

**THE GAP**

**Situational Assessment of Sexual Gender-  
Based Violence (SGBV) Among International  
Students in the northern part of Cyprus  
(2021/22)**



Funded by the  
European Union





VOICES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

C Y P R U S



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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND CORE FINDINGS**

This survey was conducted as part of THE GAP Project funded by the European Union and co-funded by the US Embassy of Nicosia. It aimed to assess the experiences of international students with sexual and gender-based violence. The experiences under consideration cover sexual violence, which includes sexual harassment, assault and rape, as well as the various forms of domestic violence. The context of such incidents was also taken into account for the assessment.

The survey found that the majority (70.4%) of respondents have experienced sexual gender-based violence in the northern part of Cyprus. This percentage was significantly higher for female respondents than the males at 83.58% and 33.33% respectively. Of the different forms of sexual harassment/violence, incidents of unwanted touching or physical contact are most common among the respondents. In addition, most of the incidents took place in public. Unfortunately, most survivors did not ask for help due to not knowing where or how to report such incidents of sexual violence.

By far, fear is the most influential social factor that prevents survivors from reporting incidents of sexual violence. This can be the fear of being blamed for the incident, or the fear of not being accepted by one's community. It is further amplified by the general lack of information which in turn intimidates the survivors from reporting the incidents and seeking justice. For this reason, it is crucial to provide adequate and accessible information on reporting procedures. It is equally important to empower survivors and create safe spaces for them.

## **BACKGROUND**

This report provides the result of a survey conducted by VOIS on international students in the northern part of Cyprus between late 2021 and early 2022 as part of THE GAP Project funded by the European Union and co-funded by the US Embassy of Nicosia. The survey was intended to assess the rate of sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence against international students in the northern part of Cyprus.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The survey was based on electronic quantitative data collection through a single questionnaire on the Google Forms platform. The questionnaire was developed by the VOIS Research Department and Gender-based Issues Committee. It was subsequently peer-reviewed by external psychologists and local experts.

## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

All data was collected anonymously and handled in accordance with the European Union General Data Protection Regulations (EU GDPR) by the VOIS team. Participation in the survey was entirely voluntary and non-committal.

## **LIMITATIONS**

The results of the survey are subject to two limitations. First, the relatively small sample size limits the generalizability of its results. Second, some questions were included to assess the impact of previous lockdown(s) on respondents' experiences, but the survey itself was conducted after restrictions had been lifted and so respondents' recollections of their experiences may have faded somewhat. However, none of this denigrates the significance of the resulting insights.

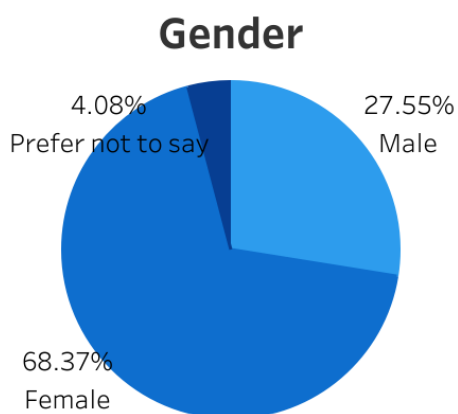
### **Analysis & Reporting**

Samuel Akoni

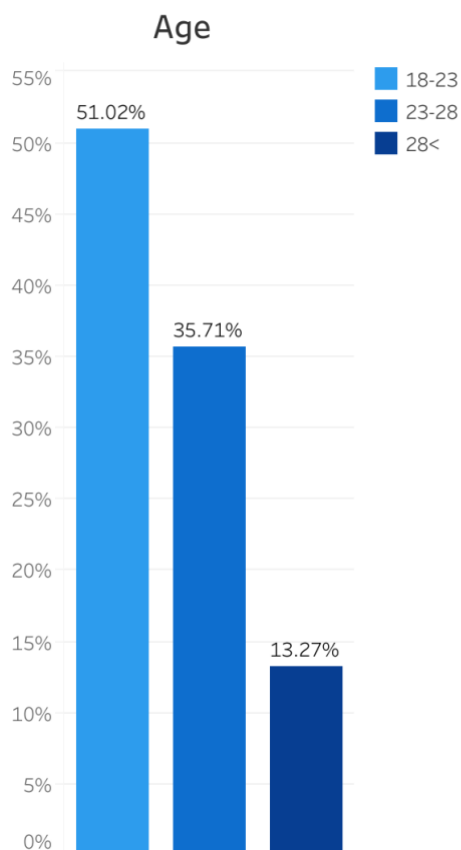
## RESULTS

### A. Demographic data

The survey received a total of 98 responses, of which the majority indicated their gender as female.

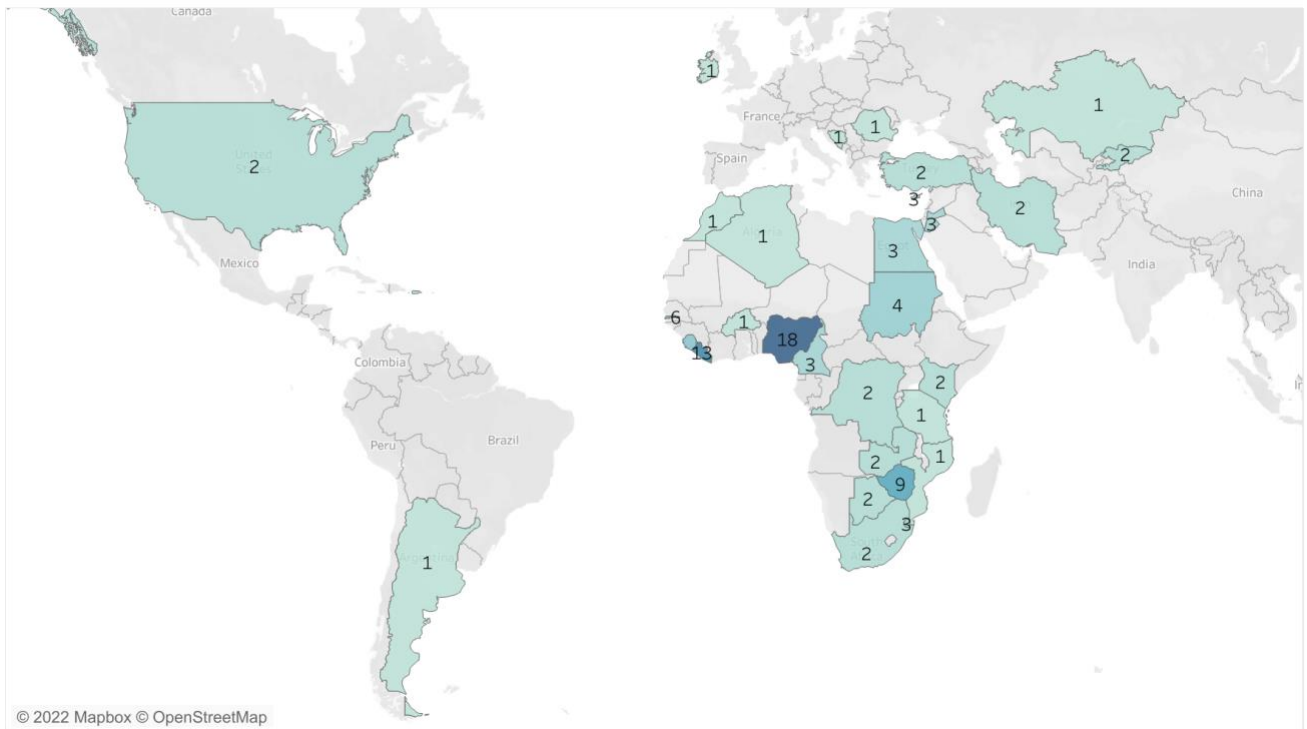


About half of the respondents indicated that they are between 18-23 years of age and the share of respondents who indicated being above 28 years was the least at 13.3%.



A total of 29 countries were represented in the survey, although the majority were represented by less than five respondents.

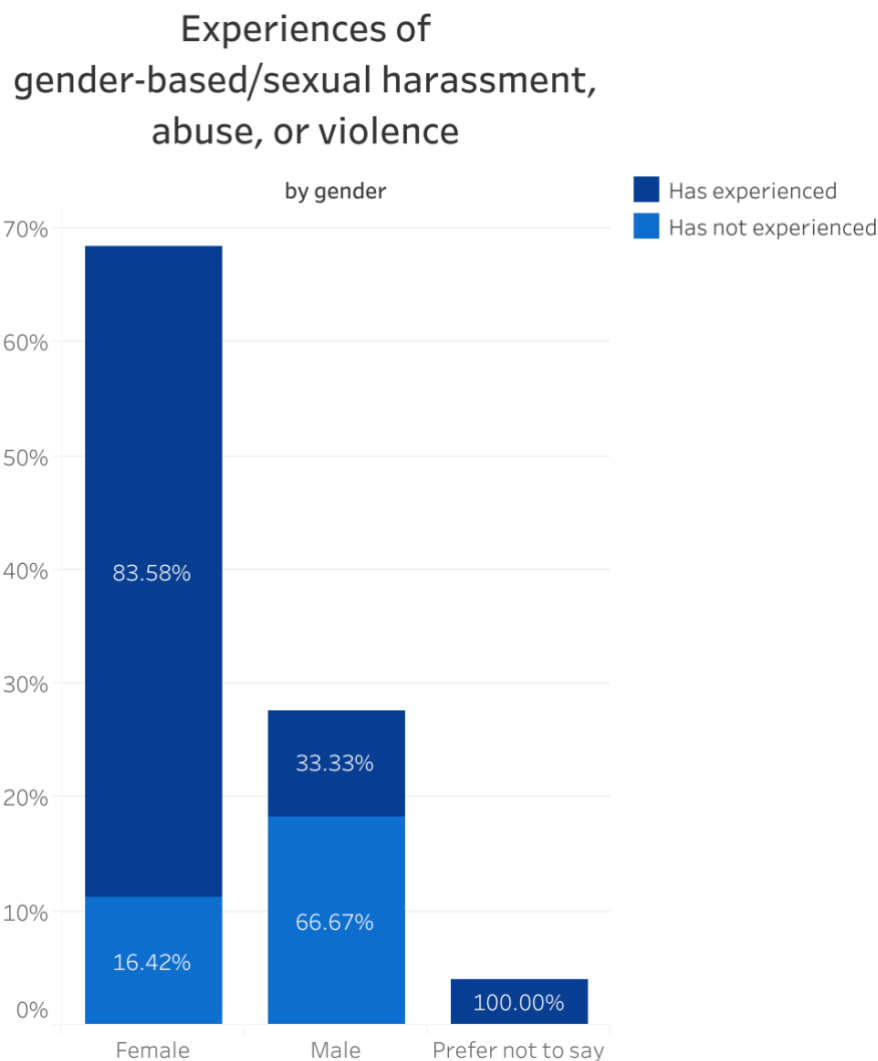
### Nationality



## B. Experiences with and forms of harassment and abuse in the northern part of Cyprus

The majority of respondents (70.4%) reported that they have experienced some form of gender-based or sexual harassment, abuse, or violence in the northern part of Cyprus.

This percentage was significantly higher for female respondents than it was for male respondents and interestingly, all four respondents who declined to specify their gender also indicated that they had experienced some form of gender-based or sexual harassment, abuse, or violence in the northern part of Cyprus. Possibly suggesting that such experiences may be more prevalent among international students who do not identify with the male-female binary.



When asked more specifically about what forms of sexual harassment or violence they have experienced, 'unwanted touching or physical contact' was the



most common response, although numerous other forms/examples were also reported by the respondents who earlier indicated that they have had such experiences, as illustrated in the table below.

**Table 1: Most common forms of sexual harassment or sexual violence**

Unwanted touching or physical contact.	76.8%
Requests for sexual favours.	53.6%
Unwelcome sexual advances.	53.6%
Verbal harassment of a sexual nature, including jokes referring to sexual acts or sexual orientation.	52.2%
Physical acts of sexual assault.	36.2%
Feeling pressured to engage with someone sexually.	26.1%
Unwanted sexually explicit photos, emails, or text messages.	21.7%
Discussing sexual relations/stories/fantasies at work, school, or in other inappropriate places.	17.4%
Exposing oneself or performing sexual acts on oneself.	15.9%
Making conditions of employment or advancement dependent on sexual favours, either explicitly or implicitly.	14.5%

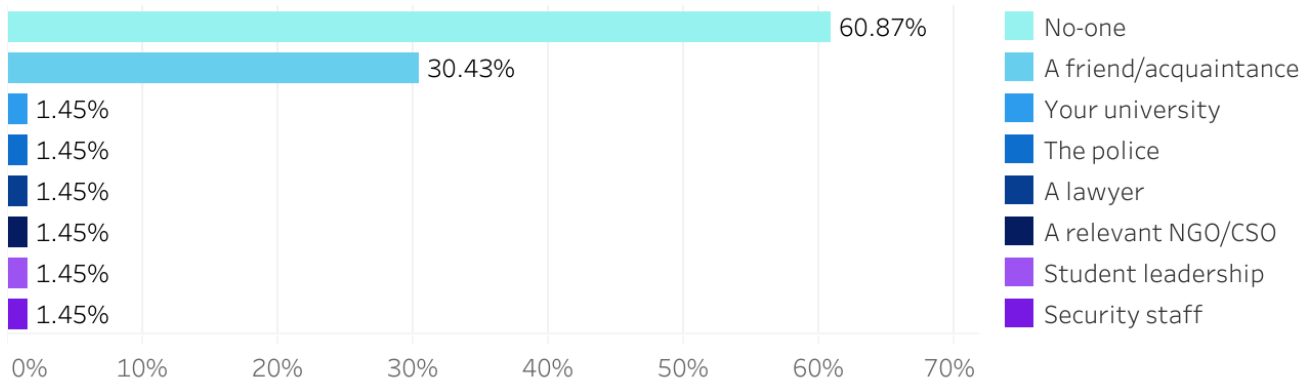
Most instances of sexual harassment or sexual violence overarchingly occurred in public places (such as cafes, bars, reassurances, buses, taxis, etc.), seconded only by those that occurred on line (see table below).

**Table 2: Places where experiences of sexual harassment or sexual violence occurred**

Public places (bar, club, restaurant, coffee shop, taxi, bus, etc.)	76.8%
Online	30.4%
Workplace	20.3%
Respondents' home	20.3%
On campus	18.8%

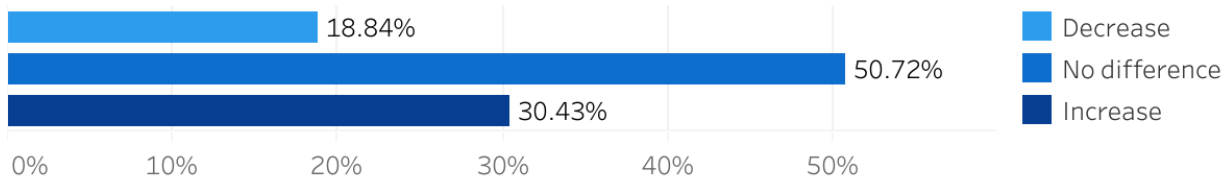
The majority of respondents indicated that they did not reach out to anyone for assistance. Furthermore, almost all of those who did reached out to a friend or acquaintance, with less than 10% (in total) actually seeking help from someone in a position to help and the means to take proper steps.

## Who did you reach out to for help?

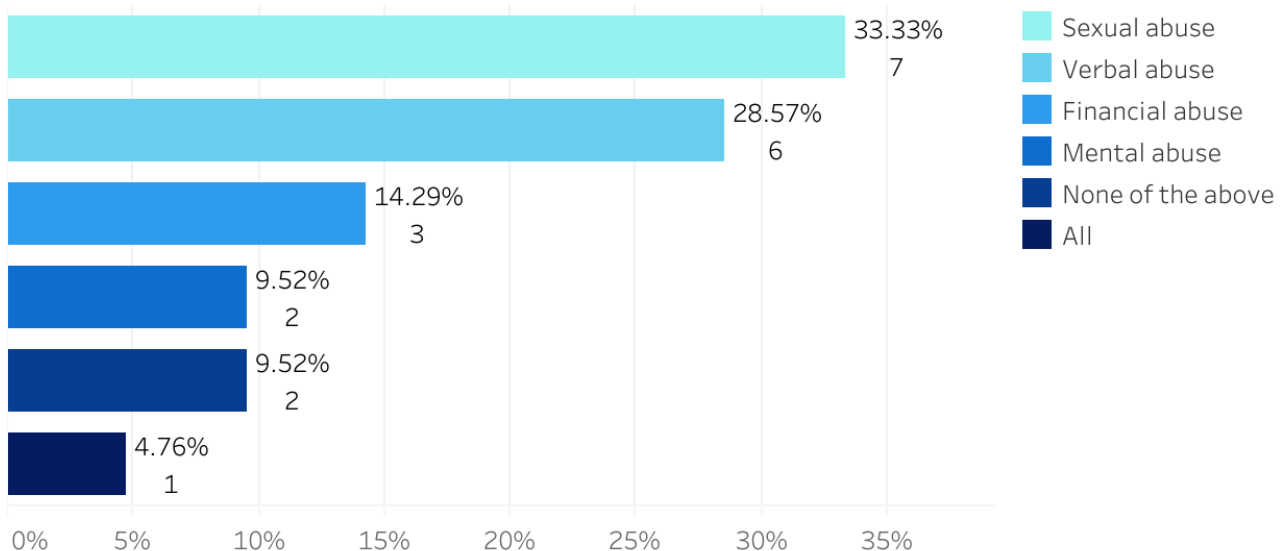


When asked if and how the previous lockdowns had (relatively) affected their experiences of harassment, while about half of the respondents indicated that they did not experience a difference, about one third of respondents indicated that they had experienced an increase in levels of harassment.

## Relative impact of the previous lockdown(s) on experiences of harassment



## Forms of abuse experienced during previous lockdown(s)

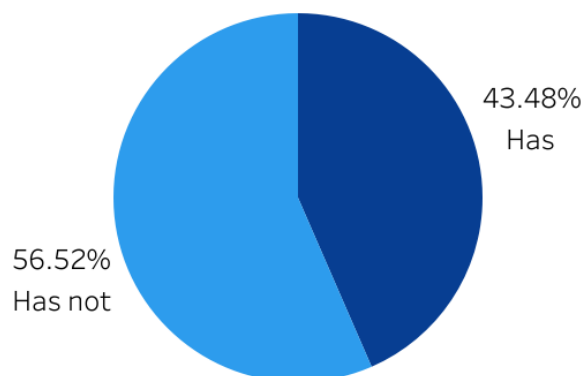


Of those that indicated they experienced an increase during the previous lockdown(s), sexual and verbal abuse were the most common forms reported. It is noteworthy, however, that two respondents who indicated that the previous lockdown(s) did not have a relative impact on their experiences of abuse or harassment also indicated that they experienced physical abuse from their partners during that time.

The fact that the lockdown(s) included mandatory stay-in-place directives suggests that the perpetrators of abuse were most likely individuals the respondents share(d) their home with.

Furthermore, though most respondents indicated that they have not, a significant portion indicated that they have considered quitting school and leaving the northern part of Cyprus due to instances of sexual abuse or harassment.

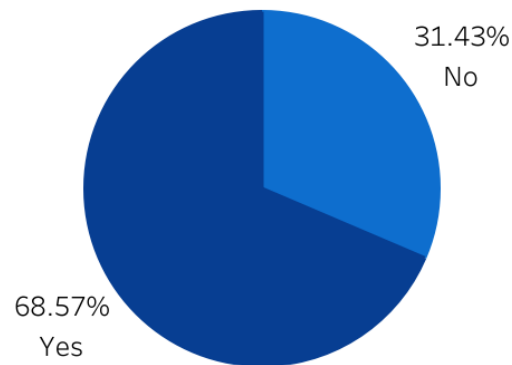
### Considered quitting school and returning to home country due to sexual harassment/violence



### C. Workplace Experiences

About half (50.7%) of the respondents indicated that they have been employed in the northern part of Cyprus. The remainder of this section presents the results of the part of the survey intended to assess their experiences with gender-related or sexual abuse and harassment in the workplace.

#### Have you experienced inappropriate behaviour by an employer or coworker?



More than half of the respondents indicated that they have experienced some form of inappropriate behaviour by an employer or co-worker while working in the northern part of Cyprus.

When asked how they responded in such instances, 50% indicated that they left the job, while 37.5% indicated that they simply ignored and continued working there regardless. Only 12.5% of the respondents indicated that they expressed their dissatisfaction with the management.

Lastly, though in the minority, 28.6% of respondents indicated that they have been offered sex in exchange for employment in the northern part of Cyprus – although 71.4% indicated that they have not.

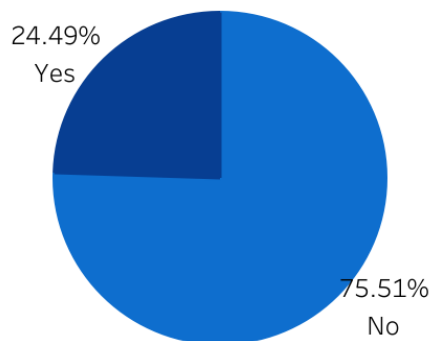
## D. Reporting and Support

9.2% of respondents indicated that they are in sexual relationships in exchange for financial assistance.

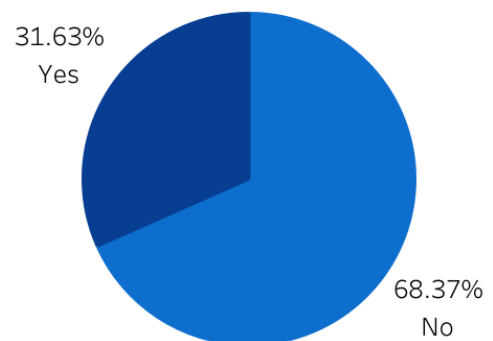
More respondents indicated that they know where to report instances of sexual harassment or violence against themselves or others than those that indicated they know where to go to for help in such instances. This, in conjunction with the fact that most instances ultimately go unreported, presents two major implications.

First, there is a need to improve the effectiveness of services offered by local bodies to international students who have experienced sexual harassment or violence as many clearly do not feel that being able to report such instances is helpful. Second, there is a more general need to make information on reporting procedures more accessible in order to combat the severe rate of underreporting.

Do you know where to get help following instances of sexual harassment or violence?



Do you know where to report instances of sexual harassment or violence?



## E. Additional Comments from Respondents

The final part of the questionnaire was an open-ended question asking respondents if they had anything else they would like to add. The most relevant of the resulting comments are provided below.

- “For me I'm even afraid of traveling on taxi,because on two occasions why on taxi the driver playing with my body,which is against my religion I'm so afraid”
- “I just like to extend my thanks and appreciation to you guys for making sure that women are safe and secure, thanks, and keep it up.”
- “I think the police in Cyprus need to be more sensitive when dealing with rape victims. Your first and only question shouldn't be to ask the victim if they are a prostitute.”
- “The general disregard for women's welfare on this island is truly terrifying.”
- “Students and international people should be protected and assisted here abroad in cases of sexual harassment. “
- “Turkish men are perverts but it's the Nigerian men that most girls need protection from. The older ones who take advantage of young girls, the rape cases are alarming. Abuse has been normalised because the law as well. Please do something, anything.”
- “I hate all men and their moms because they made them. Sex is not a joke or "an enjoyment" for everybody. Partying, having sex with people/strangers is not a lifestyle for everybody in this Island. There are people who only want to have friends, either female and male, don't assume your lifestyle on everyone. NO means NO.”
- “I was abuse by a guy” [from a male respondent]
- “The sexual harassment here in the northern part of Cyprus is becoming more everyday. I'm planning to leave after this semester.”
- “Hello. This is the girl. I don't know him. Today was my first time meeting him. We aren't friends. He got on the bus and directly came to the seat beside mine. He firstly removed my jacket flap from the chair and put it on my lap. I adjusted the jacket myself then. He then placed his hand on my knee and asked if it was bus 2, I said yes. I assumed the first placement was a mistake so I tried to adjust my leg. He then widened his right thigh to be touching mine, with his hand still on my knee. At some point, he was rubbing my knee. Then after a little while, he took it off and I crossed my legs in a bid to not let him touch me again. Then he put his hand under my thigh and at some point under my bum. All while smiling with me.”

