faculty. This exposes a structural inequality in which power and institutional position influence not only whose reports are taken seriously, but also how swiftly and rigorously procedures are enacted. Such dynamics point to the hierarchical and protective cultures that characterise many academic institutions, a pattern also observed across our other fieldwork sites.

Ultimately, insufficient resourcing for protocol implementation within the faculty, limited intersectional understandings of SGBV and gender, and the uneven application of the protocol emerged as significant barriers to the effective implementation of policy.

Lessons for other HE institutions worldwide

Develop a comprehensive victim-survivor-centred standalone policy to address SGBV

Universities should develop a comprehensive, victim-survivor-centred standalone policy to address SGBV. This policy must be grounded in a broad, intersectional understanding of SGBV and should not default to framing it solely as 'violence against women'. Instead, it should recognise SGBV as a range of harms that affect diverse groups of people, with experiences shaped by broader social structures such as race, sexual orientation, disability, class, and other intersecting axes of inequality.

The definition of SGBV must explicitly encompass the full spectrum of harm, extending beyond physical violence to include structural, psychological, economic, and moral forms of harassment.

The policy should also establish clear reporting and referral pathways, defined timelines, and robust confidentiality guarantees to ensure transparency, accessibility, and trust in institutional processes.

Figure 1 illustrates the protocol implementation structure at the case study site, including the intervention stages that are activated when a person who has experienced harm approaches the designated office for support.

Crucially, the policy must also include provisions for non-punitive responses centred on principles of transformative justice towards those who have caused harm, holistic wellbeing, and safeguarding. These approaches are discussed in detail in the points that follow.

Develop infrastructure beyond policy alone

While developing a comprehensive standalone policy is an important component of responding to and preventing SGBV in universities, it represents only one element of the broader work required to effect meaningful cultural change within institutions. Policy alone is insufficient to challenge entrenched gendered and sexual inequalities or to disrupt institutional hierarchies. Policy must therefore be supported by

Figure 2 illustrates how such infrastructure can be developed, drawing on the different offices and teams within the case study faculty in Argentina that worked collectively to respond to and prevent SGBV. These included the establishment of:

The Gender Unit (Interdisciplinary Group): composed of representatives from across the faculty community and responsible for integrating the protocol into everyday faculty practices, developing training programmes, designing pedagogical interventions across modules through an interdisciplinary gender perspective, and coordinating regular awareness-raising activities.

The Secretariat of Gender and Human Rights: responsible for implementing the protocol within the faculty, including receiving complaints, providing 'listening spaces', developing safeguarding measures, and delivering non-punitive responses to address harm.

Protocol Promoter Teams: tasked with promoting awareness of the protocol across the faculty.

Student Mental Health Programme: providing holistic mental health support and a 'listening space' for students.

Sexual Health Counselling Service: supporting students and delivering sexual health awareness initiatives.

Central Team: responsible for coordinating work around responding and preventing SGBV across faculties, facilitating knowledge exchange, and sharing best practices

coordinated systems that enable its implementation. This necessitates proactive, cross-institutional collaboration across the entire university community, involving students, academic staff, non-teaching staff, and trade unions.

In addition, all of the above offices worked closely with trade unions, students' unions, student centres, and other institutional bodies. This collaborative model reinforced the principle that responsibility for addressing and preventing SGBV does not sit with a single office, but is instead decentralised and collectively held. Such an approach reflects a holistic understanding of institutional responsibility and aligns with feminist commitments to relationality, recognising that harm and its resolution are emotionally labour-intensive processes that should unfold within a community rather than in isolation from the wider university ecosystem.

Embed listening and the principles of *acompañamiento* as a core institutional practice

Create accessible spaces where people can speak informally, share experiences, and be heard. These spaces should be open to everyone, involve minimal gatekeeping, and avoid complex or restrictive procedures. In practice, this means ensuring that access is not contingent on meeting strict criteria, such as the requirement for a person who experienced harm to file a formal complaint, but centring listening itself as a practice of recognition, justice, and care.

In keeping with this approach, universities should also be guided by the principles of *acompañamiento*—relational care, active listening, and 'walking alongside' those seeking support—in the development of everyday responses to SGBV and broader wellbeing practices. Embedding these principles can help foster an institutional culture grounded in empathy, respect, and shared responsibility for addressing SGBV, thereby enhancing the transformative potential of the university's response.

Move beyond punitive-only approaches and implement responses that centre transformation and healing

Policies and practices for addressing SGBV should not operate primarily as punitive mechanisms, but rather as tools for transformation grounded in intersectional feminist principles. Such an approach requires working not only with the person who has experienced harm, but also with the person who has caused it, ensuring that all actors are engaged in the process while always prioritising the wellbeing, safety, and interests of the person who was harmed. This should be accompanied by the principle that those who have experienced harm are actively involved in decisions about any actions taken in response to their complaint, should they wish to participate in the process.

Institutions should prioritise responses and interventions for those who cause harm that aim to transform embedded cultures and practices, rather than relying on punitive measures that often leave harmful heteronormative gender norms intact. This may involve developing and implementing gender-focused courses and training programmes for those who have caused harm, grounded in an intersectional, trans-inclusive feminist praxis and explicitly aimed at disrupting gender norms and fostering behavioural change.

As such, interventions should be intersectional and focused on producing meaningful attitudinal and behavioural change, enabling individuals to understand why their conduct was harmful and how it affected others. This could include establishing structures in which the person who caused harm engages in ongoing dialogue with designated, trained members of staff, allowing space to reflect on their behaviour and the learning emerging from the process. Such an approach supports individuals through the process of re-learning and accountability, positioning the faculty's response as a collaborative and relational process—aligned with the principles of *acompañamiento* discussed above—rather than an individualised or purely disciplinary one.

Alongside educational responses, universities must also provide mental health support to those who have caused harm.

Importantly, any measures introduced in response to harm must not undermine anyone's fundamental right to education.

Centre pedagogy in policy implementation, response, and prevention

Embedding an intersectional gender lens and engaging with gender issues within teaching and learning practices across all degree programmes, modules, and courses should be understood as a central component of efforts to address gender inequalities and SGBV at the institutional level.

Institutions must move away from treating gender and related issues as optional or marginal topics of study—often confined to elective modules—and instead recognise them as integral analytical frameworks relevant to all curricula and fields of study. Without such an approach, issues of gender and gender inequality risk being sidelined or positioned as mere 'add-ons' to existing courses, rather than as foundational to critical inquiry and learning. Engagement with the work and histories of feminist movements, theory, and praxis is a vital tool for conducting this work and challenging heteronormative institutional norms and practices that shape how SGBV is understood and addressed within the institution.

Curricular and pedagogical interventions should be intersectional and grounded in the recognition that gender is not binary, and that people beyond heterosexual women experience SGBV. Such approaches must also attend to the intersecting axes of oppression that shape experiences of harm, including race, class, disability, caste, nationality, and religion.

Engagement with this material should be meaningful, sustained, and embedded across the full range of degree programmes, and grounded in context-specific scholarship relevant to the institutional and sociopolitical environment in which the university is located. Institutions must avoid engaging with feminist agendas in symbolic or tokenistic ways, and instead commit to substantive, reflexive, and accountable forms of feminist engagement.

Gender-related teaching and programming must also be adequately resourced. Participants highlighted the value of establishing a repository of previously delivered content to enable the sharing of materials, formats, and pedagogical approaches with other faculty members seeking to implement similar initiatives. Such a repository would serve as an important mechanism for preserving institutional memory, reducing the burden placed on individual staff members, and supporting the sustainability of this work over the longer term.

Ensure continuous, multi-channel awareness-raising and training

Universities should commit to ongoing awareness-raising initiatives rather than relying on one-off or standalone campaigns or training sessions. Meaningful cultural change requires repetition, continuity, and long-term engagement. By embedding a culture of sustained and reflective learning—one that is responsive to emerging sociopolitical and contextual issues and attentive to the evolving needs of the university community—institutions can deepen understanding of SGBV, challenge harmful gender norms, and build capacity for prevention and support.

Continuous awareness-raising and training can also foster shared responsibility and help create an institutional environment in which respectful and equitable behaviours are more likely to emerge and become standard practice. In the case study faculty, participants described a range of practices used to support this work, including:

- Developing ongoing courses and training for students and staff at all levels,
- Organising workshops to engage staff and students on gender norms, rape culture, and SGBV on campus,
- Involving students' unions and trade unions in awareness-raising campaigns,
- Displaying posters with QR codes across university spaces linking to information about institutional SGBV resources and response pathways,
- Circulating flyers outlining available SGBV resources and support mechanisms,
- Disseminating information through social media platforms, including WhatsApp and faculty emails,
- Establishing fixed information points across the university campus.

Provide holistic wellbeing support and safeguarding

Universities should make provision for, and adequately resource, holistic mental health and wellbeing support. Such support should be available not only to those who have experienced harm, but also to those who have caused harm, as well as to staff and students engaged in work to address, prevent, and respond to SGBV.

Universities should ensure that health and wellbeing services, mental health provision, academic services, student services, and other relevant offices are closely connected in order to provide holistic and integrated support for all those affected by SGBV. Effective institutional responses require the coordinated integration of mental health support, therapeutic wellbeing services, and sexual and reproductive health provision, alongside routine engagement with academic services such as assessment and awards offices for students, and human resources for staff.

This coordination enables the provision of essential mental health support and safeguarding measures—including adjustments to class or examination schedules, changes to halls of residence, or modifications to office arrangements for staff members—as well as educational support such as academic mentoring, assignment extensions for students, or peer-support mechanisms for staff members.

By fostering collaboration across these areas, institutions are better positioned to establish smoother care pathways, reduce gaps in service provision, and enhance the overall effectiveness and accessibility of their prevention and response efforts.

Provide adequate and stable resources

Universities should allocate adequate financial and human resources to ensure that institutional responses to SGBV are robust and sustainable over the long term. Meaningful action on SGBV must not depend on the voluntary labour or goodwill of individual staff members, nor on ad hoc or unfunded initiatives. Instead, this work requires sustained investment in dedicated staffing, learning and development, coordinated response mechanisms, and support infrastructures. Stable resourcing is essential for maintaining effective protocols, sustaining care-based and relational pedagogical practices, and fostering the longer-term cultural and behavioural change necessary across the institution.

Build networks with other universities, unions, community groups, and broader feminist movements

Universities should aim to foster alliances with other HE institutions, unions (including trade and workers'), civil society organisations, and feminist movements to strengthen their SGBV response and promote cultures of mutual learning and solidarity. By developing cross-institutional and community-based networks, universities are better placed to share knowledge concerning policy, practice, and any learning from data, which together will build collective capacity and institutional learning. This type of collaboration supports a more coherent, evidence-based, inclusive approach to addressing SGBV, while also fostering cultures of mutual learning, solidarity, and shared responsibility.

Promote gender-aware citizenship

Universities should actively foster the development of socially responsible, gender-aware citizens, recognising their role in shaping future workplaces, public institutions, and communities. This is particularly important in political contexts where gender equality and the rights of gender and sexuality minorities are being increasingly undermined, and where anti-feminist, trans-exclusionary, and far-right discourses are gaining visibility and acceptance. Through curriculum design and teaching grounded in intersectional feminist pedagogies, supportive institutional cultures, and sustained awareness-raising initiatives, universities can better equip students and staff with the critical understanding, empathy, and skills needed to challenge harmful gendered and heteronormative attitudes that create the conditions for SGBV.

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