

# **SEXISM FREE NIGHT STANDARDS**

## **Gender-responsive criteria to prevent, detect and respond to sexism and sexualized violence in Nightlife environments**

**White Paper**



Co-funded by the Rights,  
Equality and Citizenship (REC)  
Programme of the European Union



This publication was developed by the Faculty of Education and Psychology of the Catholic University of Portugal (FEP-UCP) in the scope of the project Sexism Free Night, co-funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020).

**Author of the publication** – Cristiana Vale Pires (FEP-UCP and Kosmicare) & the Sexism Free Night Network

**The standards resulted from the expert contributions of:** Ai Laket!!, City of Zurich, ClubCommission Berlin, Crew2000, DROP Dance Society, female:pressure, Initiative Awareness e.V., Kanepe Cultural Centre, Kosmicare, NEWNET, NGO RE Generation, Nowhere & Xtrme Fest, Observatório Noctambul@s (Health and Community Foundation), QdeFesta!, Rave Awareness, VAD

More information is available on the website <https://sexismfreenight.eu/>. Sexism Free Night ©, 2022

**Graphic Design** – Miguel Januário

The content of this report represents the views of the authors only and is their sole responsibility. The European Commission does not accept any responsibility for the use that may be made of the information it contains.

## **Index**

Intro

What does gender equality mean in Nightlife?

What does gender diversity mean in Nightlife?

Sexism Free Night Standards

1. List of standards
2. Flowchart
3. Guidance towards the implementation of the Sexism Free Night Standards

## **Annexe**

The methodology used to define the Sexism Free Night Standards

## Introduction

Sexism, sexualized violence and harassment, lack of representation, gender double standards and stereotypes are systemic and systematic problems that disproportionately affect women and LGBTQIA+ people. These expressions of gendered power relations tend to be reproduced and, in certain ways aggravated in nightlife environments. The [project Sexism Free Night](#) researched and developed capacitation and awareness resources aimed at contributing to the promotion of safer and more egalitarian nightlife environments. Above all, Sexism Free Night recognizes the libertarian and hedonistic character of nightlife and clubbing cultures, and by discussing sexism it aims, above all to guarantee that the nightlife-related psychological and social benefits are accessible to all its visitors, independently of their gender identity, expression and sexuality. The implementation of the project (01/01/2020-30/10/2022) happened at a moment when several collectives and organizations were already designing and experimenting with innovative approaches to denormalize sexism and to prevent and respond to sexualized violence in nightlife and festival environments. One of the milestones of Sexism Free Night was the creation of a [European Network](#) of collectives and organizations that were already implementing gender awareness in these settings, to promote a mutual learning and dialogue towards gender-responsiveness in nightlife. This white paper results from the European exchange implemented in the scope of this network. One of the aims of the project was also to create a label to award the nightlife venues and events implementing a set of standards previously defined. However, considering the impossibility of creating a label, and implementing and monitoring it, the consortium decided instead to define a set of solution-focused standards to guide the implementation of gender-responsive policies and practices in nightlife.

This white paper presents a sequential set of Sexism Free Night Standards, based on expert knowledge to inform and guide the implementation of gender-responsive measures to prevent, detect and respond to sexism and sexualized violence in Nightlife environments (more information regarding the methodology available in the Annex). Considering that Nightlife is a polyculture, these standards are static nor universal (one-size-fits-all). They uniquely intend to provide expert-based guidance to inspire nightlife venues and events in implementing their tailor-made approaches. For this reason, this white paper must be seen as an unfinished work-in-progress document, but hopefully, for some spaces, it will be the beginning of something!

The target readers of this white paper are managers of nightlife venues and events interested in implementing policies and practices aimed at promoting a safer and more inclusive and diverse space for their visitors. Associations of bars and clubs and local decision-makers, who can financially support this process in their cities, are also key-stakeholders mainly considering that not all bars or clubs have the funding or resources they need to implement wider gender-responsive approaches in their spaces.

## **What does Gender Equality mean in Nightlife?**



**Image 1** – This Word Cloud illustrates the words used to define GENDER EQUALITY by a group of 32 respondents. These respondents collaborate in harm reduction and awareness teams and collectives working in nightlife environments and represented at Sexism Free Night Network or at NEWNET (more information available in the annex).

**What**

**does**

## **Gender Diversity mean in Nightlife?**



**Image 2** – This Word Cloud illustrates the words used to define GENDER DIVERSITY by a group of 32 respondents. These respondents collaborate in harm reduction and awareness teams and collectives working in nightlife environments and represented at Sexism Free Night Network or at NEWNET (more information available in the Annex).

**Sexism**

**Free**

**Night Standards**

## 1. List of Standards

- I. Define gender-responsive<sup>1</sup> house policies
- II. Create a protocol to deal with gender-based violence
- III. Staff training – capacity building and awareness raising towards a gender-responsive service
- IV. Communication and code of conduct
- V. Define a gender awareness strategy
- VI. Create a Safe(r) Space
- VII. Gender mainstreaming<sup>2</sup> and representation on an organizational level
- VIII. Referral and support
- IX. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation

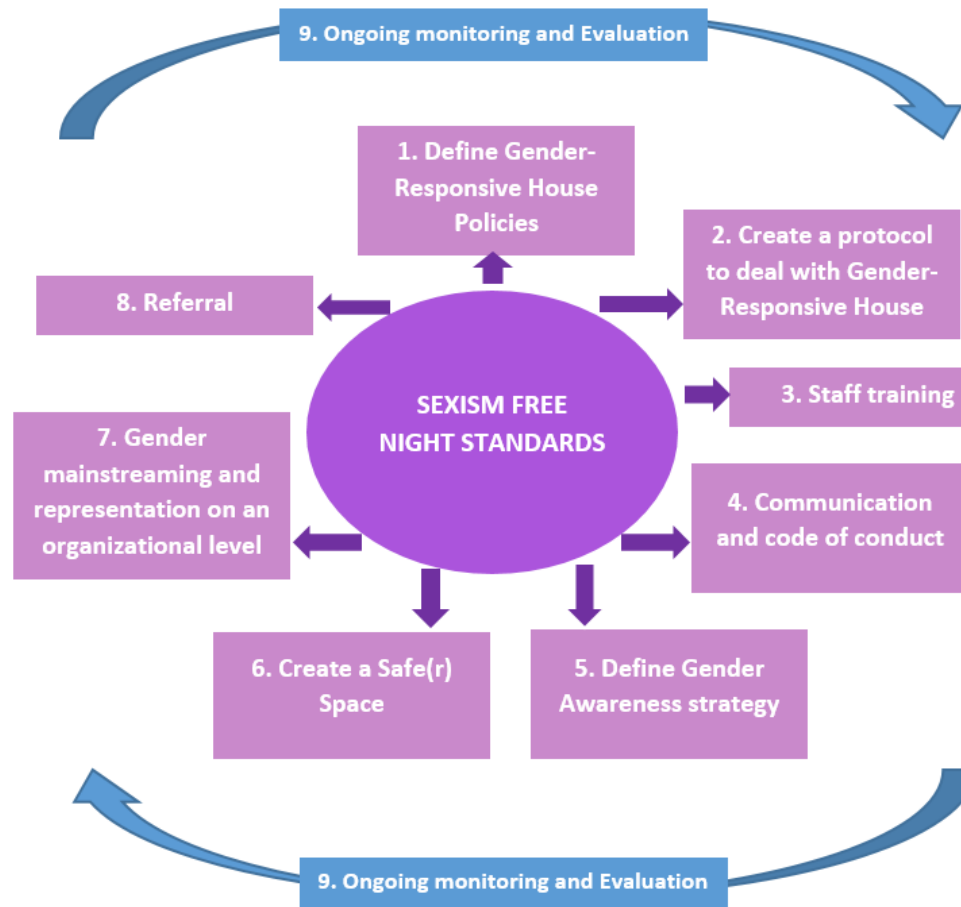
## 2) Flowchart

---

<sup>1</sup> Gender-responsiveness means to recognize and react to the structural gender inequalities and unequal power relations, by paying attention to the unique needs of women and LGBTQIA+ people but also by considering and valuing their specific experiences and perspectives in the design, implementation and evaluation of practices and policies.

<sup>2</sup> Gender mainstreaming defined a set of intentional strategies and measures to promote equality in all areas of life and combating gender discrimination.





### 3) Guidance towards the implementation of the Sexism Free Night Standards

## I. Define gender-responsive house policies

The first standard is also the first step to implementing a coherent and responsive organizational commitment to denormalize sexism and respond to sexualised violence and other forms of gender-based power imbalance in nightlife. Before any intervention, it is key to create a participatory working group between managers, staff representatives and representatives from the groups affected by sexism and exclusion in nightlife ( queer, feminist and anti-racist collectives). This will create a dialogue platform to discuss and define the establishment/ event's vision and clear policies regarding sexism but also, from an intersectional feminism perspective, racism and any type of discrimination related to gender and sexual diversity (transphobia, homophobia, lesbophobia and other LGBTQI+phobia). In addition, the house policies must contemplate also the potential experiences of the staff of the establishment/event as targets, bystanders or perpetrators of sexualized harassment and other forms of gender discrimination. In this sense, it is convenient to add policies also regarding the staff limits (e.g. 0-tolerance regarding sexual harassment, avoiding acting alone in situations perceived as dangerous).

These "house policies" must define a set of clear and specific house rules or priorities, written and organized in an internal document. In case the establishment/ event already has a house policies document, this must be updated and complemented with the new gender-responsive policies. These must be communicated and made accessible to all employees and service providers (e.g. artists, and security teams in external). To guarantee that these policies are representative and tailored-made, it is recommendable to ask for the feedback/ validation of the staff of the establishment/ event. It can be done by organizing an internal meeting to present the gender-responsive house policies, or by surveying their feedback.

Above all, these house policies must be encouraged and widely supported by the management of the establishment/ event, and will advise the definition and the implementation of other subsequent gender-responsive activities. To reinforce the support of the staff, the communication of the final version of the house policies can be sent together with an agreement to be signed by the collaborator/ service provider where symbolically they state their knowledge and support of these policies. New employees/ service providers must be introduced to these house policies.

Finally, the document must be periodically revised and updated to guarantee a growing and ongoing process of gender-responsiveness.

## II. Create a protocol to deal with gender-based violence

The house policies can be complemented by the creation of a specific protocol to provide the staff of the establishment/ event with concrete measures to deal with sexism, respond to gender-based violence and promote gender safety. This document must be practice-oriented compiling clear instructions and actions to respond to specific situations sexist or racist micro-aggressions, sexualized violence and other forms of gender-based violence. Due to the specific character of this protocol, it may be convenient to have support or consultancy from an expert/ organization/collective experienced in gender-based violence or gender-responsiveness in nightlife (check some European organizations and collectives in our [Sexism Free Night network](#)). In addition, a working group including managers, representatives of staff (e.g. security team, bartenders, artists) and experts on the prevention of gender-based violence must collaborate in the drafting of the protocol. The development and implementation of this protocol must consider the establishment of an effective internal communication channel between the staff and a clear assignment of responsibilities (e.g. what kind of situations must be intervened? Who will be in charge of supporting the person who experienced violence? Who will be in charge of dealing with the perpetrator? When is convenient to ask for the support of the bouncers/ security team?). It is crucial to include in the protocol a specific and private space/area in the venue that can be used to isolate, protect and calm down people who experienced violence, who were triggered by discrimination or who are overwhelmed or feeling unsafe (e.g. fear of having been spiked, fear of a violent ex-partner) in case they need.

This protocol must also include concrete actions to deal with macroaggressions and violence targeting the staff of the establishment/ venue (e.g. how to support a colleague experiencing harassment?). It is recommendable to complement the protocol with a list of contacts that can be useful to refer the person who experienced violence (e.g. local rape crisis centres and other support services) or to support the left of the space (e.g. a trustful taxi/ driver contact). The protocol must also integrate information regarding the national legal framework regarding sexualized violence,

intimate partner violence, sexual harassment and LGBTQIA+phobia. This may be particularly relevant to deal with perpetrators and knowing when you must call the police, particularly in public crimes.

To ensure the good implementation of the protocol, it is convenient to define collaborators to act as keepers of the protocol or contact persons to provide guidance in specific situations or supervise the implementation of concrete actions. Per shift, one person should be defined as the protocol keeper and the shifts should be planned in a way to guarantee that the responsible person is adequately trained.

We share some examples of [protocols in our Sexism Free Night Resource Centre](#).

### **III. Staff training – capacity building and awareness raising towards a gender-responsive service**

The dissemination of the house policies and the implementation of the protocol can be reinforced by giving regular training to the staff of the establishment or event. A gender-based capacity building and knowledge sharing are crucial to raising awareness of the staff and promoting a gender-responsive service.

The training should be specific and, if possible, tailor-made for the staff of the venue or event. As contents, it should include:

- Definition of gender-based violence, discrimination and micro-aggressions, particularly sexualized violence, LGBTQIA+phobia, and intimate partner violence. Following intersectional feminism principles, it can be also relevant to include racist violence and discrimination as other axes of oppression in nightlife environments
- Rape myths and gender double standards in nightlife environments (e.g. victim blaming, the myth of the strange perpetrator, “rape drugs”)
- Drug-facilitated sexual assault, including premeditated chemical submission (e.g. spiking, to make someone drunk) or opportunistic chemical submission (taking advantage of someone chemically vulnerable after voluntary use of alcohol and/or other drugs)
- National legal framework regarding gender-based violence, sexualized violence and sexual harassment
- Bystander intervention – how to detect and respond to gender-based violence, discrimination and micro-aggressions

- Psychological first aid – how to deal with people who experienced gender-based violence or discrimination
- Intervention with perpetrators
- Presentation of the gender-responsive house policies and protocol to respond to gender-based violence

It is relevant to include participatory moments where the trainees have the chance to share their doubts, experiences and strategies they already implemented in this field.

The training must be general and include representatives from all professional areas/ activities inside the venue or event. It is recommendable to train all the staff, but if this is not possible or it is hard to reach, the managers can define a minimum of participation (e.g. a minimum of 50% of the staff, and representatives from all areas). It can be relevant to include training modules for specific groups (e.g. bouncers/ security team and bartenders) to build key-competence among these agents.

Considering the specific nature of these topics, it is relevant to recruit an external expert/ organization to design and implement the training, in particular the general contents and competence (check some European organizations and collectives in our [Sexism Free Night network](#)). Someone internal that was involved in its development must present the house policies and protocol.

This training can also be organized by a collective of bars/ clubs and target staff representatives of the cluster of venues involved.

We share some [training manuals in our Sexism Free Night Resource Centre](#).

#### **IV. Communication and code of conduct**

It is important to communicate and share with your visitors the gender-responsive house policies and the behaviours and attitudes you consider unacceptable in your venue or event. In this sense, you are previously informing them that you will act upon certain situations and this may influence your visitor's behaviour, dissuading potential perpetrators, empowering potential victims and activating potential bystanders. This communication must be brief, clear and visible. You can share it previously online, on your social media, in the communication of your events and

tickets selling, and printed posters at the door before entering the space and in strategic locations in the venue. It can be also useful to have a short and clear visitor's code of conduct agreed upon when buying the ticket.

Your communication should also include the contact person or service to whom the person must go in case she feels harassed, unsafe or threatened. You can suggest the use of a code work (e.g. "Angela", one of the more widespread code words) but remember that this must be recognized by all the staff and should be associated with a specific protocol. It is not worth, and it is even harmful, to communicate to your visitor that they can count on you if you are not ready to quickly and effectively support them.

## V. Define a gender awareness strategy

In addition to the definition and implementation of gender-responsive house policies, protocol and training, the establishment or event can also implement activities that will increase the gender and sexual safety of their visitors but also raise their awareness and activate them as proactive bystanders. Several activities can be implemented to raise awareness among night and festival goers, namely:

- Produce or disseminate awareness material and contents

This can subtly be done by using gender-inclusive language and pronouns in your communication, or by celebrating important days for women and queer people (e.g. 8<sup>th</sup> March – International Women's Day, 17<sup>th</sup> May - International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia). More explicitly, your venue or event can implement a specific campaign to denormalize sexism inside the venue or event (we share some examples of [awareness campaigns in our Sexism Free Night's Resource Centre](#)). In this case, you can use publicly materials (e.g. posters, leaflets, stickers, social media content) already produced by projects (e.g. the [BCR Test campaign of Sexism Free Night](#), or the campaign [Who are you when going out?](#)), or produce your materials. These materials can be made available in strategic locations in your venue/ event (e.g. door, bathroom, chill out area, cloakroom).

- Create or recruit an awareness team

You can also decide to move further and create your awareness team or contact persons. In this case, this team or people must be trained, prepared and available for awareness activities. This option makes sense in larger-scale venues of events.

An alternative is to recruit harm reduction and awareness teams or collectives that are already implementing awareness in nightlife environments (check some European organizations and collectives in our [Sexism Free Night network](#)). Awareness teams can reinforce and promote the safety of your venue and event by implementing care policies. In this sense, beyond the relevance of bouncers and security personnel to deal with more severe conflict, violence and potentially threatening situations, awareness teams can positively influence crowd behaviour and safety and to contribute a non-violent resolution of conflicts and crises in a more caring environment.

## **VI. Create a safe(r) space**

By implementing all the previous standards, you are already contributing to the creation of a safer venue or event. However, in specific situations, it can be relevant to define a space to guarantee privacy and safety to people who experienced violence. You can create this space or alternative to use a room for staff, an office or another private area in your establishment or event for people who are in danger, who needs privacy or to get away from the threatening stimulus. This space must have some comfort (e.g., a comfortable space to sit, a blanket) and resources to respond to the very basic needs of the person and help her to calm down (e.g. water, tea, tissues, cookies). Sometimes, very simple things can help the person to calm down and feel safer. In case you need to isolate someone, it is important not to let the person alone. The previously defined contact person for situations of gender-based violence or protocol keeper can stay with the person or check on her periodically in case she is with a trustful friend.

## **VII. Gender-mainstreaming and representation on an organisational level**

The implementation of measures to deal with gender-based violence and discrimination inside your venue or event is only one of the dimensions to consider in a wider commitment towards gender equality. A safer venue or event promotes gender mainstreaming on a wider organisational level, including the gender representativeness of the staff and management, the labour organization, the communication strategy, and gender-balance line-ups. It is important to contest the gender segregation in the nightlife labour markets (e.g. more women as bouncers), gender stereotyping (e.g. “sexy” dress code for cis and trans women) as well as practices of tokenism and objectification (e.g. transwomen participating uniquely as dancers). To have a diverse crowd is also crucial that you have representativeness in your team. Remember that it is not possible to think in gender-responsive house policies and protocols without considering the experiences of cisgender women, LGBTQIA+, and racialized people.

The use of gender-inclusive language and communication and gender-balanced music programming will also be key and will reflect your striving for diversity and equality. In terms of infrastructure, toilets are key for the LGBTQIA+ communities. If you want your venue or event to be a gender-inclusive space, one of the basic requirements is to include gender-neutral toilets.

Check out the guidance of the project Diversity Roadmap ([here](#) and [here](#)) for more information and support in this field.

## **VIII. Referral and support**

Map and connect with the local services where people who experienced violence can get support (e.g. rape crisis centres, centres to support victims of intimate partner violence, psychological support for LGBTQIA+ people, and gender awareness teams working in nightlife environments, harm reduction organisations). In case there is a situation of gender-based violence or microaggression in your venue or event, at least you can provide the person with a relevant contact. It may be useful to have some leaflets or visit cards for these services with you. Check out our [Sexism Free Night network](#) to see if collectives or projects are working in your city/ country for your referral.



In case there is a public crime in your space (check the legal framework of your country regarding gender-based violence) remember you must denounce it. If something severe happens it may also be relevant to collect and store evidence and keep the contact (email or phone number) of bystanders registered (with their previous consent). Sometimes people who experienced violence need time to decide to file a formal complaint.

In addition, you must have trustful contacts of taxis or other transportation options that can support a safe exit from the establishment or event.

#### **IX. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation**

The implementation of gender-responsive house policies and practices is only the beginning of the way towards the creation of a safe venue or event. This is a relatively new area of intervention and we all are still learning by doing. For this reason, it is crucial to monitor and evaluate the implementation of these measures. In addition to the staff training, it is relevant to hold regular staff meetings to discuss the protocol, recent challenging situations and ways to prevent or improve the responses to future problematic situations.

Having some feedback and follow-up from the venue or eventgoers can also be relevant. You can have a specific email, an online form or onsite reporting boxes to encourage the participants to share uncomfortable or harmful situations. This feedback must be analysed by the protocol keepers, and they will bring the main topics to the staff meeting.

Finally, review and update the gender-responsive house policies and protocol regularly (e.g. annually) to ensure that they retain adequacy, and effectiveness and, consequently, achieve meaningful and long-lasting gender equality.

## **ANNEX**

### **The methodology used towards the definition of the Sexism Free Night Standards**

The Sexism Free Night Consortium tried to begin a consensus-based process to define these standards during the third meeting of the Sexism Free Night Network during May in Barcelona. However, due to time limitations it was not possible to implement the consensus-based activity in that meeting. As alternative, the network members that attended the meeting agreed on using a short questionnaire with three main questions, namely:

- “In your opinion, what means GENDER EQUALITY in nightlife? (be short and focused in your answer)”
- “In your opinion, what means DIVERSITY in nightlife? (be short and focused in your answer)”
- “List the criteria/ standards needed to consider a venue/event as a space committed with Sexism Free Night principles<sup>3</sup>”

The questionnaire was prepared and disseminated among the Sexism Free Night Network members but also among NEWNET members that participated in the final seminar of the project in Barcelona.

In terms of responses, 32 representatives of awareness and harm reduction collectives and organizations working in different European countries, filled out the questionnaire (68,8% ciswomen, 15.6% cismen, 12.5% queer/ diverse/ non-binary). Most of the respondents were working or collaborating as peers in nightlife in the following areas: Harm Reduction (46,8%); Gender Equality and Prevention of Gender-Based Violence (15,6%); Festival managers, promoters and entrepreneurs (9,4%); Culture and Music Industry (9,3%) and Nightlife professionals (6,3%).

---

<sup>3</sup> In the questionnaire, we defined a space following the principles of Sexism Free Night as “a venue or event committed with gender safety and gender mainstreaming in nightlife”.

The first two questions (meaning of gender equality and gender diversity) were firstly qualitatively analysed and later organized in a word cloud by using free online software. The results of the third question were qualitatively analysed by using the software NVivo. By performing a thematic analysis it was possible to identify the main themes or topics identified by the respondents, which were later aggregated in standards and organized sequentially to suggest an implementation process to the target-group. The flowchart was designed to illustrate the sequence and feedback of this ongoing process. The guidance towards the implementation of the standards was based on the qualitative analysis, but also different outputs collected in the scope of the implementation of the Sexism Free Night project (inputs deriving from participants in training activities, the expertise of the Sexism Free Night network members, different protocols, reports, codes of conduct already drafted and disseminated by other organizations or collectives). A resource centre was created to support to complement the information provided with other protocols, training manuals and awareness-raising campaigns implemented by the Sexism Free Night project or by other organizations.

To finalize the document partners from the Sexism Free Night Network were invited to manifest their agreement regarding the list of Sexism Free Night Standards and to provide their review through a short online questionnaire with 3 main feedback questions. The feedback received from the 9 partners who revised the document was key to validating the standards and improving the white paper.