

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE HUNGARY

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The research focuses specifically on sexual harassment as one of the unwanted, transgressive behaviours and attitudes in the workplace.



Data collection method: 38-question online questionnaire, six in-depth interviews and one round table discussion. Sample: 759 questionnaires completed online; 64.38% of respondents were women and 34.01% were men.



The sample shows that the most common forms of sexual harassment in the workplace are: unwanted, embarrassing stares and fixations; sexist jokes and sexual comments; and unwanted physical proximity and touching.

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SUMMARY

The research conducted in Hungary was both timely and necessary, allowing for collaboration with five other countries through the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and the Central European Labour Studies Institute. This project aimed not only at compiling country reports but also at outlining essential features for future anti-sexual harassment training based on shared findings.

Prior studies on sexual harassment in Hungary are limited, with the last major work being published in 2018 by IDEA Research Institute. Interestingly, the number of respondents in both studies was nearly identical. This current study, while not representative, included 759 online questionnaires, six in-depth interviews and a roundtable discussion. The most common forms of sexual harassment identified by the present research included unwanted staring, sexist jokes, and inappropriate physical contact. The survey revealed that respondents often have fragmented and unclear knowledge regarding the definition of sexual harassment and their rights, leading to a pressing need for better information and support. This includes uncertainty about the delimitation of concepts, the possibilities of liability and lack of knowledge of fundamental rights and obligations. It is clear that there is a great need for a kind of personal support that presupposes a relationship of trust between the person who has suffered harm and the person with whom the negative experience can be shared in a non-judgemental way. There is also a noticeable gap between legal terminology and everyday language, contributing to confusion around what constitutes harassment. This study also aims to help clarify and bring everyday experience closer to the regulatory environment by showing how practice is framed by the legislator and the decision-maker.

Despite experiencing harassment, many respondents chose not to report incidents due to feelings that the cases were not severe enough, a lack of trust in reporting mechanisms or fear of negative repercussions. This reinforces the “iceberg effect,” where only a small fraction of incidents came to light. Latency is strong in this area. The assumption on the offenders’ side that men are in the majority is confirmed by this sample. It was also hypothesized that the subordinate relationship was still a determining factor in the development of such situations although the data on this issue showed otherwise. The majority of the respondents identified a male co-employee as an offender. This shows that it is not necessarily the organisational hierarchy that strengthens

the abuser in his/her position. It is also important to be aware of informal positions of power, where someone feels superior to another because of e.g. their gender, age, social status, social rank.

The data indicate that workplace sexual harassment is a systemic issue, prevalent across various industries and deeply rooted in organisational cultures that lack accountability. Leadership plays a crucial role in shaping these cultures, and without managerial accountability a tolerance for harassment persists. Victims often seek empowerment through informal networks or direct confrontation, yet these actions should not substitute for formal institutional responses.

There is a critical need for safe, even anonymous reporting channels and external oversight to ensure a fair handling of harassment cases. The study highlights the importance of developing soft skills (interpersonal, social skills that we use in our everyday life, in our human relationships) like emotional intelligence and awareness of workplace behaviour to prevent harassment, emphasizing that these issues affect all employees, not just women, thus policies, trainings and support mechanisms should address harassment gender-neutrally, ensuring that all employees are protected.

Expectations towards trade unions to provide victim support and enforce regulations are high among respondents. Many believe that these organizations should actively assist individuals and ensure compliance with legal standards. They would consider it important to be active players in individual support (to be approached by those who experienced harm) and to be at the forefront in enforcing regulations and monitoring compliance with the legal environment, thus encouraging employers. In conclusion, the study outlines (see detailed in Section 3.) several recommendations for employers, union representatives and legislators stressing that a comprehensive approach is necessary for real change. An important element of this is the fine-tuning and clarification of the existing legislation, i.e. concretisation of the existing legal framework. In addition to the formal framework, joint reflection and communication on the subject is of equal importance, during which long-established stereotypes, beliefs and behavioural patterns may come to the surface, and by revising them it is possible to achieve changes in behaviour and attitudes at the level of everyday life.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of the international project “Sexual Harassment and Violence at the Workplace”, a partnership between the FES National Offices and CELSI, is to summarise the current knowledge and understanding of sexual harassment and to enrich it with the results of this research. Country reports will be produced at national level and officially presented to the national public around 25 November, the World Day of Violence against Women. A comparative study summarising the national studies will be published in 2025. The six countries participating in the study are Croatia, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Greece, Bulgaria and Hungary.

In the first part of the study which assesses the domestic situation the regulatory framework is described, i.e. the international, European regulatory environment beginning with the clarification of concepts to the possibilities of enforcement, the currently functioning and competent institutional system. In the second part, the empirical, online questionnaire research material is analysed. For data collection, we relied heavily on the mediation of the trade unions operating in Hungary (LIGA, MASZSZ, PSZ, PDSZ, VDSZ, VASAS) which are partners of the FES in order to ensure that our questions reach as many employees as possible. Six in-depth interviews were conducted, which deepened the understanding of ours of SWH through open sharing of lived experiences. The

third part is reserved for our recommendations; we made legislative and regulatory proposals to the legislator and the decision-maker. Proposals are presented to employers, their representative bodies and trade unions as well. Recommendations were made on the content and substance of the training, education and educational activities we should organise in order to promote change. This section sums up good practices and professional experience to produce an effective, forward-looking content that can be useful in working together to reverse sexual harassment at workplaces.

The research focuses specifically on sexual harassment as one of the unwanted, transgressive behaviour and conduct in the workplace. It is important to note at this early stage that in Hungarian legislation, following the transposition of the European Directives into national law in 2004, the applicable legislation on harassment was introduced in the Anti-Discrimination Act **CXXV/2004 on Equal Treatment and the Promotion of Equal Opportunities** (hereinafter referred to as Ebktv.). Sexual harassment is regulated as a special case in the general clause on harassment as defined in Article 10 and as such it has no separate definition in the legal system. For the purposes of this research project the understanding of sexual harassment in the workplace follows the definition of the Ebktv.

*Harassment is considered as a conduct of a **sexual** or other nature which is offensive to human dignity, which is related to a characteristic of the person concerned as defined in § 8 and which has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, humiliating, degrading or offensive environment towards a person.*

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research design is based on four pillars. Firstly, the current legal framework and the institutional system in force, both international and national, were reviewed and summarised. The few available surveys and research on the subject were also summarised. For empirical data collection, a survey was conducted based on an online questionnaire of 38 questions that was distributed mainly through the trade unions that were our partners in the research via their internal mailing systems, communication channels and platforms such as newsletters. The sample we worked with were 759 online completed questionnaires. 64.38% of respondents were women and 34.01% were men. In terms of age, almost half of them are between 31 and 50 years old, 44.71% are over 51 years and only 4.23% are under 30. The largest number of respondents work in education, followed by manufacturing and in water and waste water management. For the structure of the online survey sample see Annex 1. Due to the survey dissemination method the survey sample is not representative but provides important information and details on individual experiences of SHW as well as the perception of policies. The online questionnaire was used to recruit interviewees who were also willing to share their thoughts and experiences during face-to-face conversations. The expert network of ours helped to recruit interviewees and finally six interviews have been completed (five female and a male respondent). All the conversations were conducted in a trauma-informed way and provided anonymity for the respondents. In addition, a round table discussion was organised for Hungarian experts, representatives of NGOs and trade union leaders, where we presented the research results and invited the participants to formulate proposals for decision-makers and for the development of educational activities. Eight professionals attended the experience and knowledge sharing event on 25 September 2024 at the FES Budapest office. Among those invited were a lawyer specialising in the field (also defending interests in the arts sector), a lawyer from an NGO working for women's rights, a lawyer from an NGO working to eradicate violence against women, a lawyer specialising in equal treatment issues and trade union leaders.

The aim of the research was to answer the following questions: How prevalent is sexual harassment in the workplace and what forms does it take in Hungary today? How victims have experienced these situations and what they have done in these harmful situations. To whom did they turn, could have turned, what was the consequence, the outcome of the case. How aware are they of the tools available for them to deal with this phenomenon at the level of their employers and at the national regulatory level. We wanted to know what they think would be needed, what they think could work effectively to reduce sexual harassment.

HYPOTHESES

- Employees do not have sufficient and thorough information about their rights and means of redress
- Employees are not sure what constitutes sexual harassment and on what grounds, they are not clear about the definitions
- Employees are afraid to report incidents, lack confidence in accountability, fear negative consequences
- Verbal, sexist, invasive remarks are the most common comments that are considered sexual harassment
- The position of power favours the abuser; the subordinate-dominant relationship makes victims vulnerable, it is one of the most common interpersonal relationships in which sexual abuse occurs

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The major limitations of the research design are the lack of representativeness of the online survey data and the tight focus on the current employment. If the respondents could have had the possibility to share experiences from previous workplaces more knowledge could have been gathered e.g. about the forms and occurrences of sexual harassment. Several survey respondents noted that they would also like to talk about other forms of workplace harassment, rather than the sexual-nature type which they feel is severe and often more frequent but was not the scope of this research.

1.

OVERVIEW – SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

1.1. AVAILABLE KNOWLEDGE BASED ON PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND STUDIES

“It is a general problem in Hungary that there is no up-to-date research on the problem of violence against women (including sexual harassment), neither on the prevalence of the phenomenon nor on the experience of victims in relation to the authorities and institutions. There is either a lack of targeted collection of administrative data by the various authorities and institutions on the issue and the measures taken, or the data are not publicly available. This in turn makes it difficult to analyse and evaluate the effectiveness of institutional action and to identify the necessary steps to be taken” (NANE Association – PATENT Association, 2023:2).

We typically refer to a 2013 pan-European survey when we want to present data on the situation in Hungary. The results of the survey can be accessed in a country-specific breakdown, where you can find information on the experience of Hungarian respondents. The **European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)** has compiled the survey and asked women about their personal experiences of physical and sexual violence, psychological violence in relationships, sexual harassment and stalking. 18% of Hungarian respondents had experienced any kind of sexual harassment in the year before the survey. In their whole life, over the age of 15, 42% answered the same question affirmatively. Of these, 28% had reported the incident in the workplace. 66% had reported the incident to someone. 75% did not speak out because they were able to act on their own behalf. 18% considered what they had experienced to be of little importance, insignificant or private and did not want to share it with anyone. The emotional response to sexual harassment – i.e. experiencing it – was: 51% felt angry, 37% were upset or disturbed by what had happened, 31% found it embarrassing, 24% felt fear, 20% felt ashamed, 9% felt aggression, 5% felt shocked.

On behalf of the Women’s Section of the Hungarian Trade Union Confederation, the IDEA Institute produced

a report in 2018 on violence and harassment against women in the workplace and the spread of the “me too” movement. A questionnaire of almost 40 questions was completed by 651 women trade unionists. Although 62 percent of the respondents had not seen violence at work, of those who had, 24 percent did not report it and only 14 percent took the liberty of talking about what they had seen. Interestingly, 77 percent of the respondents fear negative consequences, 48 percent say they would not believe them, 47 percent miss a supportive work environment, 30 percent say they miss information about the reporting process, while 19 percent remain passive due to their experience of the inappropriate settling of incidents in the past at work. Surprising results were also found when asked how clear Hungarian employees are about the definition of sexual violence and harassment, and which acts they put into this category. Responses were extremely varied: 94% of respondents said that asking for services of a sexual nature (meaning anything which is ‘sexual’ kissing, pushing bodies/genitals into the others’ body, not only intercourse but other forms of sexual activity but intercourse is also included) was sexual harassment, 71% said that putting hands on legs was sexual harassment, 45% said that staring at a woman’s breasts was sexual harassment, 33% said that telling sexist jokes was sexual harassment and 39% said that whistling at women was sexual harassment.

In early February 2020, the **IPSOS** global international survey was conducted in 26 countries, with a total of 19,704 adult respondents. Hungary was one of the 26 countries surveyed. The survey data shows that in Hungary a two-thirds majority would speak out against sexist comments within a family context and amongst friends. According to the respondents, although there might be room for emotions in the workplace, the approach should never be intrusive, offensive to the other party and there is almost a total rejection of sharing or forwarding sexual content. The international survey also shows that 69% of Hungarian men would intervene if they experienced harassment of women in public, which shows one of the highest rates in Europe.

1.2. REGULATORY FRAMEWORK; INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL LAW AND INSTITUTIONS

1.2.1. Definitions

The definition of harassment was introduced into the Hungarian legal system from the anti-discrimination field, through the mediation of European Union directives. The earliest one is the Council Directive 2000/43/EC (29 June 2000), which applies the principle of *equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin*.

“Harassment is discrimination when unwanted conduct related to racial or ethnic origin occurs with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.”

Directive 2002/73/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2002 *amending Council Directive 76/207/EEC on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions* defines sexual harassment by stating,

“unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, whether verbal or non-verbal, or physical; with an intent or effect that violates the dignity of the person; in particular, if it creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.”

This definition has been fully taken over by Directive 2006/54/EC of 5 June 2006 *on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation*.

The Council of Europe's *Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Violence against Women and Relationship Violence*^[1] (2011, Strasbourg), Article 40 of the Istanbul Convention, also contains a very similar definition of sexual harassment:

“The Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, which has the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when it creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, shall be subject to criminal or other legal sanctions.”

The Council of Europe has issued a recommendation CM/Rec(2019) to Member States on *“Preventing and Combating Sexism”*, as experience shows that sexism is a widespread and pervasive phenomenon in all areas and in all societies. According to the Recommendation, sexism is a breeding ground, a precursor and a legitimizing factor for various forms of violence against women, including

sexual harassment, and as such it is worthwhile and necessary to combat it.

The Directive 2024/1385 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on *combating violence against women and domestic violence* defines VAW as follows and accordingly covers SWH:

“Violence against women’ means all acts of gender-based violence directed against a woman or a girl because she is a woman or a girl or that affect women or girls disproportionately, that result in or are likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”

1.2.2. VAW framework, harassment as a form of violence against women

In the international regulatory context (CEDAW, Istanbul Convention, EU Charter of Fundamental Rights), sexual harassment is clearly a form of violence against women, as the vast majority of victims are women and the phenomenon is based on gendered expectations and myths, as is the case with relationship (domestic) violence. Sexual harassment can also be framed as a structural problem, as an imprint of gender structures and patterns in the workplace at the level of society as a whole. In Hungary, this approach is typically held by NGOs supporting abused women but not the current government thus legislative forces. There is a lack of intention in Hungary at the moment to even label certain legal harms structurally connected to gender aspects. Violence against women or harms, injustices suffered by mainly women as a category do not exist amongst policy makers, lawmakers, accordingly there are no intentions to structurally approach the field.

According to the **CEDAW Committee Recommendation No.19**, sexual harassment includes the following ‘undesirable’ (on the receiving end) behaviours: sexually motivated behaviour, which takes the form of physical contact, offering of benefits, comments of a sexual nature, communication of pornographic content (words or actions). All this because such a situation is humiliating and endangers health and safety. Harassment can take the form of creating a hostile working environment, but also in a way that if you reasonably assume that opposing or not doing what is expected of you means disadvantage at work (not promoted, dismissed, not employed).

1.2.3. Ensuring a safe and healthy – no harassing – working environment

On the basis of the mandate of Article 157 (ex Article 138) of the **Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)**, the European social partners concluded

a framework agreement on combating harassment and violence at work in April 2007 (**EU social partners Framework Agreement**). The agreement was reached in the context of the consultation on the health and safety at work strategy, which also shows that harassment at work is recognised as a phenomenon that is harmful to physical and psycho-social health.

ILO (International Labour Organisation) No. 190 was the first international convention to establish the right of everyone to a workplace free from violence and harassment. The Convention entered into force on 25 June 2021, and as of September 2024, 44 countries have ratified it; Hungary has not done so yet. The reform document states that violence and harassment in the workplace takes a toll on the psychological, physical and sexual health and dignity of the person concerned, as well as on their family and social environment. The ratification of this convention would greatly contribute to the framing and contextualisation of workplace harassment in Hungary which is completely missing at the moment.

1.2.4. Hungarian regulatory system

In the legislation in force in Hungary there are several scattered provisions, and a combined, strategic interpretation of them constitutes the legal protection against harassment and sexual harassment. The main clauses are listed below. Recommendations for legal improvements which would eliminate the current fragmentation and fill in the missing clauses are to be presented in detail under section 3.1. At present, there is no legislative intention to create a coherent legal regulation reflecting the specificities of the topic and building on the knowledge accumulated in the field (about e.g. perpetrators, victims, patterns). The legislator rejects to apply and build up on the framework which places sexual harassment amongst other forms of violence against women (leading political forces even publicly deny the existence of such a category). In the case of the framework for healthy and safe workplaces, there are clauses from the field of labour law for asserting claims.

The Fundamental Law of Hungary (25 April 2011) states that it guarantees fundamental rights to all without discrimination (Article XV.2) and that men and women have equal rights (Article XV.3).

As mentioned above; in Hungarian legislation, the applicable legislation is found in the anti-discrimination law, **Act CXXV of 2004 on Equal Treatment (hereinafter referred to as the Equal Treatment Act or Ebktv.)**, in § 10. *Resolution No 384/5/2008 (10.4.2008) TT. of the Equal Treatment Advisory Board* states that the Hungarian definition of harassment is more limited than the Community legal definition of sexual harassment, because sexual harassment can also be “verbal, non-verbal or physical”. The Hungarian definition does not explicitly state this. The concept of harassment in the Ebktv. is also

more limited than the Community law concept of sexual harassment in that the creation of an intimidating, hostile, humiliating, degrading or offensive environment is not an example, but a closed list. In line with Community law, sexual harassment may be: verbal, non-verbal or physical and the creation of an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, humiliating or offensive environment should be considered as an illustrative list. The case law of the ETA shows that this extensive understanding is the norm when it comes to judging harassment cases.

The Act I of 2012 on the Labour Code provides for the requirement of equal treatment.

Mt. Art. 12 (1) “*The requirement of equal treatment shall be observed in the employment relationship, in particular with regard to remuneration. The remedy for a breach of this requirement may not involve a violation or impairment of the rights of other employees.*”

The Labour Code includes a general clause requiring employers to ensure a harassment-free work environment.

Mt. 51.§ (4) “*The employer shall ensure safe and healthy working conditions.*”

It is important to highlight that for all employees. However, this rather general wording makes it certain that toxic workplace atmospheres, violations of boundaries and abuses of power are typical categories that run against this basic principle. The concept of health also includes mental health, the psychological well-being of employees. And a safe environment and atmosphere must be psychologically safe as well. The wording of the legal clause should be much more precise and detailed and should also clearly refer to the mental dimension of health. In this form, it is left to law enforcers to fill it with content, which does not provide a uniform interpretation, leading to legal uncertainty.

According to **Article 54 (2) of Act XCIII of 1993 on Occupational Safety and Health**, the employer must have a risk assessment in place, which includes an assessment of the psycho-social risks of work. It must therefore carry out a risk assessment every three years. Psycho-social risk is defined as the sum of all the influence on the employee at work which affect his or her reactions to this influence and which may lead to stress, accidents at work or psychosomatic illnesses. The most common workplace stressors include *damaging/toxic environments*. It is important to note that despite the fact that the obligation is legally binding, there is no sanction attached to it, so there is currently no any body or institution that can enforce it.

It is important to note that in **the Labour Code (Article 52 (1))** the basic obligations of employees include ‘*cooperation*’, which according to judicial interpretation (LB Mfv.E.10.590/2005/1) includes mutual respect towards colleagues and respect for human dignity. Behaviour and

conduct that violate the boundaries, cause harm and are psychologically damaging run counter to this basic principle. The employer is responsible for not tolerating such phenomena. The breach of the obligation to cooperate may also result in the immediate termination of the employment which even many employers are unaware of. This is important to note that this clause provides for the possibility of applying a legal sanction in the event of harassing behaviour.

1.2.5. Frames of liability – Institutions in charge in Hungary

The Equal Treatment Authority (ETA) has been taking a legal approach to the phenomenon of ‘sexual harassment’ since 2005, albeit with a small number of cases but with a more proactive interpretation of the law. As a result of institutional changes, the Authority ceased to be an autonomous public administration body and it was incorporated into the Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights. As of 1 January 2021, the Directorate-General for Equal Treatment conducted the proceedings under administrative procedural law with shorter deadlines than the courts. In the case of (sexual) harassment in the workplace, there is also a right to bring a claim to court.

Due to the general backlog at the courts and the strict procedural rules, court proceedings tend to be lengthy. If there is a need to pursue a claim for sexual harassment in a civil lawsuit, it is possible to do so, and even to claim damages. Some can also claim personal injury in a Labour Court referring to the above-mentioned provisions of the Labour Code. It is becoming increasingly common practice to create internal whistleblowing systems and grievance procedures within companies where the employer itself provides a platform to which employees who suffered harm can turn. In 2019, the European Parliament and the Council adopted a Directive on whistleblowing schemes. The full incorporation of the Directive into Hungarian national law was achieved by the *new Complaints Act – Act XXV of 2023 on Complaints, Public Interest Reports and Rules for Reporting Abuse* – which entered into force in the summer of 2023 (24 July) and covered not only the public sector but also the private one, in addition to handling complaints and public interest reports about public bodies and local authorities. The legal institution of whistleblowing is not new, it was already known in the previous domestic jurisprudence, but the new act further increases accountability and transparency for individual entities. A harassing conduct is undoubtedly covered, so that there must be a way to report it and steps to remedy must be identified in advance.

2.

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

2.1. OCCURRENCE OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

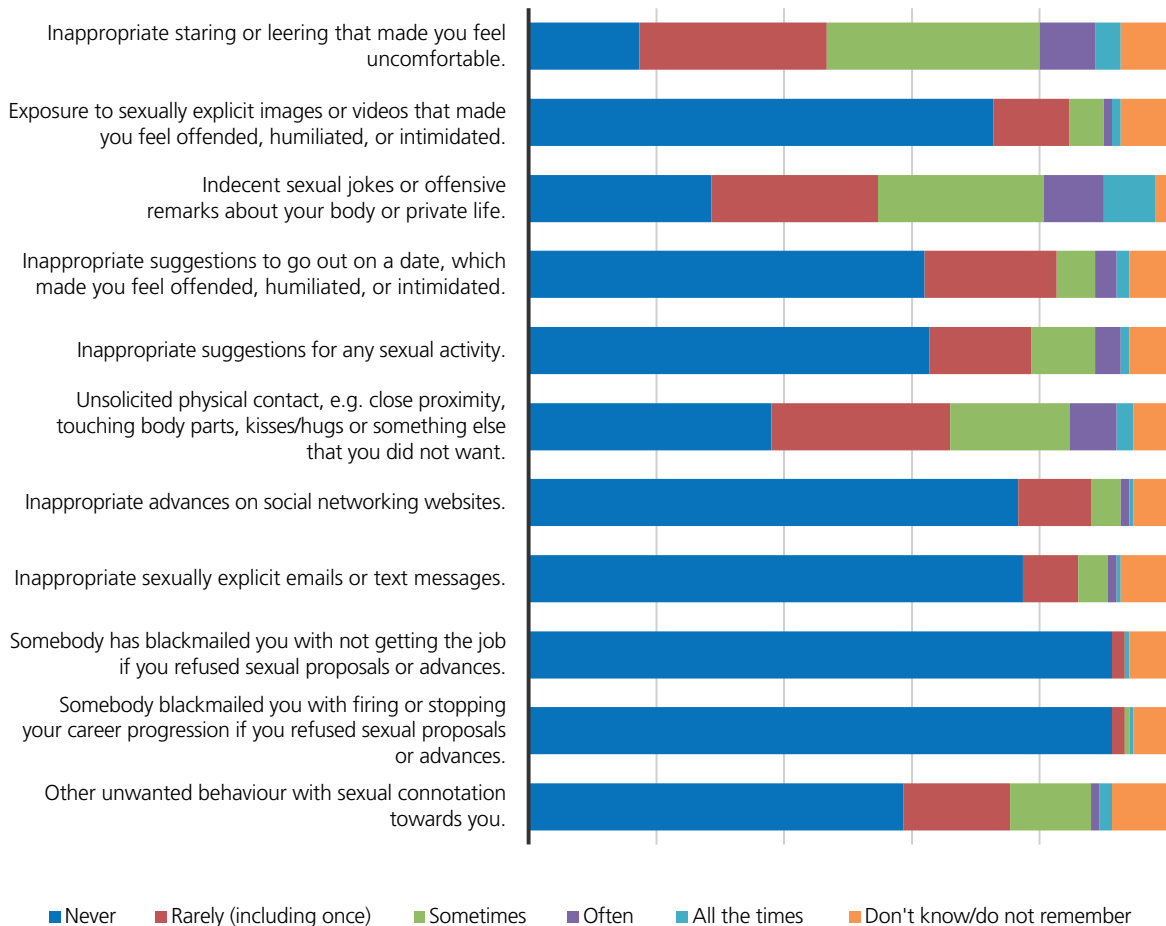
Out of 611 respondents, 364 directly experienced at least one form of sexual harassment in their current employment. The respondents could mark more types of sexual harassment but only at the current workplace, which would indicate that the frequency of SHW experience throughout the whole career would be higher.

In the questionnaire, the most frequently selected options for the degree of regularity experienced across all forms of

harassment were 'rarely' and 'occasionally', ranging from 2% to 30%. This shows that there are experiences of this kind, but statements about frequency are limited. See *Figure 1* for detailed display of the frequency and intensity of all forms this study covers.

Respondents most commonly encountered three forms of sexual harassment: inappropriate sexual content or offensive comments, inappropriate or embarrassing staring, and unwanted physical contact. This indicates that these behaviours are prevalent among the respondents, highlighting a concerning aspect of workplace culture.

Figure 1
Intensity and frequency of exposure in different forms of SHW. Answered by total of N=150 respondents



The data shows a high rate of inexperience, too. Despite the frequent experiences reported, it is noteworthy that a significant number of individuals have never encountered any forms of harassment. The fact that over 50% of the respondents reported never having experienced 8 out of the 11 forms suggests that sexual harassment is not universally experienced in workplaces and that there are varying experiences among individuals.

The two forms of harassment mentioned – extortion or coercive harassment and offers or invitations to engage in sexual acts – are rarely experienced. This indicates that while various forms of sexual harassment exist, more severe behaviours are less common among the surveyed group. When we asked about the broader context of the occurrence of specific incidents, a significant majority of respondents, 41.72%, indicated that sexual harassment is not at all common in their workplace. Additionally, 22.22% reported that it is ‘not common.’ In contrast, only 4.08% considered it to be common, while a mere 1.81% classified it as ‘very common.’ Notably, 30.16% of respondents were unable to make a judgment on the prevalence of sexual harassment in their workplace.

2.2. FORMS OF WORKPLACE SEXUAL HARASSMENT

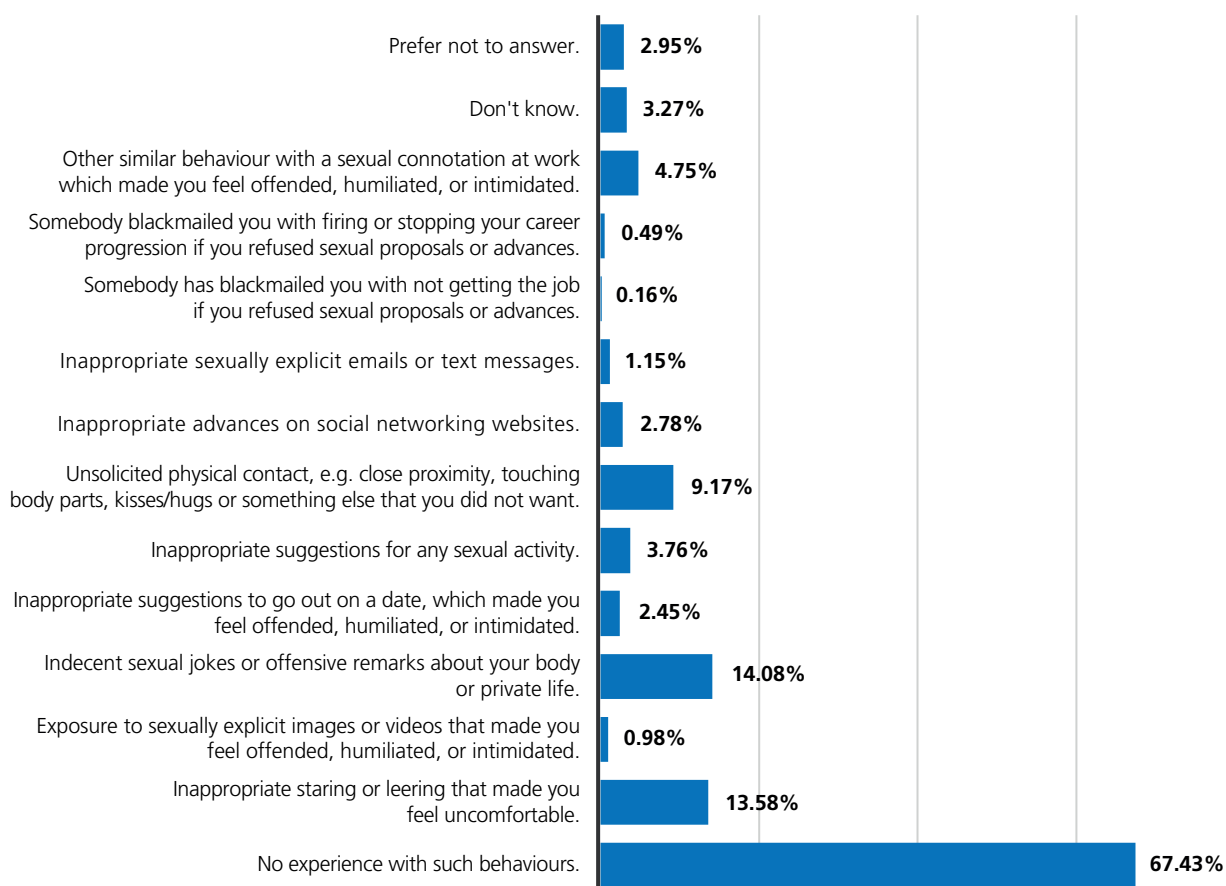
The most commonly reported forms were:

1. *‘Inappropriate sexual content or offensive, rude comments about the body or private life’* – 14.08%
2. *‘Inappropriate, challenging or embarrassing staring, fixation’*- 13.58%
3. *‘Unwanted physical contact, e.g. closeness, touching body parts, unwanted kisses and hugs’* – 9.17%

These results show similarities with the findings of the one and only Hungary-focused study in this field back in 2018 by IDEA Institute. In that study unwanted physical contact, specifically putting hands on legs represented a high percentage (71%), such as asking for services of a sexual nature (explained above) (94%). Staring was also common (45%) specifically named staring at a woman’s breasts. Telling sexist jokes and whistling at women was also commonly perceived as SHW.

Figure 2

Forms of sexual harassment in the workplace. A multiple response question, in % and answered by total N=611 respondents



Survey respondents shared individual experiences above all forms identified in the questionnaire. One respondent puts it like this: “Relatively frivolous manifestations, but very disturbing. Arrogant, egocentric, selfish, perverse, obscene verbal manifestations.” Others cited sexually offensive, abusive jokes and comments, to which they did not know how to respond when they were younger; they did not realise at the time that what was happening was sexual harassment. Some people put it like this: ‘Inappropriate sexual comments’. Some pointed out that they believed verbal sexual harassment was quite common in the country and it was up to the manager to decide how much it should be tolerated. The same trend can be found in a large proportion of cases and stories shared during interviews. Unwanted physical contact such as kissing in an inappropriate manner (IDI4), touching buttocks (IDI1, IDI4), unpleasant closeness (IDI3, IDI4, IDI5, IDI6). IDI2 and IDI3 reported about inappropriate fixation, staring whether it’s an operator’s spacious room, a tiny metro cab or an underground waiting area during early hours of the morning. Remarks, comments of a sexual nature were also common amongst them. The harassment cases came to light during the in-depth interviews are presented in detail under section 2.10.

It can be seen that verbal and non-verbal acts are sometimes experienced independently, but in many cases they complement and accompany each other. It depends on the person and situation which type causes harm, who attaches (greater) importance to which one. It is therefore not possible to establish a universal list according to

severity, but it may be useful to assess it collectively within a given group where the boundaries of each individual lie.

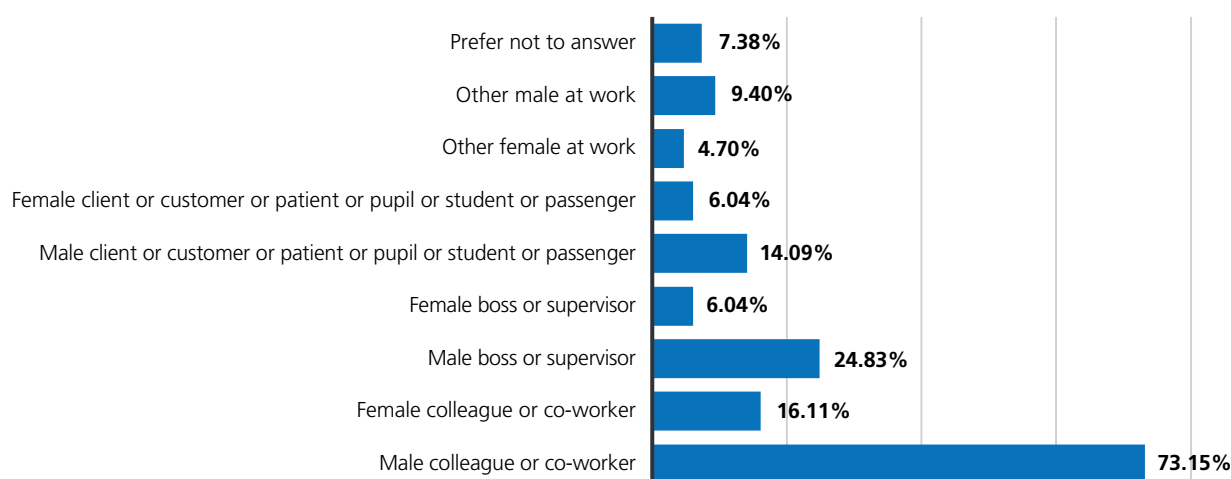
2.3. VICTIMS AND OFFENDERS

Based on the data from the survey of 149 respondents (a high number of persons skipped this question for an unknown reason) regarding sexual harassment situations several key trends emerge. A significant majority of 73.15% of the respondents identified male staff members as the primary perpetrators of harassment. In contrast, only 16.11% indicated female staff as offenders. When analysing managerial roles, 24.83% of respondents pointed to male managers as perpetrators, whereas female managers were identified by just 6.04%. Additionally, male clients, patients, or customers accounted for 14.09% of the identified offenders, while female clients represented a smaller proportion at 6.01%. Overall, these findings suggest a predominantly male presence among identified offenders in sexual harassment scenarios, highlighting a critical area for intervention and policy development within organizations. Participants who took part in in-depth interviews included five women and one man. Even this small sample shows that women are not the only victims of sexual harassment, and this fact is not enough to be emphasised. Policies, legal instruments, communication should consider the fact accordingly and provide protection for everyone regardless of gender.

The research findings support the literature¹ that subordinate relationships are determinant in sexual harass-

Figure 3

Gender and Position of Perpetrators of Sexual Harassment. Multiple response question, reported in %, number of respondents N=149



¹ The organisational model supports Franke’s critique as it proposes that there is power not desire which can be found at the heart of SHW. Amongst others, e.g. Pryor has found that behaviour in hypothetical scenarios is more likely to be judged as harassment if the perpetrator is of relatively higher status (Pryor, 1985). Stockdale (1993) also suggests investigating the influence of power distribution patterns behind harassment. She concludes that in several sexual harassment cases malevolent misusing of organisational positions explain the harm causing. In her argument, based on a patriarchal social structure in which men typically hold more powerful positions women are likely to be in subordinate positions, therefore become victims. According to Stockdale, organisational position is an excellent predictor of a particular form of SWH: ‘quid quo pro’. Vaux (1993) calls attention to the fact that discussions on power dynamics tend to ignore power from sources other than organisational positions. (Sebestyen, 2012)

ment situations, but also show that the rate of offenders may be even higher among those at the same level of the organisational hierarchy. This is not to say that the power factor is not decisive as it is also important to be aware of informal power dynamics where someone feels superior to others because of gender, age, social status, social rank, etc.

148 out of 207 respondents who experienced SHW indicated presenting a vulnerable characteristic, most often gender, age, sexual orientation, or being a member of a national minority group then disability, financial difficulties. These results show that vulnerability can be considered a risk factor when it comes to SHW. The highest score is for gender as a factor in the individuals' perception of having suffered sexual harassment. These data confirm the conceptual approach that sexual harassment is a specific type of gender discrimination, and it is in relation to gender dynamics.

2.4. CONSEQUENCES OF EXPOSURE TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The large majority of the respondents felt uncomfortable (55.2%) and alienated from colleagues, resulting in avoiding others (14.5%) after such harmful situations. 13% considered leaving the workplace and a similar amount of persons reported difficulties in concentrating and experienced decline in performance. There were some (6.21%) who were afraid to go to work and some who had suffered from depressive symptoms, had psychological complaints (8.97%). A few examples show that sometimes harassing situations might affect the quality of familial relations or friendships, as well.

Individual experiences from the open-ended responses to the questionnaire are the following:

"I learned to live with it."

This statement indicates that the individual had to adapt to a difficult situation, highlighting the constant presence of harassment.

"Every day I went to work with a stomach cramp."

This emphasises the physical consequences of stress and anxiety related to the workplace environment.

"I felt disappointed because I was not recognised for my excellent performance, but for my femininity and my looks."

This statement expresses disappointment over being valued for appearance rather than performance, pointing to issues within workplace culture.

"Constant sexual persecution is very unpleasant."

The sentence clearly articulates the discomfort and harmful effects of harassment, contributing to a toxic workplace atmosphere.

Based on the interviewees' stories, feelings of shame, blaming themselves, incomprehension, vulnerability, anger, fear, anxiety, surprise, unpreparedness also appear in harassing situations. They are helped by the confirmation of their fellow women that they are also concerned about certain behaviours because they no longer downplay their grievances after consulting someone else's opinion. Some of them talked about how they got used to certain behaviours over time, how these were normalised in a given environment. After that they didn't even pick it up, they didn't attach any importance to it, they resigned themselves. Some of them were able to react immediately during or as a result of emotional impact, others took a long time to react, protect themselves, take action under the pressure of constant harmful and unwanted influences.

It can be seen that individual experiences and reactions are divergent, but at the same time the discomfort is extremely high, which shows that harassing situations could have a strong emotional impact.

2.5. VICTIMS' REACTIONS TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Survey results indicate that a relatively high proportion of victims (42.55%) didn't take any action following SHW, for their reasoning behind the decision not to take any action pls. *see Figure 4.*

Almost half of the respondents (46.55%) said they didn't consider the incident to be serious enough which can be connected to high levels of normalisation and acceptance of SHW and lack of awareness about its forms. The same proportion of those who suffered SHW thought that nothing could be done about the case. A significant number of persons thought that reporting and escalating the case would have deteriorated the situation. Many of them did not report the incident for fear of negative consequences. It is important to note that there were some who had no confidence in the institutions they could turn to and some who did not know whom turn to.

Figure 5 displays the reactions of sexually harassed individuals. Individuals who experienced sexual harassment at work (SHW) most often responded informally by confiding in a colleague, friend, or family member. About one-third directly confronted the perpetrator or reported the incident to their manager. However, only a small number opted for formal actions, such as filing complaints, reporting to trade unions, labour inspectorates, or other organizations, or seeking help from professionals. (psychologist, lawyer). Four of them have taken formal action against the offender before the competent body anonymously and one with name.

Figure 4
Reasons why harassed individuals did not take any action following SHW. Multiple response question, displayed in %, number of respondents N=119

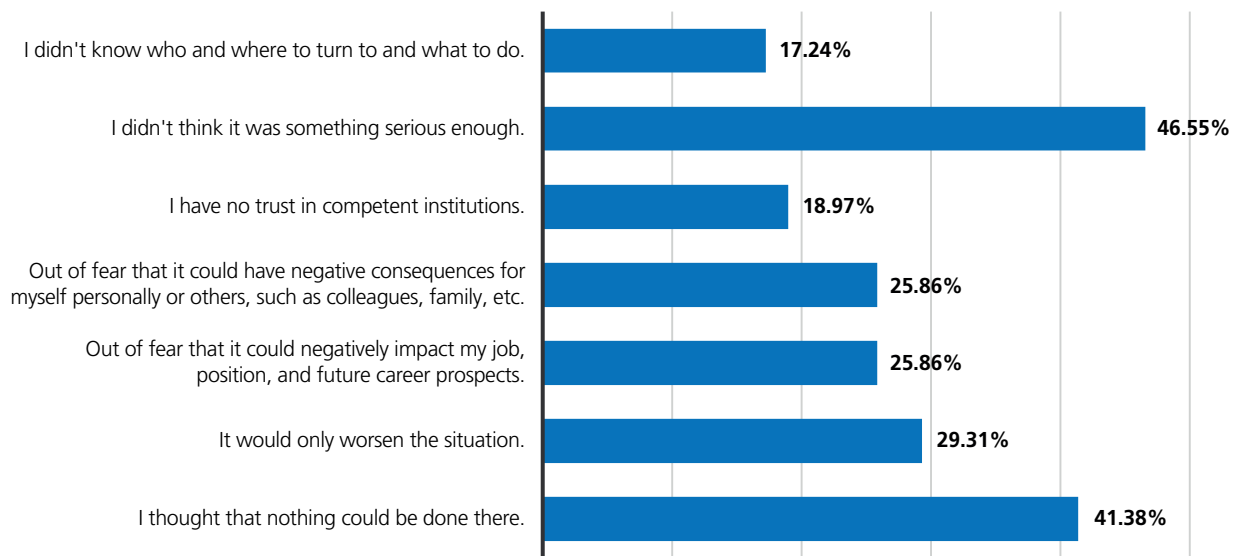
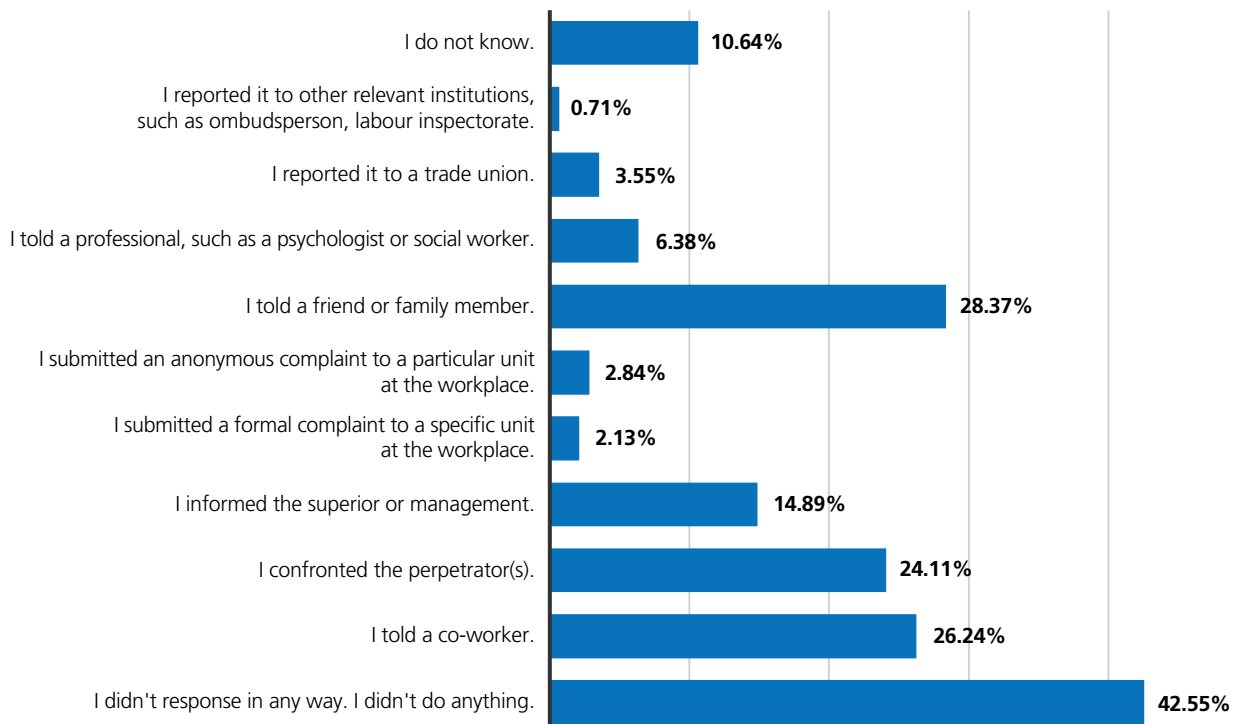


Figure 5
Responses after experiencing SHW. Multiple response question, displayed in %, number of respondents N=239



These are some of the ideas they shared with us in the questionnaire individually apart from the possibilities listed above.

"I tried to avoid annoying people at work"

"I felt guilty for reporting the incident, but I continued to see the person regularly"

"I was afraid of the offender and avoided meeting him"

"The manager had a conversation with him over drinks, and the next day he called me to account for how I could do this."

"We discussed it and it didn't happen again."

“He was scolded and then the colleague continued with others”

“The harassment stopped, but because I was his ‘right hand’ it was difficult to work because we didn’t really talk to each other for a long time.”

“We settled it among ourselves.”

Those affected often feel guilty when reporting harassment and many fear the harasser, leading to further deterioration of workplace relationships. Management intervention is crucial, but the responses do not always promote a lasting solution to the problems. The supervisors’ communication style and approach to handling the situation influence the trust of those involved. A close relationship with the harasser can create difficulties even after the harassment stops. The breakdown or reduction in communication between employees can lead to a deterioration of the workplace atmosphere. A self-resolution of situations is common, but it does not always address deeper issues. Even after harassment has ceased, communication problems may persist, hindering team cohesion and collaboration in the long term.

2.6. SATISFACTION WITH THE OUTCOME OF THE CASE

From the SHWS results of what followed the reporting (formal or informal) of sexual harassment, out of 63 responses, 57.14% said no action. 23.81% reported that the harassment had stopped. Only 9.52% reported that the request or complaint had been investigated. Under 5% of the cases some kind of sanction has been imposed; 3 out of 3 respondents indicated dismissal and disciplinary action against perpetrators. In one case, the victim was transferred and in one case anti-harassment training was organised by the employer as a result of the case. The experience of the formal complaints handling system was perceived as highly ambivalent by respondents. 4.62% believe that the situation has worsened after filing a complaint. 10.77% said that the complaint had not changed the situation, the same proportion received it as having improved the situation, the same number could not judge it.

Based on this, we can summarise the experiences of the respondents below.

Lack of Action. A significant majority of respondents reported that no action had been taken following their complaints, indicating a serious gap in the effectiveness of the reporting process. This suggests that many individuals may feel discouraged from reporting harassment.

Mixed Outcomes. Data reflects a disparity between the acknowledgment of harassment and the implementation of meaningful follow-up actions.

Minimal Sanctions. A very few cases resulted in any form of sanction against perpetrators, including dismissals or disciplinary actions. This raises concerns about accountability and the organisation’s commitment to addressing harassment seriously.

Ambivalent Experiences. Respondents had mixed perceptions of the formal complaints handling system. While a small percentage felt that the situation had worsened after filing complaint others were evenly split regarding whether the complaint had improved or had not change their situation, with some unable to judge.

Overall, the findings highlight significant shortcomings in the response to sexual harassment reports, underscoring the need for organisations to improve their complaint handling processes and enhance accountability to foster a safer workplace environment.

Taking the opportunity of open-ended questions, some people explained how dissatisfied they had been with the union’s actions, which had labelled their problems as personal and encouraged them to leave their jobs. There have also been some who have faced discrimination after standing up for themselves. In one case the male harasser tried to defame the harassed women in front of their common boss and succeeded. “After confronting my male co-employee, he tried to get me in trouble in front of my boss. My boss held me accountable for my rudeness with the man. After I had explained the reason, she said she was aware that there had been other similar complaints against him. Nevertheless, I received a written warning for my rudeness and the man was left without any consequences.” This case highlights a failure in the organisation’s response to harassment and a lack of accountability for the perpetrator.

2.7. KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS OF THE SEXUAL HARASSMENT PROTECTION SYSTEM

The survey and interview results reveal a prevalent dissatisfaction with the attitudes toward sexual harassment in the workplace. Respondents expressed significant concerns regarding the effectiveness of existing protection mechanisms and the impartiality of internal investigations. The SHW findings highlight a troubling lack of awareness about these mechanisms, with nearly half of the participants (243 out of 510) stating they do not know if their employer has any policies in place to prevent, address, or sanction workplace sexual harassment. For further details on reported workplace policies, refer to *Figure 6*.

This suggests that workplace policies may either be ineffective in addressing sexual harassment or that employees lack adequate awareness of them. When asked about their satisfaction with their employer’s efforts in education, prevention, monitoring, and sanctioning of sexual harassment one-third of respondents felt their

employer had not been doing enough to educate about the issue, while another third believed insufficient action had been taken to impose sanctions. The data reveals that employees are generally more satisfied with sanctions than with preventive measures suggesting a greater reliance on punitive actions in Hungary rather than proactive prevention strategies. Overall, it can be concluded that only about 20% or fewer respondents expressed satisfaction with their employer's actions. Further details can be found in *Figure 7*.

When asked about the type of information and support respondents would have needed after experiencing harassment, the following data were gathered:

- How to make a complaint 54,65%
- Protection from further harassment or retaliation 43,02%
- Expert assistance (legal) in making a complaint 41,47%
- Moral support, talking to someone I can trust 31,98%
- Expert help to clarify my rights 22,48%
- Health aid 6,59%
- Financial support 2,91%

This shows that more than half of those who are victims of harassment situations feel the need to hold the perpetrator to account but need information on who to contact and what process to follow. The need for personal moral and legal support is also very strong, as well as help to stop the situation causing harm. As an employer, being aware of these employee expectations is extremely useful as they

are the starting point for building a grievance mechanism on the subject.

The lack of knowledge or uncertainty of the subject is evident from the answers to this open-ended question. Here are some examples:

"To my knowledge, the employer cannot decide whether or not sexual harassment has occurred, that falls under the scope of courts, but my current employer is taking action against this type of harmful behaviours, which has not been occurred for years."

Sexual harassment is "unofficial and not in the code of ethics! But if a colleague's behaviour is offensive, I can complain to the HR and the offending colleague will be asked to stop or will be dismissed."

"I think it should be managed and monitored by HR."

"We don't have sexual harassment; we have verbal harassment. On a daily basis."

"My opinion is that most people are not even aware of the fact that what they are doing is possibly sexual harassment, which is punishable by law. Basically, it should be taught to people what they can do and what they cannot do. It should be evident to people who are being sexually harassed where to go if anything bothers them."

Figure 6

Workplace policies for preventing, addressing, and sanctioning SHW. Multiple response question, displayed in %, total number of respondents N=492

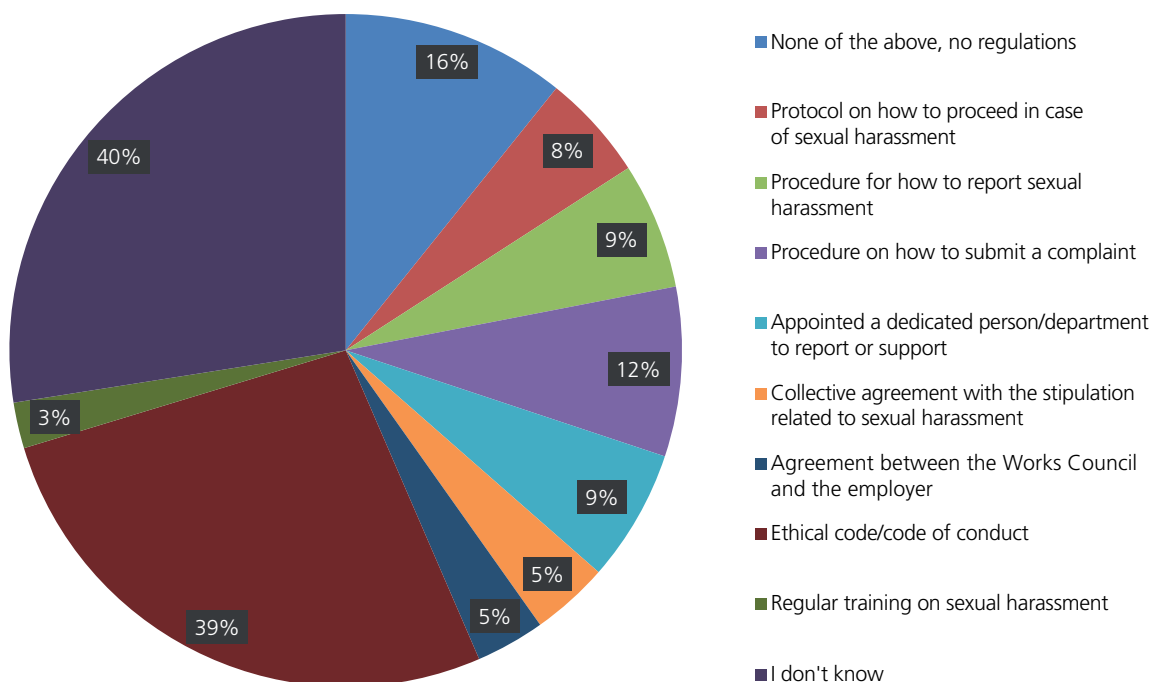
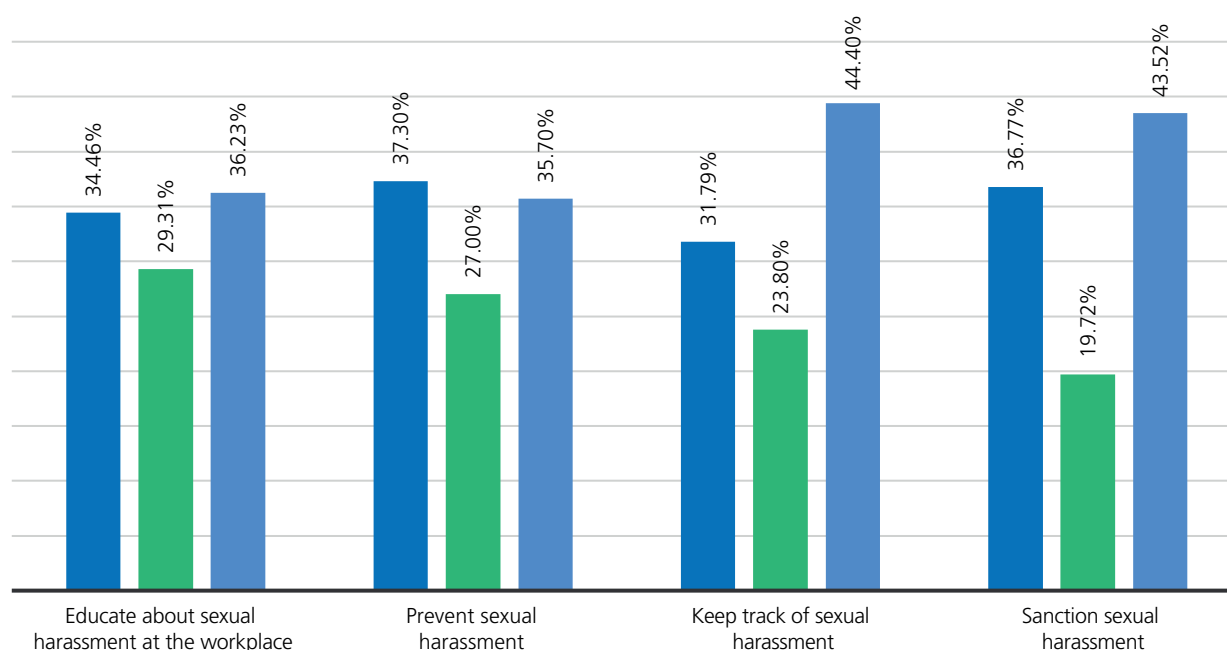


Figure 7

Perception of the adequacy of employer's SHW policies. Proportions of respondents, displayed in %, each option answered by total N=563 respondents



The individual responses highlight several key conclusions regarding the understanding and management of sexual harassment in the workplace.

Lack of Awareness: There is a notable lack of awareness about what constitutes sexual harassment as indicated by comments suggesting that many individuals do not recognise certain behaviours as problematic. This lack of knowledge underscores the need for comprehensive education on the issue.

Confusion Over Responsibility: Respondents express confusion about who is responsible for addressing sexual harassment, with some believing it is beyond the employer's jurisdiction and should be managed by legal authorities. This points to a need for clearer communication about roles and responsibilities in handling harassment cases.

HR's Role: Several comments suggest that there is an expectation for Human Resources (HR) to manage and monitor harassment issues, indicating that employees see HR as a key player in addressing these concerns. However, this also highlights a potential gap in HR's proactive involvement.

Need for Education and Resources: Many respondents emphasise the necessity of educating employees about acceptable behaviour and providing clear pathways for reporting harassment. This indicates that establishing training programs and accessible resources could significantly improve awareness and response to harassment.

2.8. THE ROLE OF TRADE UNIONS AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS IN PREVENTING AND TREATING SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Based on the responses, trade unions should assume several important roles as identified in the questionnaire. The majority of respondents (60.86%) strongly agree that unions should primarily support affected employees. Additionally, 47.29% believe that unions should advocate for the implementation of relevant regulations. Furthermore, 45.70% of respondents feel that unions should report non-compliance with national and international regulations to the labour inspectorate and share information about existing regulations. They also emphasise the importance of monitoring adherence to the regulatory framework and incorporating these issues into collective agreements. Many respondents suggest that trade unions should organise regular training sessions on this topic as well.

The individual statements from the responses to the open-ended questions reflect varying perspectives on the responsibilities of different parties in representing employees' interests and addressing workplace issues.

"Representation of employees' interests is not only the responsibility of the trade union, but also that of the works council or representative."

This statement suggests a belief in shared responsibility among various entities within the workplace. It emphasises the importance of collaboration between trade unions and works councils, indicating that a multi-faceted approach is necessary for effectively advocating

for employee rights. This could lead to the conclusion that stronger partnerships among these groups may enhance employee representation.

“The trade union should be active in providing legal and moral assistance, if necessary.”

This reflects an expectation that trade unions have a dual role in not only advocating for employees’ rights but also offering support in legal matters. It underscores the need for unions to be proactive in protecting their members. The conclusion here is that unions must be equipped with the resources and knowledge to provide this assistance effectively, which could strengthen trust and engagement among employees.

“I see it as an employer’s responsibility to involve the works council and the trade union.”

This statement places the onus on employers to ensure that both the works council and the trade union are engaged in discussions regarding employee representation and rights. It suggests that employers should take an active role in fostering communication and collaboration. The implication is that better employer engagement with these bodies could lead to a more supportive and fair workplace environment.

“I think HR should handle this task.”

This view indicates a belief that Human Resources departments should take the lead in addressing workplace issues and advocating for employees. It suggests a reliance on the HR to manage conflicts and provide support, potentially reflecting a perception that the HR is better positioned to handle these matters. The conclusion may be that the HR must be adequately trained and empowered to fulfil this role effectively to ensure employee interests are represented.

“It’s not necessarily the union’s job to find a solution, but rather the employer’s.”

This statement implies a belief that the responsibility for resolving workplace issues lies primarily with the employer rather than with the union. It suggests that unions should not bear the entire burden of finding solutions and that employers have an obligation to address and rectify problems.

2.9. EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CURRENT REGULATIONS

47.65% of respondents were unaware of any national legislation prohibiting or preventing sexual harassment in the workplace, while 46.27% were aware. The percentages regarding their own employers are similarly aligned. To put the topic in a broader, more general context, we share some of the individual responses we consider important to highlight.

“Sexual harassment in Hungary is highest in education and in film and theatre institutions. I think that is where the survey should start. And also in primary schools, with preventive education for children.”

“The topic is currently still a “taboo”. It would be advisable to make the relevant legislation known at workplace level and to draw up internal rules on the subject, and I consider it necessary to extend the collective agreement and the cooperation agreements between the employer and the works councils and the trade union in this respect.”

“In addition to sexual harassment, it would be good to have a framework for rules on collegial behaviour. Especially in places where there are many women, because it is common to humiliate others and lie. It would be worthwhile to carry out psychological and managerial aptitude tests for the staff in senior positions. Internal rules and procedures should also be established for reporting verbal abuse amongst colleagues.”

“A code of ethics is definitely needed, not just for sexual harassment, but also for victimisation, misuse of power and other discrimination. Employees are completely vulnerable.”

Based on the above, some conclusions can be drawn. The acknowledgment that sexual harassment is particularly high in education and the film and theatre industries suggests that targeted surveys and interventions should focus on these sectors especially. The perception of the topic as a “taboo” underscores the need for greater awareness and education. It points to the necessity of disseminating existing legislation at workplaces and developing internal policies to combat harassment. A gap is reflected in understanding and addressing these issues effectively within organisations. There is a call emerging for rules regarding collegial behaviour and it indicates that harassment can often be accompanied by a culture of humiliation and dishonesty. This suggests the need for a comprehensive framework to foster a respectful work environment. There is an articulated suggestion to implement psychological and managerial aptitude tests for senior staff emphasising the importance of leadership in shaping workplace culture. This indicates that the effectiveness of policies may depend on the character and competence of those in power. There is a demand for a code of ethics that addresses not only sexual harassment but also victimisation and misuse of power which suggests a holistic approach to workplace conduct. The vulnerability of employees and the necessity for clear guidelines that protect all staff from various forms of discrimination are reflected. Overall, these insights collectively advocate for a multi-faceted approach to tackling sexual harassment, emphasising education, awareness, structural changes, and the establishment of clear ethical standards in the workplace.

2.10. LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

The in-depth interviews further enriched our knowledge on the subject. What was said is so profound in its complexity that we feel the need and the usefulness of reporting in detail, albeit in abstracts, all that was shared.

IDI1, who worked for a multinational IT company in the automotive industry recounted an incident during a team-building event where she was inappropriately touched by a senior manager on her buttocks who also made an obscene comment (“I fucking love you”). She noted that this was not an isolated incident, as other women had similarly complained about this individual. Despite the concerns raised, the senior management did not give support by addressing this behaviour and insisted on inviting the manager to future events.

Following the incident, attention on social media prompted the company to investigate, with the German parent company bringing in external legal experts to conduct interviews in Budapest. IDI1 participated in this process which ultimately led to the removal of several managers involved in misconduct.

She felt a responsibility to speak out and educate others about these issues, hoping to foster a supportive environment for younger women in the company. Although the company promised training and changes in culture, IDI1 chose to leave, citing inability to work effectively with management. She emphasised the importance of holding violators accountable and advocating for assertiveness rather than avoidance in the face of harassment, as well as developing soft skills within the organisation.

IDI2 who works in production process improvement recalls her experiences in a male-dominated workplace over the past eight years. During meetings, she often faced inappropriate comments and behaviours such as colleagues making sexualised jokes and comments about her appearance. She described how men would whistle at her and make disrespectful remarks, even asking personal questions like what’s the colour of the bra she was wearing. During a meeting for example, she grabbed a bottle of water and popped the cap off and men immediately associated it with how she would grab a penis. She said that it was common when a woman entered the production area that men stepped out from behind the machines and had a good look at her and even whistled at her, calling her “hello darling”. She also said there have been countless company parties where people have lost their way, got drunk and during these events hands were sliding up and down while dancing.

When she learned that a young trainee was being messaged inappropriately by an older man she took action, emphasising the need for education within the company to prevent such a behaviour. Despite numerous incidents, she expressed a lack of trust in HR, citing a poor

reputation and the need for a more effective reporting system, possibly through anonymous channels.

While there are policies in place against harassment, she noted that recent investigations had been unprofessional, leading to a culture of rumour and mistrust. She believes it’s crucial for those handling complaints to be properly trained. IDI2 is confident that a recent change in leadership, characterised by higher emotional intelligence among the new executives will promote a positive shift in workplace culture, especially as more women enter technical fields.

IDI3, a public transport driver in the capital, shared her experience of two years of harassment from a colleague. He gave her unsolicited gifts, decorated her locker with pink hearts and intruded on her in her cab at odd hours. Despite repeatedly asking him to stop, he continued, even sending Facebook messages calling her the “Smiling Princess” until she blocked him.

Feeling overwhelmed, IDI3 sought help from his supervisor, who initially intervened, but the harassment resumed, escalating to physical confrontations. The man became much more violent, and despite locking the train door and darkening the train the man used his own key to open it and went into the compartment where they were pushing each other in that one metre by two metres room. In revenge for IDI3 not talking to him, he started telling all sorts of vile and disrespectful things about her to their colleagues; this was the last straw for her. After a particularly tense encounter where she felt the urge to attack him she realised she needed to take a stand. “It burst out of me in a peasant style, everything I’d been swallowing for two years, I was going to attack him, I was going to tear him up, so colleagues withheld me,” she says. Following her ordeal, the harasser began targeting another female colleague, prompting IDI3 to support her.

Despite the harasser still being employed, a recent case of sexual harassment led to the dismissal of a senior male colleague prompting the company to announce anonymous reporting options. However, IDI3 remains sceptical about their credibility. Empowered by her struggle, she has since connected with other women who shared similar experiences and became a trade union representative, gaining their trust and support.

IDI4, a senior manager in waste management, reflects on her long career and the immunity she felt against workplace harassment due to her position. The risk of not being called up after a rehearsal gone wrong, or of not having someone’s professional opinion taken into account, was something they didn’t dare risk after a while. She describes inappropriate advances from male colleagues, including a partner who would greet her with kisses that often crossed boundaries. These kisses were sometimes interesting; he would grip her waist more firmly and pull her towards him or slide his hand down to her bottom, or the kiss would not be far enough back, but a little further forward, closer to her mouth. After

declining a meeting request from a company manager, she found herself effectively ostracised professionally. After the refusal and having worked for them for nearly 10 years, he was virtually never to be spoken to again nor could he be approached professionally.

She emphasises the power dynamics at play when socially superior men interact with their male colleagues, calling their attention into misbehaviour in front of a women, what really can be powerful and empowering. She notes the importance of self-advocacy and processing past traumas to avoid feeling helpless in similar situations. The feeling of helplessness can easily return when such an insult comes, because it is just as difficult to deal with it at first, as it was as a child. Recently, she confronted a colleague who inappropriately touched her, discreetly slipped his hand down her bottom whilst greeting her. She then immediately told him where his hand belonged. She affirms the importance of discussing unacceptable behaviour openly with female colleagues to validate their experiences.

IDI4 believes that without strong ethical values from management, policies against harassment are ineffective. She stresses the need for impartiality in whistleblowing processes and caution against victim-blaming (especially by women), which can perpetuate toxic workplace cultures.

ID15, a media professional and former television presenter, recounted her experiences with inappropriate behaviour in the workplace. During a job interview with the director of a national TV channel he made a troubling comment about the “casting couch,” leaving her confused and humiliated. During the conversation he got closer to her and after discussing what shows she had been on he started talking about how they were a family-like workplace, everyone loved each other, and they were looking for people who could fit in. “He obviously saw my confusion or that I couldn’t do anything about it and then it became awkward, and I blushed because even though I was a mother with children, he could still make me very embarrassed.” She felt degraded and didn’t report the incident, ultimately not getting the job.

She also described a derogatory joke made by a young male colleague during a studio break. After confronting him firmly, he thanked her for the feedback, but she felt a sense of shame for being made to feel insignificant by the joke.

In a mentoring relationship, an older male colleague drove her to his family’s country house and expressed disappointment when she rejected his advances. She recognised the risk of being vulnerable in such situations, fearing that he could have exploited her. “It was a typical situation where he was a professional mentor, a leader, a teacher and if you want to get into the press and marketing circles of a big corporation’s top management, his guidance and leadership is essential. Subsequently it is

so scary, he wanted to get me as a woman and I was not aware of this at that time and he could have raped me,” she said.

Another incident involved the editor-in-chief who used power dynamics to manipulate her through invitations to dinner, which ceased once she declined. After a while she was not called for editing that show.

IDI5 believes that having an independent person to report such experiences to would be beneficial. She emphasised the importance of ensuring that rules are well-known and that external specialists should handle investigations. Additionally, she advocated for comprehensive training on rights to create a safer workplace environment.

ID16 is a sociologist and security engineer who is currently studying psychology. He reported a story in which a female manager at a company’s Christmas event approached him physically with sexual intention. She asked him to dance with the suggestion that others should be encouraged to join them on the dance floor. While she danced she pressed parts of her body such as her breasts against his body and caressed her back. The man said that he had deliberately walked out of the situation, feeling uncomfortable and questioning that a woman in a higher position was openly approaching him in front of their colleagues. After that she would invite him to date her outside of work making her sympathies clear, thus he decided to leave the company. He did not want to be in a situation where he might be treated more favourably because of such a relationship. He believes it is very important as prevention that men should be aware of their own sexuality and patterns of behaviour, so space and time should be provided for talking about it. He sees potential in company group sessions where employees have the chance to confront their own beliefs and link them to everyday behaviour. He believes there is a need to develop self-reflection and emotional intelligence in order to be able to deal with possible attractions and sympathies in a workplace environment in a mature, adult way. He also considers it useful to put the regulatory framework in writing and not for the drawer.

2.10.1. Key Findings:

Sexual harassment is reported across sectors, including IT, production, public transport, media, and waste management. In each instance, power dynamics play a crucial role, as individuals in positions of authority misuse their power over younger and/or lower-ranking employees.

Many organisations *lack effective reporting mechanisms for harassment complaints*. In several cases, HR departments were either mistrusted or viewed as unhelpful. Reporting incidents often resulted in minimal or no consequences for the offenders. Even when complaints were taken seriously, as in the case of IDI1, the management’s initial response fell short. In some instances, offenders remained employed or continued their behaviour unchecked, leaving

victims with no choice but to either leave the organisation (as seen in IDI1 and IDI6) or develop alternative coping strategies (as noted in IDI3).

Looking for personal solutions when there is a lack of organisational support. Several victims reported feeling compelled to address their own situations when organisational support was lacking. For instance, IDI3 was forced to take matters into her own hands after years of enduring harassment and eventually became a union representative. IDI1 and IDI5 highlighted their feelings of responsibility to educate others and raise awareness about the issue, indicating a shift from victimisation to advocacy. However, some individuals like IDI5 expressed feelings of shame, confusion and self-blame which initially prevented them from reporting the incidents.

Many interviewees mentioned the *need for systemic change within organisations and their culture*. This includes training on emotional intelligence (IDI6), professional competence in handling harassment complaints (IDI2) and cultural changes (IDI1, IDI2) that prevent the normalisation of harmful behaviour. IDI1 emphasised that without consequences for violations and efforts to move from avoidance to self-assertion, workplace harassment would persist.

In the absence of formal systems, *informal support networks often emerge*. IDI3 mentioned how women within her workplace began sharing stories and warning each other about dangerous colleagues. These informal networks offer a sense of solidarity and empowerment, but they also underscore the failure of formal mechanisms to provide adequate protection.

Sexual harassment is experienced by both genders. While most cases reported female victims of male harassment, IDI6 provides an example of a man experiencing sexual advances from a female superior. This case highlights that harassment can be gender-neutral, with power dynamics at the core. It also stresses the importance of men understanding their own sexual behaviour and the need for open conversations about these issues within organisations.

The influence of external investigations was significant. Investigations initiated by IDI1's German parent company played a crucial role in holding offenders accountable and driving organisational change. The engagement of independent law firms indicates that external oversight may be more effective in addressing harassment than internal investigations which can be vulnerable to bias or incompetence (as in the case of IDI2).

2.10.2. Conclusions:

Systemic Nature of Harassment: Workplace sexual harassment is a systemic issue, cutting across industries and sectors. It is deeply rooted in power imbalances and a lack of accountability in organisational structures.

Importance of Leadership and Culture: The leadership's role in setting the tone for organisational culture is critical. The lack of managerial accountability often perpetuates a culture of tolerance towards harassment. The introduction of emotionally intelligent leaders and systemic changes (as noted by IDI2 and IDI1) are vital in reversing these trends.

Necessity for Professional and Impartial Investigation Mechanisms: In-house investigations often fail to provide justice or to protect the victims as evidenced by IDI3 and IDI5's experiences. Independent investigations (as in IDI1's case) and external oversight are more likely to ensure fair outcomes.

Empowerment Through Advocacy and Networks: Victims who feel unsupported by their organisations often find empowerment through advocacy, either by forming informal networks (IDI3) or through direct confrontation and feedback (IDI5). While these actions are empowering, they are reactive measures and should not replace formal, institutional responses to harassment.

Training and Emotional Intelligence: There is a clear call for developing soft skills such as emotional intelligence, self-reflection and awareness of sexual behaviour in the workplace. IDI6's suggestion for company-wide group sessions and discussions on beliefs and behaviour is a proactive way to address harassment before it happens.

Gender-Neutral Approach to Harassment: Sexual harassment is not solely a female experience, as seen in IDI6's case. Policies, trainings and support mechanisms should address harassment gender-neutrally, ensuring that all employees are protected.

Victim Support and Whistleblowing: There is a strong need for safe, anonymous, and independent channels for victims to report harassment, coupled with guaranteed follow-through. This includes whistleblowing mechanisms and external handling of cases to ensure impartiality.

2.11. CONCLUDING REMARKS FROM THE ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

At the round table discussion, there was a common agreement that sexual harassment is a topic that needs to be talked about, that is worth agenda, to keep it on the surface and not just on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (25 November) to commemorate it. It is important that well thought out messages on multiple platforms and targeted at different audiences reach the workplace communities. The very nature of the topic makes it very important to build trust, which is essential in order to deal with this type of grievance to come forward. It was agreed upon that proactivity is important to achieve this, which does not just imply open doors from a senior management level but also, as a first step, systematic education, whereby learning about our rights and obligations in the workplace,

interpersonal relationships, human connections, the expected – and tolerated – behaviour of people desirable behaviour and attitudes. How we work together we have formulated, in addition to clarifying and building a framework (rules, responsibilities, complaints procedures), which gives a formal sense of security in a formal sense, even legal compliance, in shaping attitudes must also be taken up. To do this, it is necessary to devise and design communication, education (training, lectures, sessions).

There was a lot of talk about employees with mental health problems, who are often the perpetrators of harassment. There was a lot of discussion about the need for special medical assessment, therapy, possible banning from the community, and that this extreme category needs special treatment or measures.

Ingrained stereotypes about gender roles were also a central theme, at trade union leadership level as well; typically, there is experience of an ageing, male chauvinist tendency that is less open to hearing the diverse voices, needs and demands of women. As such, it is often not easy

even at the level of raising issues to bring in suggestions, perhaps a different attitude, in such a resistant, jovial, paternalistic and often sexist environment. In this area, there is confidence in generational change and in the many years of experience of women's organisations which have been able to achieve change despite the resistant environment, developing their own strategies.

There was also a lot of talk about the fear that is present in employees in general, that there is a general sense of being at risk, without grievances and without standing up for oneself, which can also be translated into silence, or withdrawal from public affairs. They are reluctant to talk about problems, or, if they do, not even in search of constructive common solutions and possibilities for change, but rather with resignation, complaining, resignation, bitterness. The overall social context, the divided and survivalist quality of the socio-political sphere, is presumably a major contributor to individual apathy. In this way, it is crucial to allocate resources to figure out how to address people, how to share valuable and important content with them.

3.

REGULATORY PROPOSALS AND REFLECTIVE SUMMARY

The following recommendations are based on the SHW survey results, in-depth interviews and stakeholder focus group discussion.

3.1. PROPOSALS FOR LAWMAKERS

- **ILO Convention No. 190 – Call for ratification by Hungary**
The provisions of the Convention should be implemented through national legislation and through collective agreements or other measures in accordance with national practice, including the extension or revision of existing occupational safety and health measures to cover violence and harassment and, where necessary, the development of specific measures. Pursuant to Recommendation 206, Member States should ensure that provisions on violence and harassment in national laws, regulations and policies take into account the ILO's equality and non-discrimination instruments, including the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951, No. 10 and Recommendation 90, and the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958, No. 111 and Recommendation 111.
- **Istanbul Convention – Call for ratification by Hungary**
The Convention contains a number of internationally recognised general standards and provisions for effective and professional action against violence against women, domestic violence and violence in relationships. Basic principles:
 - Women must be protected against all forms of violence, in both the public and private spheres. Zero tolerance must be applied to all forms of violence.
 - Action should focus on prevention, protection of victims and prosecution of offenders.
 - The rights, protection, safety and needs of victims are paramount. They must be at the centre of every intervention and action. All actions must be planned and implemented with this in mind.
- **Making changes to the domestic legal order to comply with 2024/1385 Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on combating violence against women and domestic violence**
 - Member States shall bring into force the laws, regulations and administrative provisions necessary to comply with this Directive by 14 June 2027.
 - The purpose of this Directive is to provide a comprehensive framework to effectively prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence throughout the Union. It does so by strengthening and introducing measures in relation to the following areas: the definition of relevant criminal offences and penalties, the protection of victims and access to justice, victim support, enhanced data collection, prevention, coordination and cooperation.
 - The transposition of the regulations into the Hungarian legislation shall result in having a complex and carefully considered system of handling injustices suffered mainly by women instead of having a limited number of legal clauses which shall be applied on VAW.
 - The document is a thorough guideline how to address VAW and what measures are necessary to be done in order to handle, prosecute, sanction and prevent cases; to fight against the phenomenon effectively
- **Amendment of the Labour Code**
 - A separate definition of harassment (including sexual harassment), based on the provisions of the Ebktv (Act on Equal Treatment).
 - Specify the 'duty of cooperation', drawing on judicial practice (see LB Mfv. E.10.590/2005/1.); name the need to respect each other and to preserve human dignity
- **Amendment of the Labour Protection Act**
 - Name and list bullying, harassment (including sexual harassment) and violence at work as a psychosocial risk
 - The legislation currently requires risk assessment every 3 years; reduce this to 1 year, and set up a monitoring and follow-up mechanism and sanction employers who fail to comply
- **Improving the institutional system of Labour Protection – Employment and Labour Inspection**
 - To set up a group/department to monitor violence, abuse, harassment, psychological, mental well-being, psychological safety in the workplace

3.2. PROPOSALS TO STAKEHOLDERS

For Employers:

- Compile a policy, a codex for internal rules, a written document on the core values of the organisational culture and a complaint handling mechanism
- Appoint a responsible person, committee or body in charge; have external, independent experts and/or internal, trained staff specifically appointed to deal with these kinds of complaints
- Those in positions of responsibility for handling complaints, or the committee, should be trained and prepared
- Resources should be allocated for the administrative burden of these procedures
- Organise training sessions and education for employees on the psycho-mental aspects of the employment relationships and on the phenomenon of causing harms to others, the phenomenon of organisational abuse, harassment, sanctions and liability with a special focus on sexual harassment
- Information and education for employees on the legal environment regarding mobbing and harassment within the organisation, about the employer's policies, the grievance mechanism, the investigators, responsibilities, the procedure with a special focus on sexual harassment
- Leaflets, posters, newsletters, regular internal company communication on the legal and institutional background, employees' rights and opportunities
- Organise informal, optional events on this topic – to promote attitude change; so, keep the topic on the surface in a non-direct way, e.g. through art or science (e.g. film screening, theatre performance)
- Treat prevention as the basis for the development of a safe organisational culture, i.e. work consciously on building psychologically safe communities and environments
- Appoint a person (position, role) who deals with the psycho-social relations and mental well-being/health of the collective, who organises community events, who is responsible for the compliance of the regulations, who can be contacted immediately after a potential harm has occurred – a professional with the necessary competences – who can support both the individual and the community (e.g. mental health professional, psychologist, sociologist, coach)

For Employers' Representatives:

- Recognise the importance of the topic and stress the importance of dealing with it; e.g. include SHW issues in their programme priorities documents, official and internal statements, short term and long term strategies. Regularly assess conditions, e.g. discuss annually the number, nature and case management of any cases
- Organise training sessions, education on the psycho-mental aspects of the employment relationship

and on the phenomenon of causing harm to others, the phenomenon of organisational abuse, (sexual) harassment, sanctions and liability

- Promoting the Copenhagen questionnaire², encouraging psycho-social risk assessment, recruiting partners who can help with this, quasi mediate professionals to clients
- Recruit experts and help employers with a database
- policy editors, investigators, complaint handlers
- trainers, speakers

3.3. PROPOSALS FOR TRADE UNIONS

- Recognise the importance of the topic and stress the importance of dealing with it; e.g. include SHW issues in their strategy documents, official and internal statements, organise special preventive programmes
- Working on the inclusion of prohibition of SHW and implementation of regulations by employers in collective agreements. Strategic communication on the issue; awareness raising, rights and obligations
- It is important to be aware of the specificities of the target audience (in terms of platforms, messages)
- Encourage trade union leaders to deepen their knowledge in the field and encourage them to convey openness and build trust
- Organise sectoral educative events and workshops on the subject, for the sake of prevention
- Be an advocate and flag bearer for change in this area too
- Organise informal, optional activities and events on this topic – e.g. through art or science (film screening, theatre performance) to promote attitude change
- Lobbying the government for the ratification of ILO no190 and the Istanbul Convention; contact politicians who can exert influence and pressure
- Keeping the issue in the public discourse, cooperating with the media and public actors, building a network out of supporters
- Appoint a person who deals with the psycho-social relations and mental well-being/health of the collective, who organises community events, who is responsible for the compliance of the regulations, who can be contacted immediately after a potential harm has occurred – a professional with the necessary competences – who can support both the individual and the community (e.g. mental health professional, psychologist, sociologist, coach)
- Training of officials at the workplace

² <https://nfa.dk/vaerktoejer/spoergeskemaer/copenhagen-psykosocial-questionnaire-copsoq-ii/copenhagen-psykosocial-questionnaire-copsoq-ii>

3.4. REFLECTIONS ON THE DESIGN OF TRAINING COURSES

Methodologically, these occasions can be divided into two broad groups, as it is important to define the goal, what we want to achieve as a result of the meeting. We can think of “lecture-type”, informative, framing-type of occasions whilst knowledge transfer is the goal when we clarify the regulatory framework, clarify concepts with the aim of transferring information e.g. on the process of prosecution or sanctioning. In this case, we can reach several people at the same time and we work on a cognitive level.

When it is possible to work on the topic in smaller groups we talk about “Workshop-like group work”, where there is dedicated space and time to share experience, opinions, knowledge and there are possibilities to confront beliefs. This type of thinking and working together can help shape attitudes – as well as – develop a personal relation and connection to the topic. It can be very useful when participants have the opportunity to support each other, share their stories and experience, show each other a mirror or share their coping strategies that might inspire each other.

Priority topics, possible themes when carrying out sensitisation, awareness-raising work on sexual harassment:

- International and national regulatory framework; rights and obligations, case law (case studies), means of complaining (competent bodies, institutions)
- How to build an environment where there is psychological safety, where vulnerability can be accepted, where there is dialogue about boundaries, where boundary violations and grievances are not tolerated
- Communication techniques; tools and strategies to deal with harassers in harassment situations; how to maintain your dignity, values, and mental health in situations that challenge or discomfort you
- Soft skills development: boundary setting, self-assertion, assertive self-expression, emotional intelligence, emotion regulation, anger management, conflict management skills development
- The problem of violence against women, power as a driver of abuse, the nature of misuse of power
- The problem of victim blaming, (secondary) victimisation, the basics of trauma-informed victim support
- Sexism, gender equality, gender stereotypes, gender cooperation, mutual respect in theory and practice
- Training to participate in the investigation of sexual harassment complaints
- Strengthening women’s solidarity with each other, promoting supportive cooperation, a safety net for each other
- Men among themselves – how they can “regulate” each other, influence each other on the behaviours to be normalised in a context, and become allies of women (expanding their reality, listening to unfamiliar experiences, dealing with them sympathetically, with empathy)

ANNEXES

1. STRUCTURE OF THE SURVEY SAMPLE

Category	Main (number)	Percentage
Respondents	759	100%
Female	479	64.38
Male	253	34.01
Other	2	0.27
Age		
over 30 years	32	4.23
31 – 50	386	51.05
51 above	338	44.71
Trade union membership		
Trade union member	513	76.34
A trade union member who has experienced sexual harassment	68	46.90

2. LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Identification code number	Date of the interview	Description of the interviewee			
		No (F/M/Other)	Age	Employment sector	Trade union membership (Y/N)
IDI1	2024.10.03.	Woman	31-50	automotive industry	N
IDI2	2024.10.04.	Woman	31-50	mechanical engineering	N
IDI3	2024.10.04.	Woman	31-50	public transport, passenger transport	Y
IDI4	2024.10.10.	Woman	31-50	waste management	N
IDI5	2024.10.10.	Woman	50+	media, TV, radio	N
IDI6	2014.10.12.	Man	31-50	security	N

3. COMPOSITION OF THE FOCUS GROUP

Date: 25th September, 2024

N.	Type of institution represented by the participant	Female	Male
1	trade union	x	
2	trade union	x	
3	trade union	x	
4	trade union	x	
5	foundation, attorney-at-law, advocacy	x	
6	FES local office	x	
7	FES local office	x	
8	author of this study, lawyer, trainer, advocacy	x	

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LEGAL SOURCES

Act CXXV of 2004 on Equal Treatment

Act XXV of 2023 on Complaints, Notifications of public interest and Rules on the notification of abuses

Act I of 2012 on the Labour Code

Act XCIII of 1993 on Occupational Safety and Health

Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2012)

Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention and Control of Violence against Women and Relationship Violence (2011, Strasbourg); the "Istanbul Convention"

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, United Nations (CEDAW)

Decree-Law No 10 of 1982 on the proclamation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted in New York on 18 December 1979

CEDAW Committee Recommendation No 19 (2004)

Council of Europe and the Council of Europe Recommendation "Preventing and Combating Sexism" (CM/Rec(2019)1.)

Directive 2002/73/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2002 amending Council Directive 76/207/EEC on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions

Directive 2024/1385 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on combating violence against women and domestic violence

European Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin

European Council Directive 2006/54/EC of 5 June 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation

EU Social Partners Framework agreement on combating harassment and violence at work

Fundamental Law of Hungary (25 April 2011)

ILO Convention on Violence and Harassment (C190): International Labour Organization. (2019) Convention concerning the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MASZSZ	(Magyar Szakszervezeti Szövetség) Hungarian Trade Union Confederation
LIGA	(Független Szakszervezetek Demokratikus Ligája) Democratic League of Independent Trade Unions
PDSZ	(Pedagógusok Demokratikus Szakszervezete) Teacher's Democratic Union
PSZ	(Pedagógus Szakszervezet) Teacher's Union
VDSZ	(Magyar Vegyipari, Energiaipari és Rokon Szakmákban Dolgozók Szakszervezeti Szövetsége) Federation of Chemical Employees of Hungary
VASAS	(Vasas Szakszervezeti Szövetség) Hungarian Metalemployees' Federation
CELSI	Central European Labour Studies Institute
FES	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
Ebktv.	(Egyenlő bánásmódról szóló törvény) Act on Equal Treatment
Mt.	Labour Code
VAW	Violence Against Women
SZMZ	Sexual Harassment at the Workplace
EBH	Equal Treatment Authority

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Andrea Sebestyén, PhD, lawyer, coach, trainer. She specialises in workplace harassment, with a particular focus on sexual harassment. Since 2010 she has been publishing several articles on violence against women, in law, social sciences, business and labour journals. She completed her MA in Gender Studies (CEU) with a thesis on 'Sexual harassment in the open office environment'. Her doctoral studies were conducted at the Department of Law and Social Sciences, ELTE ÁJK, dissertation about Violence against women cases at criminal courts in Hungary. Possibilities of critical analysis of judicial decision-making from a feminist legal perspective.

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SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE – HUNGARY



Even when respondents do experience a situation that falls under the umbrella of sexual harassment, they do not report it because they either do not feel the severity is sufficient, do not trust the efficacy of their signal or fear the negative consequences. Respondents expressed significant concerns about the effectiveness of existing protection mechanisms and the impartiality of internal investigations. More than half of the victims of harassment situations feel that the perpetrator should be held accountable but would need information on who to contact and what action to take.



There is a strong need for secure, even anonymous, reporting channels and the involvement of external, independent, impartial experts to ensure that harassment cases are handled fairly. In order to prevent it, the study highlights the importance of developing soft skills such as emotional intelligence, boundary-setting skills, assertive communication and awareness of workplace behaviour, stressing that these issues affect all employees, not just women, and that regulations, training and support mechanisms should ensure the protection of all employees regardless of gender.



Real change requires a comprehensive approach. An important element of this is the fine-tuning and clarification of the existing legislation, i.e. concretisation of the existing legal framework. Equally important to formal, institutional responses and complaint-handling mechanisms is joint reflection and communication on the subject, which can bring to the surface long-standing stereotypes, beliefs and patterns of behaviour, which can be reworked to bring about changes in behaviour and attitudes at the level of everyday life.

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