

STUDY

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Central Europe Labour Studies Institute

# Report on Workplace Sexual Harassment

*in Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Greece,  
Hungary and Slovakia*

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# Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| List of Abbreviations .....   | 4  |
| List of Boxes .....   | 4  |
| List of Figures .....   | 5  |
| List of Tables .....  | 5  |
| Executive summary .....   | 6  |
| Introduction .....  | 8  |
| Research methodology .....  | 10 |
| 1 Current insight on sexual harassment in the European Union .....                      | 12 |
| 1.1 Prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace .....                              | 12 |
| 1.2 Current Knowledge on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace<br>in the 6 Countries ..... | 12 |
| 2 Legal framework .....   | 14 |
| 2.1 Definitions of sexual harassment and related challenges .....                       | 15 |
| 2.2 Responsible Institutions .....  | 16 |
| 2.3 Employer Obligations .....  | 17 |
| 2.4 Victim Protection .....   | 17 |
| 3 Lived experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace .....                         | 19 |
| 3.1 Occurrence of sexual harassment in the workplace<br>and its characteristics .....   | 19 |
| 3.2 Forms of sexual harassment observed .....   | 21 |
| 3.3 Victims and perpetrators .....  | 24 |
| 3.4 Consequences of exposure to sexual harassment .....                                 | 27 |

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 3.5 Victims' responses to sexual harassment  | 29        |
| 3.6 Victims' satisfaction with the case(s) outcomes and her/his needs                                      | 33        |
| 3.7 Awareness and attitudes to existing protection against SHW   | 35        |
| 3.8 Effectiveness of the current regulations and steps forward   | 37        |
| <b>4 Role of trade unions in fighting sexual harassment in the workplace</b>                               | <b>40</b> |
| 4.1 Opinions and expectations on the role of trade unions in addressing sexual harassment in the workplace | 40        |
| 4.2 Effective practices of trade unions in combating SHW   | 43        |
| 4.2.1 Workplace Policies & Training  | 43        |
| 4.2.2 Joint statements   | 43        |
| 4.2.3 Collective bargaining agreements addressing SHW  | 44        |
| 4.2.4 Campaigns  | 46        |
| 4.2.5 Guidance   | 46        |
| <b>5 Recommendations comparing insights from the six countries</b>   | <b>47</b> |
| 5.1 Recommendations for Policymakers   | 47        |
| 5.2 Recommendations for Trade Unions   | 47        |
| 5.3 Recommendations for Employers  | 47        |
| 5.4 Training Implications  | 48        |
| 5.5 Implications for future research   | 48        |
| <b>References</b>  | <b>50</b> |
| <b>Annexes</b>   | <b>51</b> |

## List of Abbreviations

| Abbreviation | Full text  |
|--------------|--|
| BG           | Bulgaria   |
| CBA          | Collective bargaining agreement  |
| CZ           | Czechia  |
| EL           | Greece   |
| FG           | Focus group  |
| HR           | Croatia  |
| HU           | Hungary  |
| IDI          | Individual interview   |
| IUF          | International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations |
| NGO          | Nono-governmental organisations  |
| PTSD         | Post Traumatic Stress Disorder   |
| SHW          | Sexual harassment at the workplace   |
| SHWS         | Sexual harassment in the workplace survey  |
| SK           | Slovakia   |

## List of Boxes

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Box 1. Landmark treaty addressing violence and harassment in the world of work . . . . .                      | 14 |
| Box 2. Reasons why violence and harassment against women matter to unions . . . . .                           | 42 |
| Box 3. Joint Commitment on preventing sexual harassment. . . . .  | 44 |
| Box 4. Ten things that unions can do to tackle harassment and violence especially against women work. . . . . | 45 |

## List of Figures

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Figure 1. Perceived commonality of sexual harassment in the country and at the workplace of the respondents (N=3519, %)                    | 19 |
| Figure 2. Respondents experiencing direct sexual harassment in their current workplace (N=4622, %)   | 20 |
| Figure 3. Forms of sexual harassment experienced in the respondents' current workplace (N=2676, %, multiple responses)                     | 22 |
| Figure 4. Frequency of the experiences with sexual harassment at the workplace (N=1203,%)  | 23 |
| Figure 5. Perpetrators of SHW by gender (N= 1938, %)   | 25 |
| Figure 6. Perpetrators of SHW by position related to work (N= 1938, %)   | 25 |
| Figure 7. Perceived victim's characteristics as motivation to attack them by the perpetrator (N=1758, %)                                   | 27 |
| Figure 8. Psychosocial consequences of being exposed to sexual harassment at the workplace (N= 2177, %)                                    | 28 |
| Figure 9. Victims' reactions and steps taken in the aftermath of SHW (N= 1891, %)  | 30 |
| Figure 10. Reasons for not acting in the aftermath of sexual harassment in the workplace (N=895 responses, %)                              | 32 |
| Figure 11. Respondents' opinions on the employers' efforts and actions to combat sexual harassment (N=4308, %)                             | 35 |
| Figure 12. Awareness of the regulations to prevent, address, and penalise workplace sexual harassment in respondents' country (N= 4308, %) | 37 |
| Figure 13. Types of employers' anti-SHW regulations that respondents are aware of (N= 5484, %)   | 38 |
| Figure 14. Circumstances when the workers would seek information on anti-SHW regulations (N= 6071, %)                                      | 39 |
| Figure 15. Role of trade unions in addressing sexual harassment in the workplace (N= 3527, %)  | 40 |

## List of Tables

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Table 1. Percentage of women with SHW experience in the last 12 months (% , 2021)   | 12 |
| Table 2. Research availability and awareness on SHW   | 13 |
| Table 3. Victims by gender, age, education and marital status (N=1279, %)   | 24 |
| Table 4. Type of perpetrators by gender and working position to the victim (N=1938 responses, %)                            | 25 |
| Table 5. Victim's sex/gender by type of perpetrator (N=1938, %)   | 26 |
| Table 7. Outcome of the case of the sexual harassment at the workplace (N= 665, %)  | 34 |
| Table 8. Respondents' and victims' needs for specific information and support in cases of exposure to sexual harassment (%) | 36 |
| Table 9. Structure of the survey sample by country  | 51 |
| Table 10. Overview of the interviews  | 52 |
| Table 11. Overview of the focus groups  | 53 |

# Executive summary

Based on the Eurostat data, sexual harassment in the workplace (SHW) is widespread in the six examined countries, with Slovakia having the highest revealed prevalence at 9.4% of working women experiencing SHW in the past 12 months, compared to the EU average of 4.3%. Common forms of harassment include verbal harassment (offensive jokes, sexual remarks), unwanted physical contact (touching, groping), coercion linked to job promotions, and digital harassment (unsolicited explicit messages).

Approximately half of the victims acted, primarily confiding in someone, filing complaints, or reporting to institutions. However, a third did not act or were uncertain, reflecting a lack of trust in reporting channels. Victims frequently preferred informal discussions due to fears of retaliation or inadequate support. Those who chose not to report often cited disbelief in effective action and distrust in support systems.

Sexual harassment significantly affects victims' mental health, job performance, and career progression. About 32% of victims reported feeling unsafe at work, 12% began avoiding colleagues or social interactions, and 7% suffered from depression and anxiety. One in 10 victims considered leaving their jobs due to harassment, leading to high turnover and lower workplace productivity.

While all six countries have legal provisions prohibiting SHW, enforcement remains inconsistent. Croatia and Greece, Hungary, Czechia, Slovakia, and Bulgaria rely on labour and civil law, limiting legal repercussions for perpetrators, while all countries criminalised the most intrusive forms such as sexual assault and rape. Only Greece has ratified ILO Convention No. 190, establishing comprehensive worker protections. Most national laws lack clear penalties, efficient reporting channels, and protection against retaliation for whistleblowers.

Based on those facts, we have the following recommendations:

For Policymakers:

- Ratify and enforce the International Labour Organisation Convention on Violence and Harassment in the world of work No.190.
- Strengthen anti-SHW legislation with specific penalties for perpetrators and protections for victims.
- Mandate annual SHW training for employers and employees.
- Require transparent reporting mechanisms and legal support services for victims.
- Conduct national awareness campaigns to encourage victims to report sexual harassment.
- Improve data collection on SHW cases to monitor workplace harassment trends.

For Trade Unions:

- Advocate for including SHW protection in collective bargaining agreements to strengthen workplace policies.
- Establish specialised units within trade unions to support victims and provide legal guidance.
- Monitor SHW complaints and employer responses, ensuring compliance with labour protections.
- Conduct awareness campaigns to encourage trade union members and other workers to report sexual harassment.
- Collaborate with NGOs and legal experts to advocate for stronger SHW policies.



For Employers:

- Establish and enforce zero-tolerance policies on sexual harassment.
- Implement confidential reporting systems, including anonymous options.
- Train managers and HR staff in trauma-informed SHW response procedures.
- Provide psychological counselling and legal aid to victims.
- Monitor and assess workplace harassment cases, ensuring accountability for offenders.
- Include SHW protection in collective bargaining agreement to strengthen workplace policies.

### Proposed Next Steps

The responsible authorities should launch nationwide anti-SHW training programs for employees, HR personnel, and leadership teams, targeting high-risk industries such as healthcare, hospitality, and public transport with sector-specific policies; Strengthen coordination between labour inspectorates, trade unions, and law enforcement to improve SHW case management while conducting annual audits of workplace policies and legal enforcement efforts; Additionally, ensure trade unions play an active role in protecting workers and monitoring SHW cases.

### Trade Union Role and Upcoming Training Initiatives

Trade unions are expected to play a critical role in preventing workplace SHW by advocating for stronger regulations, negotiating better protections in labour agreements, and supporting victims. However, only 5% of victims currently report SHW incidents to their unions, signalling a need for trust-building measures. To address this, a structured anti-SHW training program should be introduced for union representatives, focusing on:

- Integrate SHW training at various levels, ensuring that employees, managers, and HR personnel are sufficiently equipped to recognise, prevent, and tackle harassment.
- Make SHW training a continuous, structured process rather than a one-time event.
- Training should be embedded in organisational culture, focusing on awareness, prevention, and response mechanisms.
- The necessity for nationwide efforts to standardise SHW training.

### Conclusion

Workplace sexual harassment remains a deeply entrenched issue in Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Greece, Hungary, and Slovakia, with low reporting rates and inadequate legal enforcement. While international conventions provide a roadmap for improving protections, effective implementation requires stronger legal commitments, and employer accountability. Under these circumstances, trade unions can be a key actor, helping to raise awareness, and support the victims in reporting to responsible authorities.

Urgent action is needed to ensure harassment-free workplaces, empower victims to report incidents without fear, and hold perpetrators accountable. A combination of policy reforms, training, and enforcement mechanisms will be crucial in creating a safer and more equitable work environment across the region.

# Introduction

Despite the European Union's strong legal framework prohibiting sexual harassment, research from across Member States consistently reveals its prevalence and devastating impact on workers' well-being and dignity. This report examines the multifaceted challenges posed by sexual harassment in the workplace, drawing on unique new data from Bulgaria, Czechia, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, and Slovakia. It delves into trade unions' critical role in combating this issue, analysing their potential and strategies in advocating for a truly harassment-free work environment for all.

This report was prepared in the framework of the project "Sexual Harassment at the Workplace" that aims to deepen the existing knowledge about the incidence and characteristics of sexual harassment in the workplace in the context of the six partner countries. The project was initiated and implemented by the biggest Croatian trade union confederation, the Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia (SSSH), the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) Croatia and other FES respective country offices in cooperation with Central European Labour Studies Institute (CELSI).

The emphasis placed on sexual harassment within the workplace allows for an examination of factors contributing to worker vulnerability, in addition to the compilation of both exemplary and deficient practices concerning sexual harassment in the workplace (SHW) policies at the national and employer levels. This initiative underscores the existing and prospective roles of trade unions and their representatives in advocacy and policy processes pertinent to the prevention, reporting, investigation, and sanctioning of sexual harassment.

The goals of the project's activities are twofold: to improve the data situation concerning this specific problem area and to analyse how different legal frameworks and "lived practices" in institutions such as police and justice impact the situation across countries within the EU. Based on this analysis, we aim to make policy recommendations and develop a training series for works' councils and union representatives.

This project defines workplace sexual harassment based on the European Parliament and Council's Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence. The

Directive defines the sexual harassment as "any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, where it occurs in the course of, linked with, or arising in matters of employment, occupation and self-employment, with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of the victim, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment."<sup>1</sup>

This research project utilises a comprehensive and nuanced conceptual framework for understanding sexual harassment, encompassing various manifestations of this phenomenon. The operational definition and interpretation of specific behaviours as constituting sexual harassment in this study are rooted in the subjective perceptions of the victim regarding the actions of the perpetrator.

This report is based on the national reports from Bulgaria, Czechia, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, and Slovakia, prepared by national research teams in cooperation with local FES offices and their trade union partners, and utilises the same methodological design.<sup>2</sup> The national reports have already been presented to the national stakeholders and discussed at national workshops about the International Day against Violence against Women in November 2024 and gained significant attention by media and political decision-makers alike. This report summarises, compares, and applies all the findings and knowledge that the project partners gathered and provides a comprehensive picture of the situation regarding sexual harassment in the respective countries.

The structure follows a similar order to that of the national report. Namely, after presenting the methodology and the various data collection methods, we summarise the current knowledge at the national level from previous studies. Then, we delve into the legal frameworks concerning the prevention, prohibition, sanctioning, and combating of sexual harassment in the workplace. We also focus on the limitations to identify the gaps that need to be mitigated.

This report primarily focuses on a rigorous analysis of survey data, interviews, and focus groups that investigate public attitudes and awareness, as well as various strategies for addressing these issues across six Central Europe-

<sup>1</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52022PC0105>

<sup>2</sup> All the national reports can be found at <https://celsi.sk/en/sexual-harassment-in-the-workplace/>; Links to individual reports are included in the references list.

an nations. A substantial portion is dedicated specifically to the lived experiences of survivors of sexual harassment in the workplace. This examination encompasses their personal narratives, emotional responses, coping mechanisms following the incidents, reactions to these adverse experiences, and their requirements in the event of similar situations in the future. The report allocates considerable attention to amplifying the voices of victims by presenting findings derived from victim responses, whether obtained through interviews or articulated in open-ended survey questions.

Particular emphasis is placed on the role of trade unions in the formulation of sexual harassment and workplace poli-

cies, their respective initiatives, and exemplary practices such as collective bargaining, advocacy campaigns, legislative improvements, and the provision of guidance. The insights garnered from this analysis will ultimately inform the development of future anti-sexual harassment training programs. The report concludes with a synthesis of recommendations proposed by national research teams for the consideration of policymakers, trade unions, and employers.

We are confident that the report will prove to be as engaging and appealing to you as it was to its researchers and authors.

# Research methodology

The report's mixed-methodology design includes desk research, an online survey, semi-structured interviews with victims of SHW, and focus groups with stakeholders. The tailored methodology developed by CELSI and the Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia (Savez samostalnih sindikata Hrvatske (SSSH), i.e. the author of the Croatian report, Dijana Šobota) facilitated the collection of unique data on experiences related to SHW, as well as the perspectives of trade unions and other stakeholders concerning sexual harassment in the workplace, its prevention, investigation, and other policy measures to eliminate this adverse behaviour.

Survey data was collected from June to September 2024<sup>3</sup> using translated online questionnaires distributed by national teams across six countries. The survey sample comprises 5445 respondents, all 18 years or older and employed at the time of the survey. The most represented age categories are those aged 50 years and over (38.1%) and 40 to 49 years (34.7%), cumulatively accounting for 72.8%. Most respondents were women (74.1%), while men comprised 24.1%. Most respondents were married or in partnerships (63.3%) and held tertiary education qualifications, specifically Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctoral degrees, significantly outnumbering other educational categories, making up 67.9% of the survey sample. At the time of the survey, 77.3% of respondents indicated that trade unions operate in their workplace, and 59.7% are members of these trade unions. A detailed sample structure can be found in the annex.<sup>4</sup> The data from all six countries were merged and analysed using SPSS software.

In the survey, the national teams used convenience sampling, i.e. using respondents who were conveniently accessible to the researchers, for example, asking people who were at the workplace. Despite the inherent limitations of this kind of sampling, which is a non-representative sampling method, the data collected provides valuable insights.

As to the interviews, a total of 44 individual interviews were conducted across the six partner countries, involving 40 women and 4 men who experienced workplace sexual harassment. National teams encountered difficulties in identifying suitable communication partners for the interviews due to the victim's hesitance to share traumatic experiences and distrust, despite assurances of anonymity and confidentiality. The teams employed various recruitment strategies to address these challenges, including inviting people to reach out through online survey, social media, and informal networks. The interviewees, primarily aged 30 to 50 and from various sectors, were typically not members of trade unions. The national teams processed the data from the interviews using an analytical method of their choice. The comparative report consists solely of summarised data and representative quotations from the national reports. Additionally, the survey's open-ended questions provided insights into the perceptions of both victims and non-victims regarding this pervasive issue.

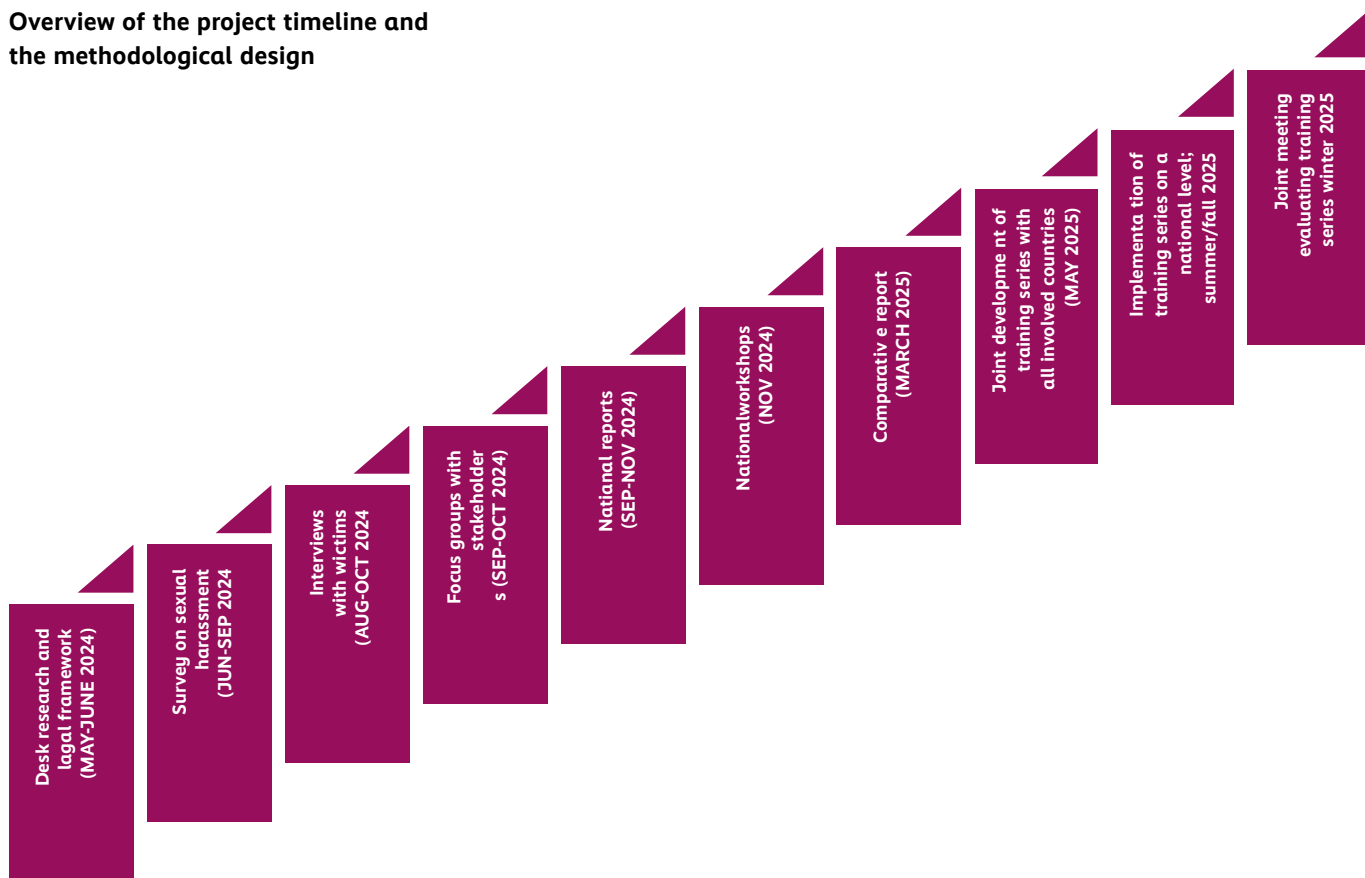
Additional data were collected through focus groups utilising semi-structured scenarios. Seven focus groups were organised by the national teams from September to October 2024, comprising a total of 67 stakeholders: 54 women and 13 men representing a diverse array of institutions, state agencies, ministries, and research institutions, predominantly from the trade unions.<sup>5</sup> These focus groups provided valuable insights on enhancing policies and measurements, specifically for the representatives of various agencies and organisations. The focus groups should help formulate recommendations, necessary steps to be taken, the desired framework for future anti-SHW training, target demographics, and the relevant content to be addressed.

<sup>3</sup> The specific data collection period for each country varies according to the distribution strategies of the survey and the involvement of relevant trade unions within the country that help disseminate the survey. The data collection period is included in the sample structure table annex.

<sup>4</sup> The overall sample consists of the national samples as submitted to the national teams. The Czech sample is slightly different in comparison to the sample in the Czech national report, as the national team use only a representative weighted sample of public workers.

<sup>5</sup> The structure of focus group participants representing diverse institutions can be found in the annex.

## Overview of the project timeline and the methodological design



# 1 Current insight on sexual harassment in the European Union

## 1.1 Prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace

Attention to sexual harassment in the workplace has intensified thanks to the MeToo movement, and policies for its prevention and elimination are also reflected in EU-wide policy documents such as the Directive on Prevention of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (art. 4. g)<sup>6</sup> and the Istanbul Convention (art. 40).<sup>7</sup>

EU-wide policies are accompanied by evidence on the prevalence of sexual harassment at work, and currently, there are already two waves of surveys of the EU female population estimating the long-term and short-term prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace (FRA 2014, Eurostat 2021). The latter and most recent estimation of SHW prevalence in the last 12 months reveals that all six targeted countries are above the EU average (4.3 % of the female population) except for Bulgaria (3.2%). The estimation of SHW annual prevalence is highest in Slovakia (9.4%) among the six countries, ranking it among the EU nations with the highest prevalence alongside Luxembourg (9.7%) and Sweden (11.1%).

Table 1. Percentage of women with SHW experience in the last 12 months (% , 2021)

|  | Last 12 months |
|--|----------------|
| Bulgaria   | 3.2            |
| European Union (aggregate changing according to the context) | 4.3            |
| Czechia  | 4.4            |
| Hungary  | 5.8            |
| Croatia  | 6.4            |
| Greece   | 6.7            |
| Slovakia   | 9.4            |

Source: Eurostat, 2021, Note Ever-working women who have experienced sexual harassment at work, by occurrence of the last episode [gbv\_shw\_occ\$defaultview]

<sup>6</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52022PC0105>

<sup>7</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/168008482e>

## 1.2 Current Knowledge on Sexual Harassment in the Workplace in the 6 Countries

This section provides findings from previous research on sexual harassment in the workplace (SHW) across six countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Greece, Hungary, and Slovakia. The comparison focuses on research availability, forms of SHW, reporting trends, institutional response and other key findings based on desk research provided by the national teams in their reports.

The availability of research on SHW varies significantly across the six countries. In Hungary, the last major study on workplace sexual harassment was conducted in 2013, and there is no centralised data collection on SHW cases. Similarly, Czechia has had few representative studies, with the most detailed data coming from a 2004 survey. In contrast, Slovakia, Greece, and Croatia have more recent studies focusing on workplace harassment, including research on gender-based violence and sector-specific analyses. Bulgaria falls somewhere in between — while there is some research, it is primarily conducted by NGOs and trade unions. The national statistics are lacking.

As a result of the lack of data, the recent evolution in gender-based violence and harassment at work is underestimated and insufficiently communicated. The relative inability to measure the evolution of cases also means that it is not possible to evaluate the real impact of prevention measures, both legal provisions and workplace policies (ETUC, 2024).

Social awareness of SHW also varies. In Bulgaria and Hungary, SHW is not widely recognised as a serious workplace issue, while in Greece and Croatia, the #MeToo movement has driven more significant public discussion. Despite increased awareness, distrust in institutions and fear of retaliation prevent many victims from reporting cases in all six countries.

Table 2. Research availability and awareness on SHW

| Country         | Research Availability   | Awareness & Social Perception  |
|-----------------|---|--|
| <b>Bulgaria</b> | Limited research, mostly through NGO studies (e.g. TEAMWORK project); No national statistics available.             | SHW is not widely recognized as workplace violence; Low awareness of effects and reporting mechanisms.   |
| <b>Czechia</b>  | Few representative studies; last major study in 2004, Some recent surveys; but sample sizes are insufficient.       | Difficulties defining SHW objectively, Sensitivity varies across demographic groups; Public sector is ahead of the private sector in prevention. |
| <b>Greece</b>   | Several national studies; post-#MeToo movement research increased.  | Growing awareness, but SHW remains underreported; LGBTIQ individuals face additional risks.  |
| <b>Croatia</b>  | Research is increasing, but most surveys are convenience-based; Some sector-specific studies exist.                 | High awareness, but victims have little trust in institutional responses.  |
| <b>Hungary</b>  | Lack of recent research, with outdated national data from 2013; NGOs collect some qualitative data.                 | Significant data gaps; Fear of reporting is high, with concerns about being believed.  |
| <b>Slovakia</b> | Recent representative surveys (2023) focusing on gender-based violence and specific sectors (healthcare, academia). | High levels of SHW recorded, but most cases go unreported due to workplace dynamics.   |

Common forms of SHW across all six countries include sexual jokes, inappropriate comments, unwanted touching, coercion, and suggestive remarks. In Czechia and Hungary, non-physical harassment, such as verbal harassment and suggestive emails, is particularly prevalent. Slovakia, Greece, and Croatia report high levels of both verbal and physical harassment, including unwanted advances and coercion.

Reporting of SHW remains alarmingly low in all countries. Even in Slovakia, where research has extensively documented SHW, most victims choose not to report incidents.

The reasons for non-reporting are consistent across all countries. The fear of job loss, retaliation, and lack of trust in institutional mechanisms discourage victims from coming forward. In Czechia and Greece, many victims believe the incidents are not “serious enough” to report, while in Bulgaria and Croatia, there is a perception that reporting will lead to no action or, worse, professional repercussions. In Hungary, and also in other countries, the cultural normalisation of SHW further deters victims from seeking justice.

Institutional responses to SHW are largely inadequate. In most cases, employers fail to take meaningful action, and victims who report SHW often face backlash or are forced to leave their jobs. Croatia, for example, has a relatively higher rate of reported cases, yet victims express significant dissatisfaction with the lack of institutional response. Greece and Slovakia have developed some employer-driven prevention policies, but these are mostly limited to the public sector, while private sector protections remain weak.

Certain industries are more vulnerable to sexual harassment than others. Healthcare, education, tourism, and male-dominated industries such as transport, manufacturing, and public services emerge as high-risk sectors across all six countries. Healthcare workers, particularly nurses and medical technicians, report high levels of harassment in Croatia, Slovakia, and Greece. Public transport and manufacturing are noted as high-risk environments in Czechia and Hungary, while retail, hospitality, and food service workers in Greece and Bulgaria frequently encounter workplace harassment, particularly from customers or clients. Academia has also been identified as a workplace where sexual harassment is common, particularly in Slovakia and Czechia. Many of those affected in these sectors hold subordinate positions, making them particularly vulnerable to harassment and coercion. In Croatia and Slovakia, third-party harassment by clients or patients is also a significant issue, further complicating employer responsibilities and legal accountability.

While public awareness of sexual harassment in the workplace has increased, particularly following the global #MeToo movement and EU-driven gender equality policies, cultural attitudes, weak enforcement, and institutional failures continue to undermine efforts to combat the issue. Addressing sexual harassment in these countries will require stronger legal protections, more effective workplace policies, and a fundamental shift in social attitudes to encourage reporting and provide adequate support to victims. Without systemic change, sexual harassment in the workplace will remain an invisible yet deeply damaging reality for many workers across the region.

## 2 Legal framework

This section provides a comprehensive analysis of the legal framework governing employer obligations in the six targeted countries based on the information provided in the national reports. It delineates the roles of institutions tasked with investigating and sanctioning sexual harassment within workplace settings. It also examines the mechanisms available for victim protection, and it identifies the challenges faced and the best practices observed across the six countries included in this comparative research project.

Since all of the targeted countries are EU member states, their legislative frameworks and definitions of sexual harassment are largely similar and influenced by various European directives and their transpositions into national legal systems. Sexual harassment in the workplace is usually defined and prohibited in anti-discrimination legislation as a form of discrimination based on gender, with discrimination being seen as a violation of the equal treatment principle (BG, CZ, HR, EL, HU, SK). A number of countries prohibits SH in multiple laws, most commonly anti-discrimination law in combination with articles in the Labour Code specifically addressing sexual harassment in the workplace, through the lens of ensuring safe and healthy working environment and prohibiting behaviours and practices, which would undermine these principles, such as bullying, bossing, mobbing, sexual harassment or other toxic behaviours (CZ, HU, HR, SK).

On the international level, the most comprehensive legal framework addressing sexual harassment in the workplace is the International Labour Organization's Convention No.190 on Violence and Harassment from the year 2019 (ILO, 2019). The Convention employs a broad understanding and definition of sexual harassment as well as the importance of the unique dynamics of power and inequality in the world of work. Furthermore, it uses a broad definition of workers, including employees, interns, part-time workers, volunteers, jobseekers, individuals working informally, or the self-employed and contractors, and also extends the understanding of the workplace, from the physical place of work to include the online world, commuting, education and training locations, work-related travel, and events and social activities. Another area of the Convention with a wider scope of application is the extension of possible perpetrators of harassment to include third parties, such as clients, customers, pupils or members of the public who could potentially harass a worker. The only country participating in this project which ratified the ILO Convention No. 190 is Greece, via the adoption of the Law No. 4808/2021. The law prohibits any form of harassment and violence, including sexual harassment and gender-based violence, but beyond the forms of discrimination defined in other laws transposing EU Directives on the principle of equality (Directives 2000/43/EC and 2000/78/EC). Despite the adoption of ILO Convention No. 190 and its transposition into national legislation, it has had little impact in practice thus far.

### Landmark treaty addressing violence and harassment in the world of work

Box 1

*The International Labour Organization's Convention No. 190 (C190), adopted in 2019 - a landmark treaty addressing violence and harassment in the world of work*

Key progressive elements of C190 include:

1. **Comprehensive Definition:** C190 defines violence and harassment as a range of unacceptable behaviours and practices that aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual, or economic harm. This includes gender-based violence and harassment.
2. **Inclusive Scope:** The Convention applies to all workers, irrespective of their contractual status, covering employees, trainees, interns, volunteers, job seekers, and individuals whose employment has been terminated. It encompasses all public and private sectors, in urban and rural areas, and extends beyond the physical workplace to include work-related communications, travel, and accommodations.
3. **Preventive Measures:** C190 mandates member states to adopt an inclusive, integrated, and gender-responsive approach to prevent and eliminate violence and



harassment. This includes enacting and enforcing laws, promoting collective bargaining, and developing policies that address violence and harassment in the world of work.

4. *Protection and Support: The Convention requires the establishment of complaint and dispute resolution mechanisms, as well as support services for victims. It emphasises the need for training and awareness-raising to prevent violence and harassment and to protect affected individuals.*

5. *Recognition of Domestic Violence Impact: C190 acknowledges the effects of domestic violence on the*

*workplace and calls for measures to mitigate its impact, recognising that such violence can affect workers' productivity and safety.*

*C190 sets a comprehensive framework for creating safer and more inclusive working environments globally by incorporating these provisions.. The languages only differ in their grammar, their pronunciation and their most common words. Everyone realizes why a new common language would be desirable: one could refuse to pay expensive translators.*

Connected to the adoption of international frameworks are the different approaches to SHW that countries can employ. The ILO's Convention No. 190 together with the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence commonly known as "the Istanbul Convention" (CoE, 2011), or the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Violence against Women (CEDAW) for example employ an approach that sees SHW and other forms of violence in the form of work in a gender-sensitive manner as a form of violence against women and a result of inequality and power imbalances, not as an isolated phenomenon. Some other countries approach SHW as a form of toxic and unwanted behaviour, which can manifest in the world of work together with bullying, staffing or bossing. It is possible that countries use both approaches, based on which laws regulate SHW – occupational health and safety laws included in labour law usually employ the latter approach, whereas for example the Greek transposition of the ILO Convention No. 190 uses the former, wider approach. The approach to SHW can reflect the social and political conditions in each country.

Authors of the national reports point out to the confusion and inconsistencies stemming from multiple and overlapping legal provisions related to sexual harassment in some of the member states. In Croatia sexual harassment is addressed in five different regulations: the Constitution, Gender Equality Act, Labour Law, Anti-Discrimination Act, Criminal Code, and a number of other acts and provisions, leading to ambiguous definitions of SHW that possibly discourage victims from reporting SHW and thus hindering the effective application of laws.

## 2.1 Definitions of sexual harassment and related challenges

Most countries apply definitions of sexual harassment from EU legislation or international frameworks, with some significant differences. The Directive 2006/54/EC of the Euro-

pean Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation defines sexual harassment as "any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature occurs, with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment." This definition includes the conditions that the behaviour is unwanted, negatively impacts or violates the dignity of the individual, and has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, which is crucial for the interpretation of certain behaviour as sexual harassment. Furthermore, the definition does not include a definitive list of possible behaviour and actions but distinguishes three broader types or categories of sexual harassment: verbal, non-verbal, and physical. This is done to avoid being reductive and conditional, and to allow new forms of sexual harassment to be included. Another common feature of sexual harassment legislation includes the provision related to disadvantaging or discriminating against an employee for rejecting or accepting certain conditions or advances of a sexual nature in exchange for advancement or perks or under the threat of losing employment or suffering other negative consequences, oftentimes called "quid pro quo" conduct.

There are two major deviations in national laws from the wide EU definition mentioned above, Croatia's Anti-Discrimination Act (Official Gazette No. 112/12, Article 3) stipulates that for sexual harassment to be considered discrimination, it must violate the dignity of the victim and create an intimidating, hostile, degrading or offensive environment as a cumulative precondition. Additionally, this legal formulation is in conflict with the definition of sexual harassment from the Gender Equality Act, which uses the exact definition from the EU directive. Such conflict causes confusion both for the interpretation of laws and for the victims, who might be discouraged from reporting SH and

seeking justice, as many conditions must be fulfilled and proven in order for proceedings to start under the Anti-Discrimination Act (European Commission: Directorate-General for Justice, 2013).

Similarly, Hungary transposed the EU Directive 2002/73 (European Parliament and Council, 2002) into the Equality Act, using a narrower definition of harassment: “A conduct of sexual or other nature that violates human dignity shall constitute harassment if it is related to a characteristic specified in section 8 of the person concerned and has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for a person.” The Equality Act also does not specifically mention sexual harassment as a form of discriminatory behaviour, but only harassment, which together with direct and indirect discrimination and segregation is considered a violation of the principle of equal treatment. Unlike most definitions, it does not specify possible forms of sexual harassment – verbal, non-verbal, or physical, which makes this definition more limited and can complicate the application of these legal principles in effectively addressing sexual harassment. The Hungarian definition similarly to the Croatian, introduces the cumulative precondition of the behaviour violating the victim’s dignity as a fact in connection with the intention or result of creating an intimidating, hostile, humiliating, degrading or offensive environment. The creation of such an environment is thus not a possible consequence but must be fulfilled in order for a certain behaviour to be considered harassment and thus a form of discrimination. Moreover, the Equality Act is the only legal provision in Hungarian legislation, which holds harassment to be a form of discrimination (European Commission: Directorate-General for Justice, 2013).

An example of a more extensive approach to sexual harassment in legal framework can be seen in the Act No. 198/2009 Coll., known as the Anti-Discrimination Act in Czechia. In § 2 para. 2 it explicitly mentions sexual harassment together with harassment, stalking, instruction to discriminate and incitement to discriminate as forms of discrimination, but the Czech legal formulation also does not specify possible forms of sexual harassment but describes it as “undesirable behaviours of sexual nature” and introduces the cumulative pre-condition of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the victim. There is however an extensive interpretation of the definition of SH available in materials published by the Office of the Government and the Public Defender of Rights (2019), which explicitly addresses the importance of subjective inappropriateness, which is crucial when it comes to SH and how subjective inappropriateness may be recognized by verbal and non-verbal reactions. Closely connected is also the matter of consent, where the interpretation states that silence or a natural reaction cannot be considered consent, but instead it must be expressed explicitly.

The formulation of the Anti-Discrimination Act in the Slovak legal system defines sexual harassment in Article 1, §2a, (5) as “unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.” The Slovak Anti-Discrimination Act considers discrimination direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment together with an unjustified penalty and instruction to discriminate and incitement to discriminate. Compared to the Czech formulation, it leaves out stalking as a form of discrimination.

## 2.2 Responsible Institutions

Most analysed countries have a designated official institution or authority whose responsibility is to ensure adherence to the principle of equal treatment and to investigate complaints of discrimination. There is such an institution in Bulgaria, Hungary, and Slovakia. In Bulgaria, the responsible institution is the Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPAD), which is a governmental body monitoring the implementation and adherence of the equal treatment principle. Both individuals and trade unions on behalf of victims are able to submit complaints and initiate proceedings. Trade unions can also submit proposals in order to prevent, stop, or remedy the effects of violations of the equal treatment principle.

Sexual harassment in the workplace is linked with the world of work, and therefore, in most countries, labour inspectorates have certain powers and responsibilities, especially concerning the investigation of complaints or monitoring of employer compliance with their obligations (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Greece, Slovakia). An example of a good practice can be seen in the organisation of the Greek Labour Inspectorate, which has a specific department designated to harassment and violence in the workplace with the authority to co-create and coordinate related policies. The mandate also requires the Labour Inspectorate to communicate and inform the Ombudsman about complaints related to gender-based harassment and violence or other forms of discrimination covered by law, showing a degree of official coordination between different authorities with a mandate connected to sexual harassment in the workplace. On the other hand, lack of both official and unofficial coordination between different institutions with a SHW-related mandate can be seen in Slovakia, where the labour inspectorates by law have certain obligations and rights, such as to receive complaints, carry out inspections as well as examine documentation and ask for clarification or explanation of steps.

Furthermore, in Slovakia labour inspectorates specifically have the responsibility to ensure equal treatment and equal pay of all employees, which includes matters of dis-

crimination and SHW, but they do not have sufficient personal and financial resources or the knowledge base to be able to investigate discrimination complaints and according to labour inspectors they tend to encourage victims to contact the equality body. There is thus an overlap of responsibilities between the labour inspectorates and the national equality body, but without an officially, clearly coordinated division of tasks or procedures. Some steps have been taken to remedy the challenges that labour inspectorates face, such as specialized trainings for labour inspectors by the Slovak national equality body or the publication of a methodological handbook with guidelines on procedures and investigation of discrimination, specifically gender-based discrimination such as harassment. The role of labour inspectorates is crucial as in most countries they have the right to impose fines or other sanctions on the employer, if they do not fulfil or violate their obligations.

The extent of sanctions and fines varies significantly. In Czechia, they can be up to 1 million Czech crowns (about 40 000 EUR), and the employer is liable for damages caused to the victim. In Croatia, the maximum sanctions stipulated in anti-discrimination legislation are less than one average monthly salary and damages for the victim are not included. These sanctions are deemed insufficient for the victim to pursue justice in court as well as too low to function in a preventative manner for employers and perpetrators of SHW, and the lack of a damages stipulation in law results in a lack of uniform standard for damages in harassment claims. Another major barrier to justice in Croatia is a short statute of limitations of only three months for reporting SHW, which goes against trauma-informed approaches to SHW and knowledge of the long-lasting consequences and trauma that SHW can cause to victims.

## 2.3 Employer Obligations

Legal frameworks protecting workers from sexual harassment and other unwanted behaviours or forms of discrimination place obligations on employers, usually in labour law. Labour law most commonly obliges employers to prevent sexual harassment and to have reporting mechanisms and investigation processes in place, as well as obliges them to investigate received complaints in a timely manner. Some legislation also places an obligation on employers to provide information on SHW legislation and definitions, as well as to inform about responsible institutions and available support services or to provide training on SHW. In Hungary for example, employers must carry out a risk assessment every three years, which includes an analysis of possible psycho-social risks, however there is no enforcement mechanisms or sanctions in place to be applied in case of violation. These are very general obligations that leave employers significant flexibility regarding the measures they choose to implement. In all the researched member states, victims are able to pursue their claims in court –

against the employer most commonly in civil lawsuit proceedings or labour court (e.g. Hungary), alternatively directly against the perpetrator in civil proceedings related to offence against civil coexistence (e.g. in Czechia) or in criminal court, if the facts of a criminal offence are fulfilled or SHW is directly criminalised.

Some legislative frameworks go beyond and require more specific measures, such as in Croatia, where workplaces with more than 20 employees must dedicate a trained workplace dignity officer to handle harassment complaints and implement procedures within internal organizational work rules or collective agreements. Similarly, by the incorporation of the ILO's Convention No. 190 into the Greek legal system via the law No. 4808/2021, enterprises in Greece with more than 20 employees must have reporting and investigation procedures in place, must provide risk assessment, measures for prevention, regulation and elimination of these risks, policy providing information and raising awareness, and a designated person of confidence, able to provide guidance, support and reliable information. Greek legislation further requires employers, who employ more than 70 employees to adopt official internal regulations related to SHW in the form of labour regulation, which can be included in collective agreements on the employer level with a responsible trade union or works council agreement, alternatively, if neither of these is present in the workplace, the employer may satisfy the criteria by informing all employees of the procedures and measures in place. Greek enterprises were required to fulfil these obligations within three months after the law entered into force.

The effectiveness and scope of implementation of the different measures depend on a variety of factors – sufficient financial and personnel resources of employers, knowledge and awareness of good policies and practices, monitoring and assessment of compliance, existence of sanctions in case of noncompliance with obligations or their violations, or the extent to which international frameworks are adopted into national legislation.

## 2.4 Victim Protection

Ensuring the protection of victims in workplace sexual harassment cases is a crucial aspect of fostering a safe and inclusive work environment, EU legislation, including the Equal Treatment Directive and the Victims' Rights Directive 2012/29/EU (European Parliament and Council, 2012), establishes clear obligations for employers to prevent harassment and protect those who come forward. This section examines the legal framework, support mechanisms, best practices, and challenges of laws and policies implemented across the examined EU member states to safeguard victims, encourage reporting, and promote a culture of accountability.

The approach to victim protection varies among states, but most legal frameworks protect those who come forward with a complaint from unjustified sanctions, meaning that the victim cannot be subjected to any sanctions, such as termination of employment, hindering of career advancement, being awarded no or lesser benefits as a result of bringing forward complaints or claims pointing to SHW, discrimination or other forms of unwanted or toxic behaviours, or unethical actions. This protection can be invoked in court and must be accompanied by proof that unjustified sanction took place. Such protection is guaranteed, for example, in Slovakia.

Another common mechanism that aims to offer victims heightened protection as well as encourage victims to come forward is the application of a reversed burden of proof. This means that in court proceedings or formal investigation by the most common labour inspectorate, the defendant, usually the employer, must prove that no discrimination or specifically sexual harassment took place, rather than the victim proving the opposite. However, even the application of a reversed burden of proof has significant limitations, especially because in order to start an investigation (both by the employer or labour inspectorate) or for a case to go to court, first the victim is required to show that they were the victim of sexual harassment, or other forms of discrimination, which can be very difficult to demonstrate or prove.

A key piece of legislation mentioned in connection with victim protection are national adaptations of the 2019 Directive 2019/1937 on the protection of persons who report breaches of Union law, commonly known as the whistle-blower protection, which aims to protect those who report violations of EU law from retaliation or sanctions by their employer (European Parliament and Council, 2019). The directive requires companies with more than 50 employees to establish a confidential internal reporting systems and designate a person or an entity responsible for the reception of complaints. The transposition of the directive provides protection only to the most serious crimes for which the law can administer a fine of a maximum one hundred thousand crowns and any breach in selected areas of EU law - financial services, security, environmental protection, public health protection, and public procurement. Furthermore, due to the nature of sexual harassment and the need to investigate it, anonymity of the victim cannot be ensured. Internal reporting systems are becoming increasingly popular but the extent to which the transposi-

tion of the 2019/1937 directive remains unclear and may cause confusion among victims as well.

Several practices exist beyond victim protection from retaliation. One good practice in Greece allows the victim to leave their workplace for a reasonable time during the investigation process without a loss of pay if they believe that their life, health, or safety are under threat.

# 3

## Lived experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace

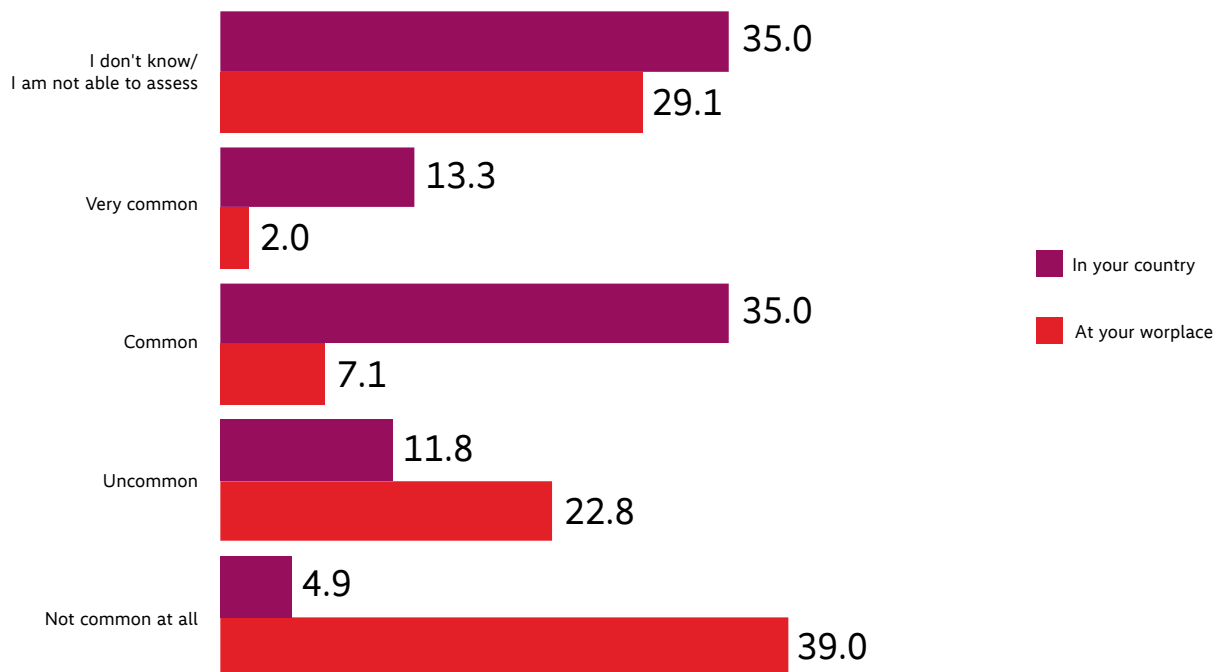
This section delves into the critical findings derived from comprehensive surveys, in-depth interviews, and focused group discussions. It thoroughly examines the incidence of workplace sexual harassment, shedding light on the various types of occurrences and the contexts in which they arise. The research highlights the profiles of the perpetrators involved and explores the significant impact of such harassment on victims, including both psychological and professional consequences. Furthermore, the chapter investigates broader societal attitudes towards this adverse social behaviour, highlighting perceptions, misconceptions, and the prevailing culture surrounding workplace harassment. This multifaceted analysis aims to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play and to inform future strategies for prevention and intervention.

### 3.1 Occurrence of sexual harassment in the workplace and its characteristics

The perceptions of workers regarding the occurrence of sexual harassment in the workplace, both nationally and within their respective workplaces, exhibit a notable paradox. Participants estimate that sexual harassment is more widespread at the national level and uncommon in their immediate work environments. This discrepancy may imply that individuals possess a general awareness of the issue but tend to underestimate its occurrence or are uncertain about whether specific behaviours in their vicinity qualify as sexual harassment. Furthermore, the substantial proportion of respondents who could not ascertain the occurrence of sexual harassment both nationally and locally suggests

*Perceived commonality of sexual harassment in the country and at the workplace of the respondents (N=3519, %)*

**Fig. 1**



Questions: In your opinion, how common is workplace sexual harassment in your country and at your current workplace?

a pervasive lack of information regarding the actual prevalence of this phenomenon.

We zoomed in on the occurrence of sexual harassment experienced by individual respondents within their current workplace. We specifically inquired about direct experiences of such adverse conduct aimed at the individual respondent. Additionally, we employed an indirect approach to ask about sexual harassment by referencing inappropriate and unwanted behaviours with sexual connotations that may occur in the context of the respondents' current employment. We instructed the respondents that such unwanted behaviours may be perpetrated by various individuals in the workplace, including colleagues, supervisors, cli-

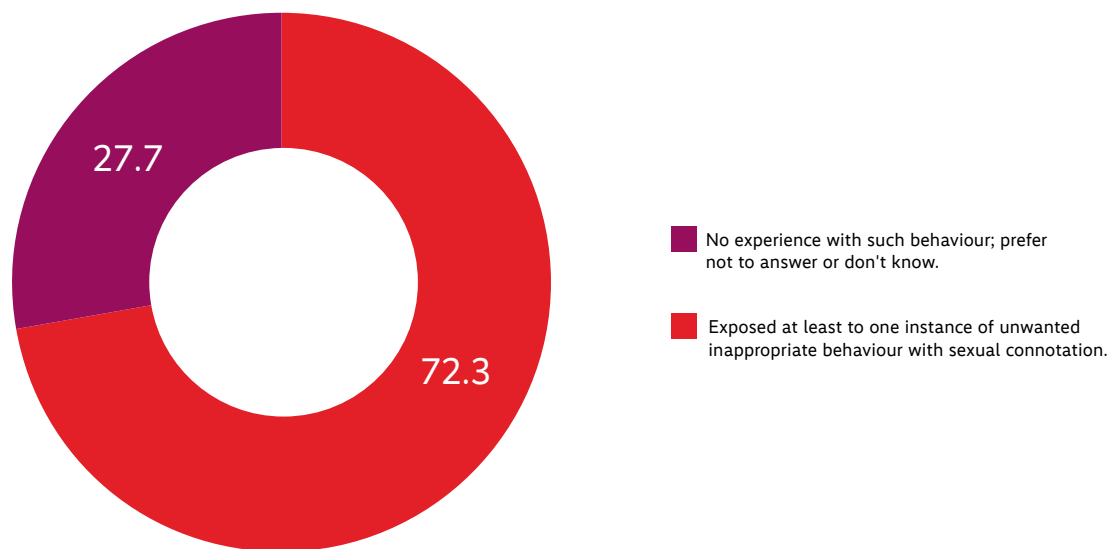
ents, or patients. The impact of these behaviours can result in feelings of offense, humiliation, or distress among the affected individuals. We presented participants with a spectrum of adverse behaviours, encompassing verbal, physical, and coercive acts that included sexual connotations. Participants were asked to indicate each adverse behaviour they had encountered.

Among the respondents who participated in this multi-response question (4622 respondents), 27.7% reported having encountered at least one incident of sexual harassment. In comparison, 72.3% indicated they had no such experiences, chose not to respond, or were unaware of such incidents.

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### *Respondents experiencing direct sexual harassment in their current workplace (N=4622, %)*

**Fig. 2**



Question: Have you experienced any unwanted behaviour in your current employment? Choose any behaviour below that you have encountered at your current workplace, (Multiple response; based on the number of respondents – cases),country and at your current workplace?

The lived experience of SHW as recounted by female workers in the IT sector from Slovakia:

“Different situations I have encountered in my IT company dominated by men:

*A male colleague spread a rumour that I was pregnant because I looked like I had gained weight.*

*The head of HR in my previous company actively flirted with male colleagues and even performed ‘belly dancing’ at company events. Any complaints I made were laughed at.*

*After encountering a colleague in a public sauna, he texted me the next day saying, ‘he is imagining me naked,’*

*My boss once told me that I was selected for a major keynote speech ‘just because I am a woman,’*

*At an event, I was told to stay at the table with the CEO ‘so there is something nice to look at,’ despite my relevant business role.*

*When I joined one company, the all-hands meeting announcement was, ‘It’s good we’ll have a higher ratio of women now,’*

*An older male colleague pushed me uncomfortably into a corner.*

These are just a few examples from my last three companies. Eventually, I had to leave them due to the toxicity and lack of support.”

### 3.2 Forms of sexual harassment observed

Figure 3 below displays data on the various forms of sexual harassment encountered in the workplace, derived from a multiple-response survey (N=2676 responses). As respondents had the option to select multiple behaviours, the percentages reflect the occurrence of each type of harassment rather than the proportion of individuals affected. The most common forms of workplace sexual harassment are inappropriate staring or leering, which makes respondents feel uncomfortable, affecting nearly 30% of respondents. Furthermore, indecent sexual jokes or offensive remarks about one’s body or private life follow closely, with a significant percentage. Unsolicited physical contact (e.g., close proximity, touching body parts) is another highly reported form of harassment.

Moderately experienced forms of harassment include suggestive comments or actions, inappropriate proposals for dates, and suggestions for sexual activities, which are reported by a noticeable percentage of respondents. Less common but serious forms of digital harassment involve inappropriate advances on social networking sites and exposure to sexually explicit images or videos, although these are reported at a lower rate. Receiving explicit emails or text messages is less frequently reported. Blackmail related to career progression or job security due to a refusal of sexual favours is the least reported but remains a serious concern. Coercion represents the most severe power abuse in the workplace. The number of multiple responses suggests that many individuals experience more than one type of harassment, usually also escalating over time if not addressed, pointing to a systemic and persistent issue in workplace culture.

Here are some noticeable experiences as described by the victims themselves:

*“The perpetrators were networked: the director, the boss and team members employed through a connection, HR acted on the side of the perpetrators, and they said that it was only a private lawsuit, but that they could not do anything. They even called the boss and said that I was complaining, that increased the pressure. I quit my job.”*

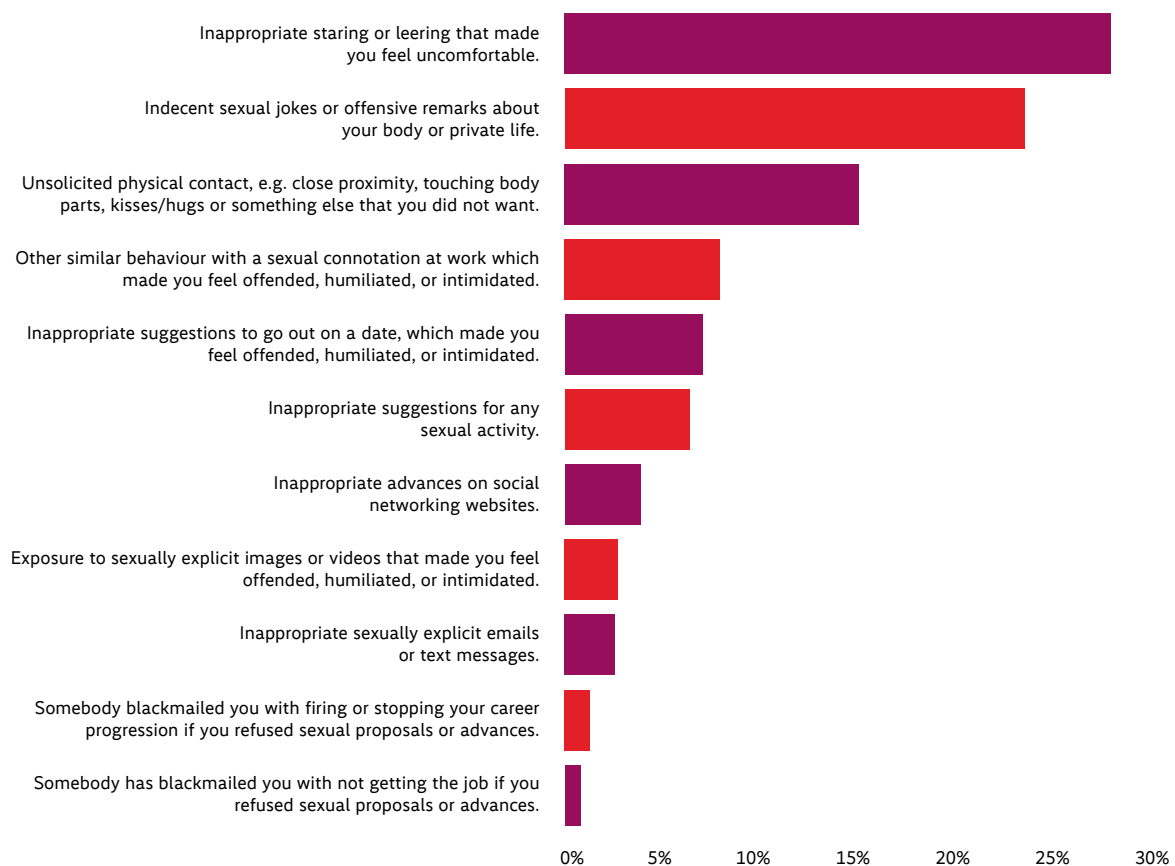
(Croatia)

*“Some male co-workers do stupid ‘jokes’ with sexual content, which are very inappropriate in the workplace. They did this because they thought they could get away with it since I was younger than them. It was very humiliating.”*

(Czechia)

### Forms of sexual harassment experienced in the respondents' current workplace (N=2676, %, multiple responses)

Fig. 3



Question: Have you experienced any unwanted behaviour in your current employment? Choose any behaviour below that you have encountered at your current workplace.

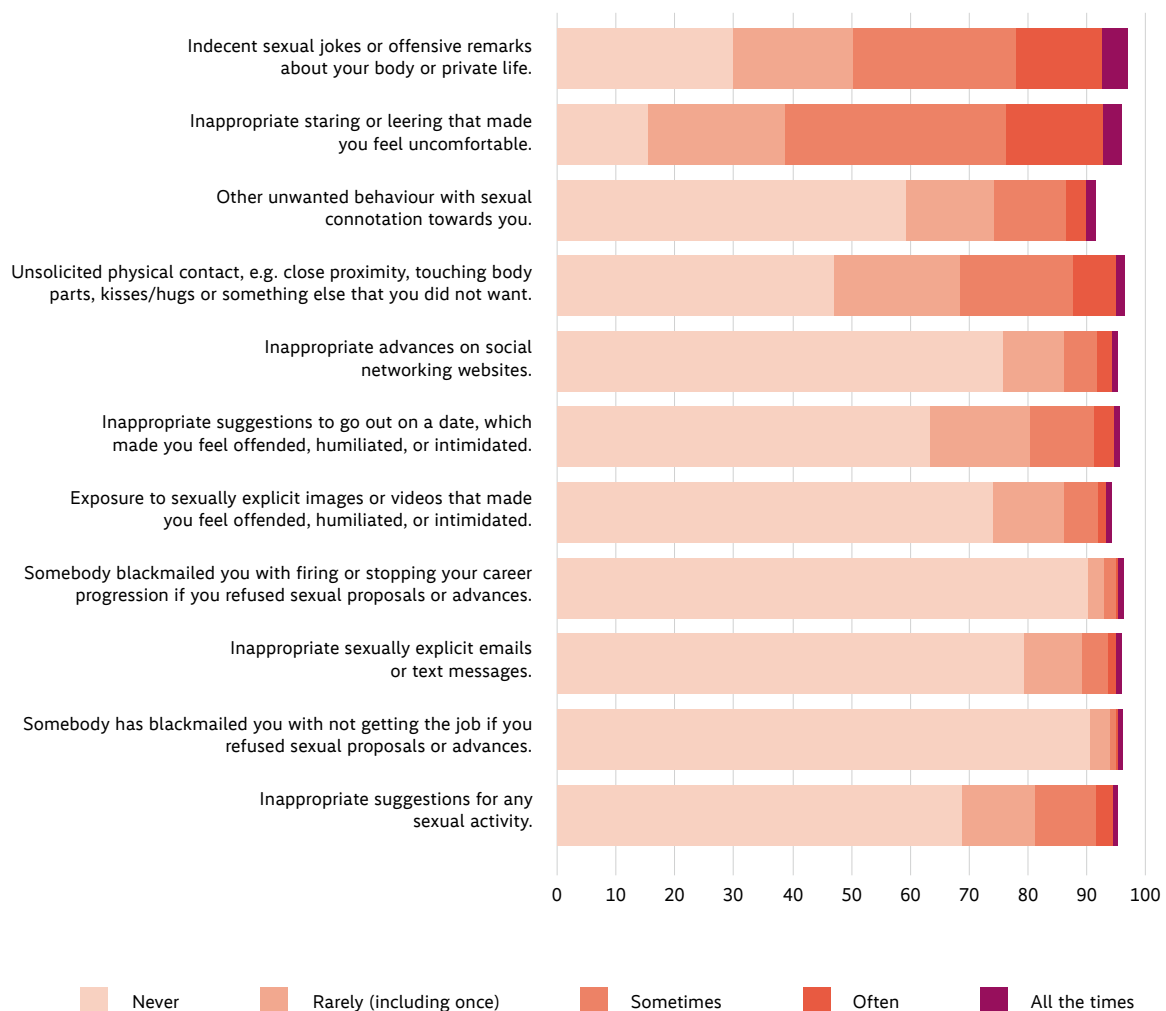


Figure 4 presents data on the frequency of different types of sexual harassment experienced in the workplace, based on responses from 1203 respondents. The categories are listed in descending order based on the highest frequency of “All the time”. Indecent sexual jokes or offensive remarks about one’s body or private life appear to be the most frequently experienced forms, Inappropriate staring or leering that causes discomfort is also a frequently encountered unwanted behaviour. Other forms of adverse conduct with a sexual connotation, including unsolicited physical contact (e.g. touching body parts, kisses, or hugs), rank high in ex-

periences. We can observe patterns, which implicates that verbal and visual harassment (such as sexual jokes, remarks, and staring) is more common than direct blackmail or coercion. Physical harassment, while less frequent than verbal forms, still represents a significant issue. Digital harassment, such as social media advances and explicit messages, is present but occurs less frequently than face-to-face harassment. Blackmail and coercion are less commonly experienced but are particularly concerning due to their severe impact on job security and career progression.

### Frequency of the experiences with sexual harassment at the workplace (N=1203,%)

Fig. 4



Question: Please indicate how often you have experienced such behaviour at your current workplace in each row.  
 Note: In descending order by “All the times”; The difference to 100% stands for “Don’t know/Do not remember.”

### 3.3 Victims and perpetrators

The findings from the survey suggest that sexual harassment disproportionately affects young individuals (in age 18 - 29), females, persons indicating “other” gender than male or female (e.g., non-binary people), and those with higher education. The relatively high exposure rate to SHW among tertiary educated respondents might be influenced by their overrepresentation in the sample, but it also indicates their higher sensitivity and recognition of unpleasant experiences. Being single, divorced, or widowed is associat-

ed with higher risk, while men report lower rates. Females account for 26.7% of victims, while males represent 14.5%, showing that women are almost twice as likely to be victims compared to men, but also that measures against SHW should not exclusively focus on female victims. These insights emphasise the need for targeted workplace policies and protective measures for vulnerable groups.

Table 3. Victims by gender, age, education and marital status (N=1279, %)

| Sex                  |      | Age         |      | Marital status                 |      | Education   |      |
|----------------------|------|-------------|------|--------------------------------|------|---|------|
| Female               | 26.7 | 18 - 29     | 33.3 | Single and never married       | 30.6 | Non or primary education                            | 18.3 |
| Male                 | 14.5 | 30 - 39     | 32.4 | Married/in a civil partnership | 22.0 | Secondary education                                 | 21.2 |
| Other                | 47.4 | 40 - 49     | 25.9 | Divorced and widowed           | 21.5 | Tertiary education (Bachelor's, Master's, Doctoral) | 25.0 |
| Prefer not to answer | 28.2 | 50 and more | 14.9 |                                |      |   |      |

Note: Percentage within the category

In the survey, victims could note whose behaviour adversely affected them in the workplace. They could select more than one type of perpetrator. Overall, male perpetrators account for 76.1% of sexual harassment marked perpetrators, and female perpetrators for 19.8%. Victims identified a male supervisor as being a sexual harasser three times more often than a female supervisor (males 19% and fe-

males 5.4%). However, victims experience more SHW from co-workers and even peers (43.1%) than from bosses (24.5%).

Table 4. Type of perpetrators by gender and working position to the victim (N=1938 responses, %)

|   | Count | %      |
|---|-------|--------|
| Male colleague or co-worker   | 664   | 34.3%  |
| Female colleague or co-worker   | 171   | 8.8%   |
| Male boss or supervisor   | 369   | 19.0%  |
| Female boss or supervisor   | 105   | 5.4%   |
| Male client or customer or patient or pupil or student or passenger   | 305   | 15.7%  |
| Female client or customer or patient or pupil or student or passenger | 52    | 2.7%   |
| Other female at work  | 56    | 2.9%   |
| Other male at work  | 137   | 7.1%   |
| Prefer not to answer  | 79    | 4.1%   |
| Total   | 1938  | 100.0% |

Q: Thinking about all the incidents of sexual harassment you marked in the previous questions, who did it? Please select all that apply to you.

*“It was easy for me to confront a male client and his verbal harassment, but I couldn’t do the same with my supervisor. In the second case, he did it in a way that would seem to others as a parental hug due to the age gap.”*

*(Czechia)*

*“I have only been harassed by customers in the food and beverage industry, which in my experience is quite common.”*

*(Czechia)*

Forms of sexual harassment experienced in the respondents’ current workplace (N=2676, %, multiple responses)

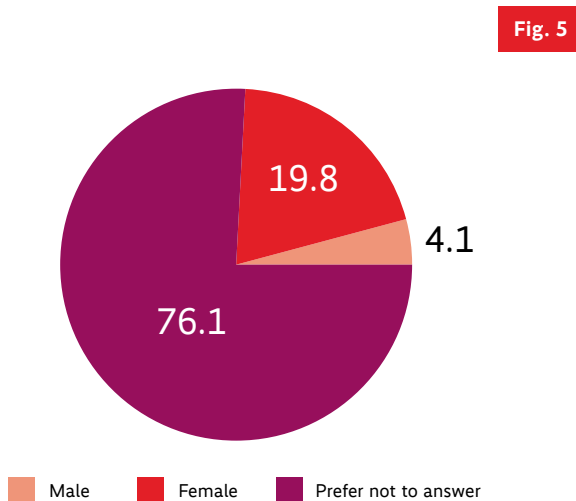


Fig. 5

Perpetrators of SHW by position related to work (N= 1938, %)

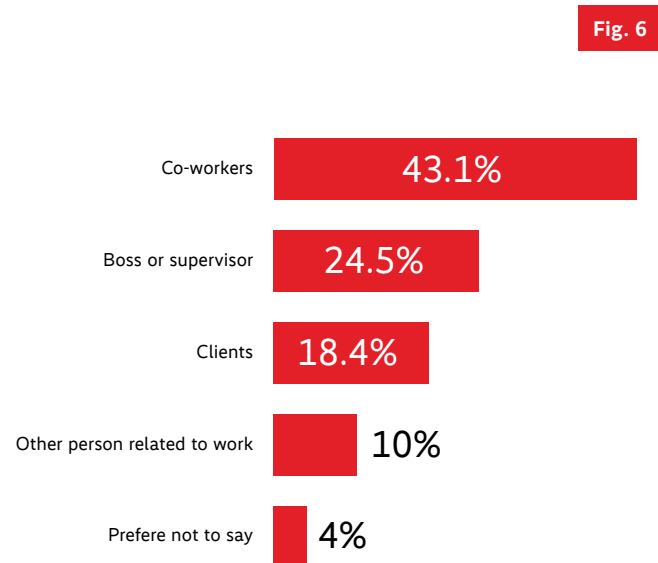


Fig. 6

Q: Thinking about all the incidents of sexual harassment you marked in the previous questions, who did it? Please select all that apply to you,

Note: based on the number of responses in the multiple response question

Table 5. Victim's sex/gender by type of perpetrator (N=1938, %)

| Type of perpetrator by gender and position                            | Victim's sex/gender |            |          |                      |
|---|---------------------|------------|----------|----------------------|
|   | Female              | Male       | Other    | Prefer not to answer |
| Male colleague or co-worker   | 36%                 | 23%        | 33%      | 39%                  |
| Female colleague or co-worker   | 7%                  | 22%        | 0%       | 3%                   |
| Male boss or supervisor   | 20%                 | 13%        | 22%      | 10%                  |
| Female boss or supervisor   | 4%                  | 11%        | 0%       | 10%                  |
| Male client or customer or patient or pupil or student or passenger   | 18%                 | 5%         | 33%      | 13%                  |
| Female client or customer or patient or pupil or student or passenger | 2%                  | 8%         | 0%       | 0%                   |
| Other female at work  | 2%                  | 7%         | 0%       | 7%                   |
| Other male at work  | 8%                  | 3%         | 11%      | 10%                  |
| Prefer not to answer  | 3%                  | 8%         | 0%       | 10%                  |
| Total   | 100%                | 100%       | 100%     | 100%                 |
| <b>Total count</b>  | <b>1601</b>         | <b>297</b> | <b>9</b> | <b>31</b>            |

Q: Thinking about all the incidents of sexual harassment you marked in the previous questions, who did it? Please select all that apply to you.

Male perpetrators dominate all victim genders. Data show 36% of female victims reported male colleagues, and 23% of male victims. 33% identifying as “Other,” reported male perpetrators and 39% preferred not to answer. Male bosses were reported by 20% of female and 13% of male victims, while male clients accounted for 18% of female and 5% of male harassment victims.

Male victims report more harassment from female perpetrators than female victims. Specifically, 22% of male victims faced harassment from a female colleague vs. 7% of female victims. Additionally, 11% identified a female boss as the perpetrator, whereas only 4% of female victims did. Furthermore, 8% of male victims reported harassment from a female client, compared to 2% of female victims. These findings indicate that while male perpetrators are common, male victims are more likely to experience harassment at work from female superiors.

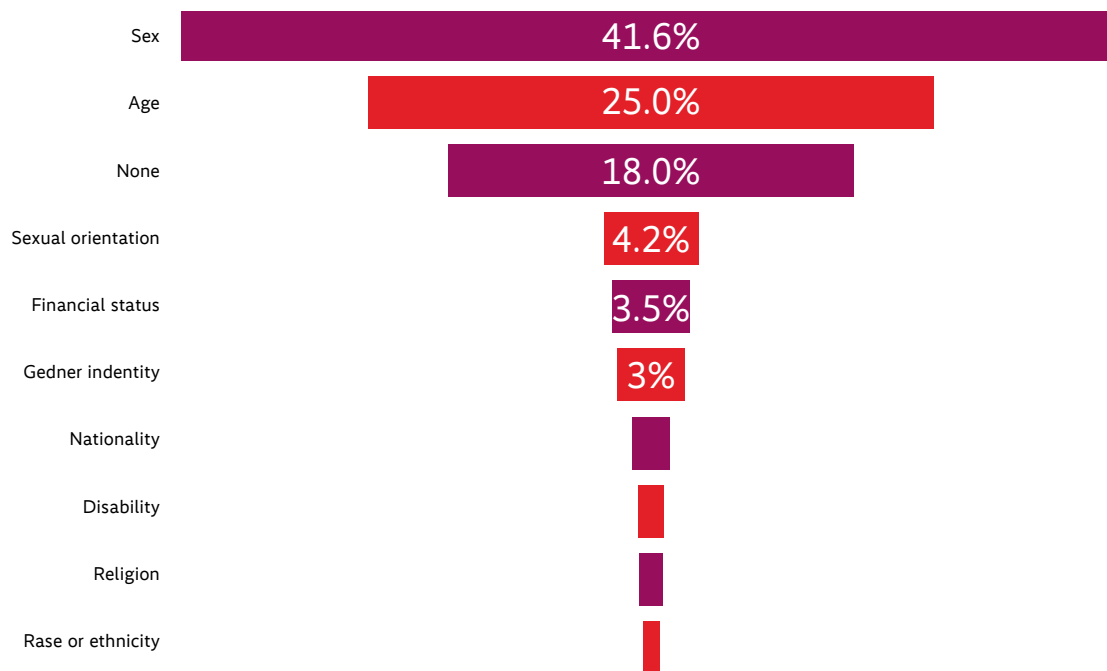
Victims identifying as “other” gender report higher rates of male clients and harassment, with 33% facing harassment from male clients — the highest among victim groups. Additionally, 11% encountered harassment from other males at work, outpacing female and male victim rates. These statistics indicate that those outside the traditional gender bi-

nary may face greater vulnerabilities in customer-facing roles due to complex power dynamics.

We investigated potential “motivators”, i.e. specific characteristics of victims that may have contributed to the occurrence of SHW (sexual harassment and assault). However, the identification of these “motivating factors” is likely influenced by the victim’s own sensitivity regarding the reasons behind the perpetrator’s behaviour towards him or her.

## Perceived victim's characteristics as motivation to attack them by the perpetrator (N=1758, %)

Fig. 7



Q: Thinking about all the incidents of sexual harassment you experienced; do you perceive that they might be motivated by any of the following characteristics? Please select all options that you consider relevant. Note: Multiple responses based on the number of responses.

Gender and age are key factors in sexual harassment in the workplace and are perceived as the most possible motivation for the perpetrators of the attack. This suggests that power dynamics related to sex/gender and age contribute to the occurrence of workplace harassment, with women, younger individuals, and those viewed as vulnerable due to gender norms being disproportionately affected.

Sexual orientation and financial status were mentioned far less frequently. Fewer victims attributed harassment to factors like gender identity, nationality, disability, religion, or race/ethnicity. This suggests that, in most cases, victims do not see these aspects of their identity as primary reasons for being harassed. However, this could also indicate a lack of awareness of implicit biases influencing perpetrators' behaviour. Moreover, victims with these specific risk characteristics are relatively rare among the victims.

### 3.4 Consequences of exposure to sexual harassment

We explored the psychosocial and other kinds of consequences of being exposed to sexual harassment at the workplace, based on a sample size of 2177 responses. Since it was a multiple-response question, victims could select more than one consequence.

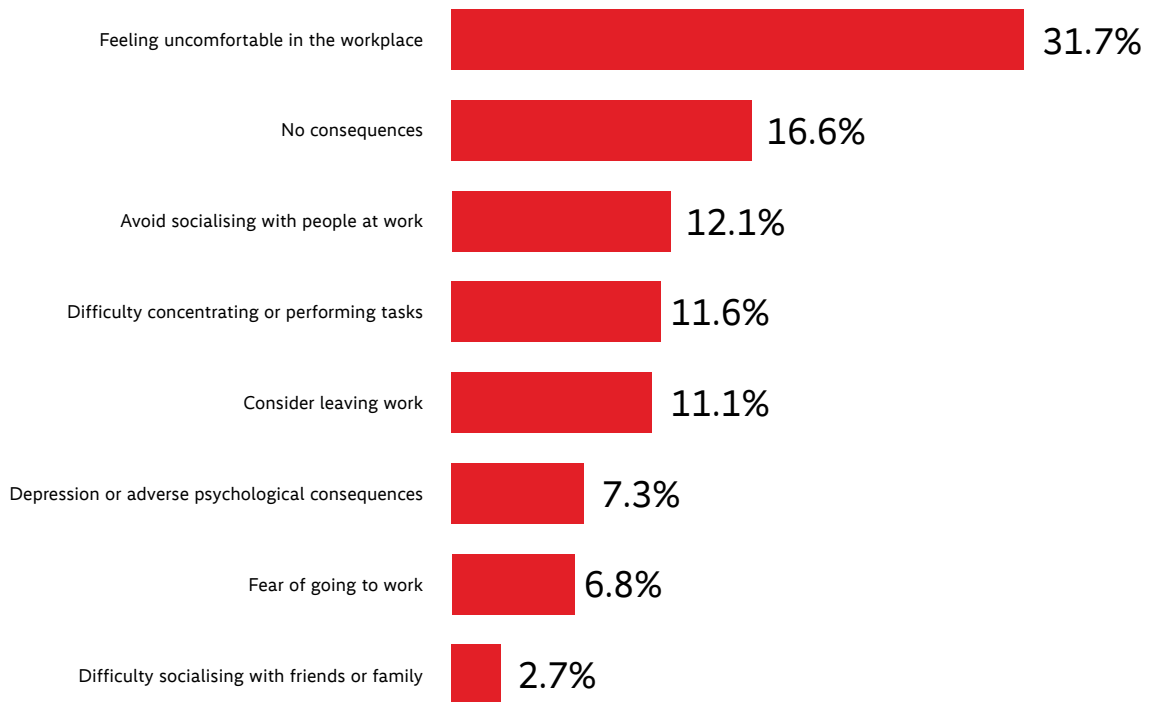
Nearly one-third (31.7%) of respondents reported feeling uncomfortable at work due to harassment. This highlights how sexual harassment disrupts workplace well-being and creates a hostile work environment. About one in six (16.6%) respondents reported no noticeable consequences. This suggests that while sexual harassment has a significant impact on many, some individuals may either not perceive direct harm or have developed coping mechanisms.

Many individuals started avoiding social interactions at work (12.1%), likely due to discomfort, fear, or loss of trust in colleagues, and 11.6% reported difficulty concentrating or performing tasks, indicating that workplace harassment negatively affects productivity. Over one in ten victims of SHW considered leaving their job due to harassment. This underlines the severe career impact that harassment can have. It also shows that not confronting SHW is problematic for employers: They lose personnel in an increasingly employee-driven job market.

Depression and adverse psychological effects were reported by 7.3% of respondents. This aligns with known research linking workplace harassment to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

## Psychosocial consequences of being exposed to sexual harassment at the workplace (N= 2177, %)

Fig. 8



Q: Have you identified any consequences of the sexual harassment you experienced? Please select all that apply to you.  
Note: Multiple response

Based on the open survey answers, the consequences of being exposed to sexual harassment in the workplace include psychological and emotional impacts, behavioural changes, professional consequences, and effects on the social and workplace environment. We illustrate this with the victims' own words as revealed in the survey,

Psychological and emotional impacts of SHW include anxiety, PTSD, flashbacks, stress, and depression, along with fear of encountering the harasser, feeling disrespected and not taken seriously, and loss of self-confidence, making it difficult to stand up for oneself.

*"I went to work every day with a knot in my stomach."*

*(Hungary)*

*"(Fear of going out and anxiety about facing unpleasant situations. And anger."*

*(Greece)*

Behavioural changes are also common, including avoiding contact with supervisors and colleagues, altering clothing choices (e.g., wearing long sleeves to avoid attention), refraining from socialising, reducing communication with clients, and fearing retaliation or being labelled as problematic. Therefore, for employers and colleagues alike, not confronting SHW means that the victims can no longer perform their work in a fully committed manner.

*“I avoid wearing low-cut tops or anything ‘provocative’ because some male colleagues stare.”*

*(Czechia)*

On a professional level, victims may experience changes in working hours or location due to harassment, be denied promotions or career advancement, quit their jobs without having another lined up, feel unappreciated for their skills and contributions (being valued only for their looks), and suffer from reduced productivity and engagement due to stress.

*“Quitting my job without having another one lined up.”*

*(Croatia)*

*“Feeling anxiety around my boss, don’t want to take the promotion to manager so I don’t have to be in daily contact with him.”*

*(Slovakia)*

*“Request for transfer, not approved.”*

*(Greece)*

Furthermore, as colleagues and superiors fail to take action or ignore complaints, the social and workplace environment is affected: workplace culture may enable or excuse inappropriate behaviour, bystanders may feel uncomfortable and distance themselves from victims, and employees may fear losing their jobs if they report harassment.

*“I felt guilty for reporting the incident, but I still had to meet with the person regularly.”*

*(Hungary)*

The findings underscore the significant repercussions of workplace sexual harassment. The data show harassment negatively affects workplace well-being, productivity, mental health, and relationships. Notably, 11.1% of respondents considered leaving their jobs, indicating a link between harassment and turnover. Additionally, 16.6% of individuals reported “no consequences,” suggesting either resilient coping mechanisms or unawareness of harassment effects.

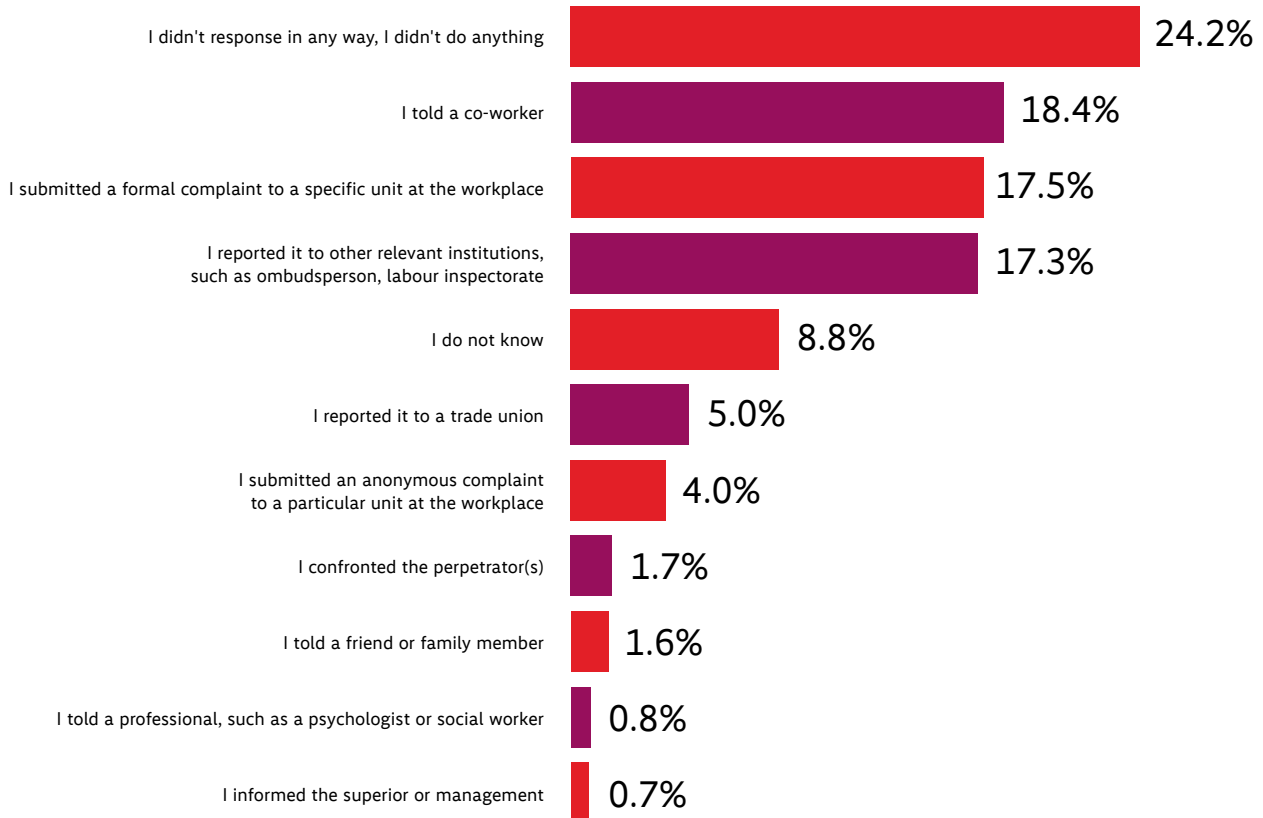
### 3.5 Victims’ responses to sexual harassment

We asked the victims about their reactions and the actions they took when experiencing SHW. We analyse all the actions they undertook as multiple responses.

In total, 51.6% of responses indicate that victims confided in someone about the incident; specifically, they spoke with a co-worker (18.4%), submitted a formal complaint (17.5%), or reported it to another relevant institution (17.3%). This suggests that nearly half of the victims attempt to act proactively by informing someone about the harassment. Conversely, 33% of responses indicate either no action or uncertainty, including those who did not respond or took no action, as well as those who were unsure what to do.

## Victims' reactions and steps taken in the aftermath of SHW (N= 1891, %)

Fig. 9



Q. What was your response to the sexual harassment? Please select all that apply to you.

Key observations from the survey data reveal significant trends in how victims responded to workplace sexual harassment. Low reporting to formal channels suggests a lack of trust in formal systems, fear of retaliation, or inadequate reporting mechanisms. More victims confided in informal contacts than formal authorities, highlighting a gap in workplace trust where victims may feel safer discussing issues with colleagues rather than reporting them through formal channels. The minimal confrontation of the perpetrator indicates that fear of retaliation, power dynamics, or workplace culture may deter direct action. A significant percentage of victims took no action: one in three remained silent, likely due to fear of consequences, workplace culture, or a lack of faith in existing support structures.



Based on the open survey responses (N= 36), individuals who experienced sexual harassment in the workplace reacted in a variety of ways, which can be categorised into the following themes:

Reporting to authorities or management: Some victims took action by reporting the harassment to their supervisors, HR departments, or external authorities. However, in many cases, the responses from these entities were inadequate or dismissive.

*HR told me that only a private lawsuit was possible; they could not do anything.”*

*(Czechia)*

Setting boundaries and confronting the harasser: Many individuals directly confronted the perpetrator and set clear boundaries.

*“I directly told him that the jokes were not okay and to stop.”*

*(Croatia)*

*“Confronting the harasser led to professional retaliation.”*

*(Slovakia)*

Leaving the job or considering resignation: For some victims, the harassment was severe enough that they left or considered leaving their jobs.

*“ I left my job. Resignation.”*

*(Greece)*

*“There’s not much I can do if I don’t want to lose my job. “*

*(Slovakia)*

Retaliation and lack of institutional support: Some victims faced retaliation or were not taken seriously when they reported harassment.

*“I told a colleague from the union committee. Unfortunately, he downplayed the problem.” (*

*Czechia)*

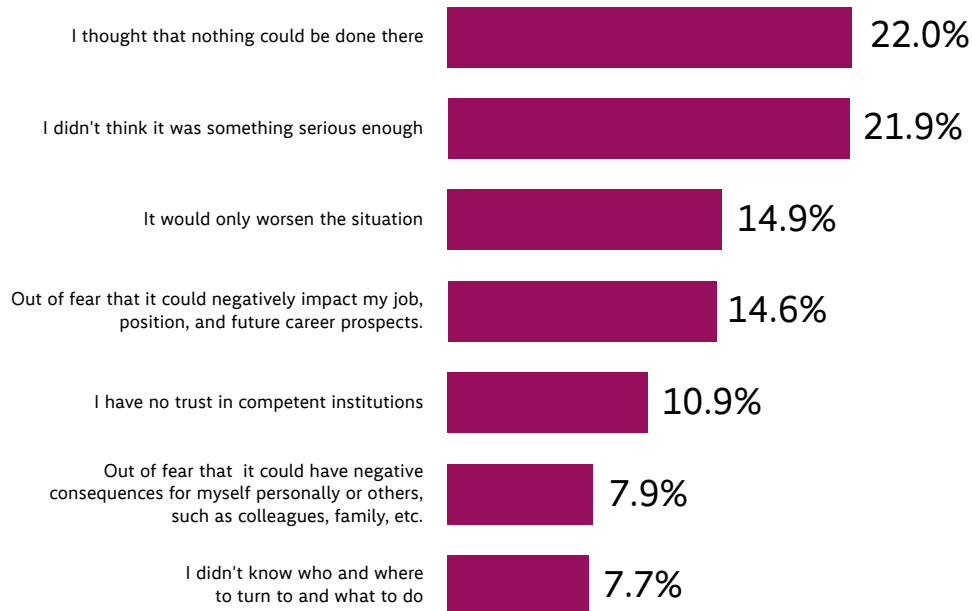
*“Considering the perpetrator’s position and reputation, it made no sense to report it because there would be no consequences for them.”*

*(Croatia)*

Those victims who did not respond or take any action were asked about their reasons. The most common reason (22%) was that victims believed nothing could be done if they reported the harassment. Additionally, 10.9% confirmed a lack of trust in competent institutions, indicating that many victims perceive workplace and legal systems as ineffective or unsupportive.

## Reasons for not acting in the aftermath of sexual harassment in the workplace (N=895 responses, %)

Fig. 10



Q. If you did not respond in any way, what were the reasons for that? Please select all that apply to you.

Minimisation of the incident prevents action, as 21.9% of victims stated that they did not think the harassment was serious enough, making it the second most common reason for inaction. This suggests that many victims downplay their experiences, potentially due to societal normalisation of harassment or a lack of understanding about what constitutes unacceptable behaviour. They take an “appeasement” strategy, assuming that SHW will stop if they do not react. The open answers confirm this:

*“I didn’t feel I needed to act because it was a one-time incident.”*

(Hungary)

*“It’s just a few inappropriate glances, I don’t reciprocate, and that solves it.”*

(Czechia)

Fear of negative consequences contributes to silence, with 14.9% of respondents feeling that taking action would only worsen the situation, while 14.6% feared career-related repercussions such as losing their job or harming their professional future.

*“I was ashamed and afraid they would downplay the seriousness of the situation and not believe me.”*

(Czechia)

*“The perpetrator had a high position and reputation. It would be seen as oversensitive, especially since I wasn’t the only one exposed to it.”*

(Croatia)

Furthermore, 7.9% were concerned about personal or social consequences for themselves or colleagues. This highlights the power imbalances and retaliation fears that discourage victims from speaking. Several respondents described psychological distress, including shame, inexperience, or emotional detachment, as reasons for inaction. Some victims froze in response to harassment or felt powerless to take action or react.

*“I was inexperienced in handling such situations.”*

*(Hungary)*

Cultural and gender expectations shaped how some individuals processed harassment. Male victims may struggle to report harassment due to stereotypes that men should always welcome sexual attention.

*“It’s stupid, but it feels like – which man would complain about a woman making a move?”*

*(Croatia)*

*“I understand that I may be attractive to some women, but some crossed the line of decency.”*

*(Croatia)*

*“If you accept, you’re a predator; if you reject, you’re even worse.”*

*(Croatia)*

Certain victims think that ignoring harassment will make it cease, while others come to understand later that they should have taken action. Some participants indicated that if the harassment were to occur again, they would respond differently.

*“I wouldn’t let it happen a second time. If it happened again, I would speak up.”*

*(Greece)*

*“Without a reaction, it stopped.”*

*(Hungary)*

### 3.6 Victims’ satisfaction with the case(s) outcomes and her/his needs

We asked about the outcome of their SHW case and whether the victims took any action in the aftermath of the incidents. The data strongly suggest that reporting sexual harassment often leads to no action or inadequate resolution. Lack of action (43, 2%) was the most common response, indicating that nothing occurred following the report of harassment. This highlights a systemic issue in effectively addressing sexual harassment cases.

The data on workplace sexual harassment cases reveal significant shortcomings in how these incidents are managed. In the majority of cases (43.2%), no action was taken, indicating a systemic failure to address complaints properly. While in some instances (22.7%) the harassment eventually ceased, it remains unclear whether this resulted from formal intervention or other circumstances. A notable portion of respondents (13.4%) indicated that none of the listed outcomes applied, further emphasising dissatisfaction and a lack of meaningful resolution.

Only a small percentage (6.5%) reported that their claim was investigated, suggesting that organisations either lack proper procedures or fail to implement them adequately. In a limited number of cases, either the perpetrator (2.7%) or the victim (2.9%) was transferred to another department or workplace, raising concerns about potential retaliation or inadequate solutions. Additionally, disciplinary action (2.1%) and the firing of perpetrators (2.1%) were rare, pointing to a lack of accountability for offenders.

Preventative measures, such as anti-harassment training, were implemented in only 1.5% of cases, further emphasising the need for proactive policies. Overall, these findings suggest that many workplaces fail to respond effectively to sexual harassment claims, underscoring the necessity for stronger policies, accountability mechanisms, and cultural changes to ensure that victims receive the support and justice they deserve.

Table 7. Outcome of the case of the sexual harassment at the workplace (N= 665, %)

| Type of outcome  | Responses |
|--|-----------|
| Nothing happened - no action                                       | 43.2%     |
| The harassment stopped   | 22.7%     |
| None of the above  | 13.4%     |
| The claim was investigated   | 6.5%      |
| The perpetrator(s) left  | 3.0%      |
| I was transferred to another department/workplace                  | 2.9%      |
| The perpetrator(s) was transferred to another department/workplace | 2.7%      |
| Disciplinary actions were taken                                    | 2.1%      |
| The perpetrator(s) was fired                                       | 2.1%      |
| An anti-harassment training was organised                          | 1.5%      |

Q: If you told someone, confronted the perpetrator or informed the responsible persons or institutions about the sexual harassment you experienced, what happened afterwards? Please mark all options that apply to you.

Victims express the outcome in their own words; here are a few examples:

*“The superiors told me I was overreacting.”*

*(Greece)*

*“My salary was reduced.”*

*(Czechia)*

I was told that my colleague was harmless and that I should not be bothered by the fact that he had been contacting me in the middle of the night for a year and a half, and that I should be gentle with him because he is sensitive.” (Croatia)

*“I quit my job, the perpetrator was promoted.”*

*(Czechia)*

Victims who file a formal complaint reported on how it was handled and whether the action taken was effective. According to the feedback received, 16.9% of the complainants indicated that the complaint made the situation worse, while 26.3% stated that the complaint did not change the situation at all. In contrast, 28.1% reported that the complaint improved the situation, and 28.7% were uncertain about the outcome.

The further analysis of outcomes following the submission of a formal complaint reveals a variety of experiences, the majority of which suggest a lack of effective resolution or additional negative repercussions for the complainant. Below are the key findings accompanied by representative quotations from the victims:

Some cases resulted in temporary relief or minor interventions but did not address the issue’s root:

*“The harassment stopped, but since I was the ‘right hand,’ working together became difficult as we barely spoke for a long time.”*

*(Hungary)*

Several complainants experienced retaliation, heightened hostility, or loss of employment as a consequence of voicing their concerns:

*“They told me I was fired, and the harassment increased because HR informed management that I had complained.”*

*(Croatia)*

Some victims suggest that while the complaint was recognised, it did not result in lasting change within the system:

*“The complaint was filed, and special attention was given to specific clients during their presence”*

(Czechia)

*“The only change was that more female colleagues left for other jobs, No one is addressing the fact that the manager has a real problem with women.”*

(Czechia)

In some cases, the victim was pressured to accept the behaviour or was gaslighted into thinking the issue was not serious:

*“The person is who they are, and my role is to accept them as they are— even justifying their behaviour and being told they are a good person to change my perspective.”*

(Croatia)

Some complainants attempted to resolve the issue informally, but the harassment continued in more subtle forms:

*“The obvious attacks stopped for a while, but the perpetrator tried even harder to appear uninvolved and found new ways to harm me.”*

(Czechia)

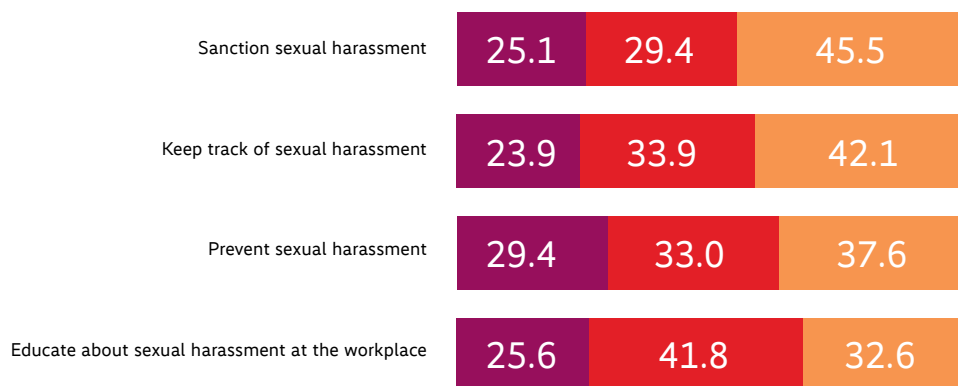
The findings indicate that the process of filing formal complaints concerning workplace harassment often fails to yield substantial resolutions. Victims frequently face retaliatory measures, inadequate or superficial responses, along with organisational cultures that tend to minimise or disregard their experiences. These results highlight a critical need for enhanced enforcement of anti-harassment policies, improved protections for complainants, and a necessary shift in workplace culture towards greater accountability and comprehensive support for victims.

### 3.7 Awareness and attitudes to existing protection against SHW

The figure below presents responses from survey participants regarding whether they believe their employer is taking adequate and effective measures to combat sexual harassment in the workplace.

## Respondents’ opinions on the employers’ efforts and actions to combat sexual harassment (N=4308, %)

Fig. 11



Q. Do you think that your current employer is doing enough to:....

Across all categories, a significant portion of employees are uncertain about their employer's efforts, with "Don't" responses ranging from 32.6% to 45.5%. This indicates a potential lack of communication or transparency regarding workplace policies. The highest disapproval rate (41.8%) is for employer-led education on sexual harassment. The lowest approval rate (23.9%) is for tracking sexual harassment cases, implying scepticism about how well incidents are recorded and monitored. More employees disapprove (29.4%-41.8 %) than approve (23.9%-29.4 %) of their employer's actions across all four areas, pointing to a need for stronger policies and enforcement mechanisms.

The findings highlight gaps in workplace efforts to combat sexual harassment, with exceptionally high concerns regarding education and tracking mechanisms. Employers should consider enhancing transparency, awareness campaigns, and employee training programmes to address these concerns effectively.

The next table outline the specific types of information and support respondents (general population) and victims of sexual harassment need in cases of exposure to sexual harassment.

*Table 8. Respondents' and victims' needs for specific information and support in cases of exposure to sexual harassment (%)*

| Category   | All respondents' responses (N= 9558) | Victims' responses (N= 2461) | Difference |
|--|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|
| Information on how to proceed in case of sexual harassment from responsible persons/institutions | 19.6%                                | 21.6%                        | +2.0%      |
| Protection against further sexual harassment and retaliation                                     | 18.5%                                | 19.7%                        | +1.2%      |
| Professional (legal) support in reporting violence and/or harassment                             | 19.9%                                | 16.2%                        | -3.7%      |
| Moral support (someone to talk to in confidence)   | 12.3%                                | 14.9%                        | +2.6%      |
| Professional help in interpreting my rights  | 11.8%                                | 10.6%                        | -1.2%      |
| Practical help   | 8.4%                                 | 10.6%                        | +2.2%      |
| None of the above  | 5.1%                                 | 3.6%                         | -1.5%      |
| Medical assistance   | 2.4%                                 | 1.2%                         | -1.2%      |
| Financial support  | 1.9%                                 | 1.7%                         | -0.2%      |

Q: What information and support would you appreciate after experiencing sexual harassment? Select up to three options.

Victims prioritise direct protection, emotional support, and clear procedural guidance slightly more than the general respondents. General respondents overestimate the need for legal support but underestimate the importance of moral and practical help. Both groups agree that institutions should focus on preventing retaliation, providing procedural clarity, and offering legal and emotional support. These findings indicate that employers, institutions, and policy-makers need to ensure transparent reporting mechanisms, strong protective measures, and accessible emotional and practical support for victims of sexual harassment.

We analysed the insightful comments from survey respondents (N= 70), offering further understanding of employees' attitudes toward sexual harassment and policies against it. A significant portion of respondents state that

they have not experienced sexual harassment and, therefore, feel unable to answer the question. Some believe the issue is exaggerated or irrelevant in their workplace.

*"We don't have sexual harassment."*

*(Slovakia)*

*"Such things do not exist in my company."*

*(Czechia)*

Several respondents express scepticism about workplace policies, claiming that sexual harassment is either ignored, tolerated, or only addressed superficially for legal compliance:

*“Most of these things are just empty words on paper to satisfy formal requirements or protect the employer.”*

*(Croatia)*

*“The men in leadership positions are the ones committing harassment, so I can’t imagine them fighting against it.”*

*(Czechia)*

A small subset of respondents advocate for harsher consequences for perpetrators, including extreme measures:

*“Chemical castration.”*

*(Hungary)*

### 3.8 Effectiveness of the current regulations and steps forward

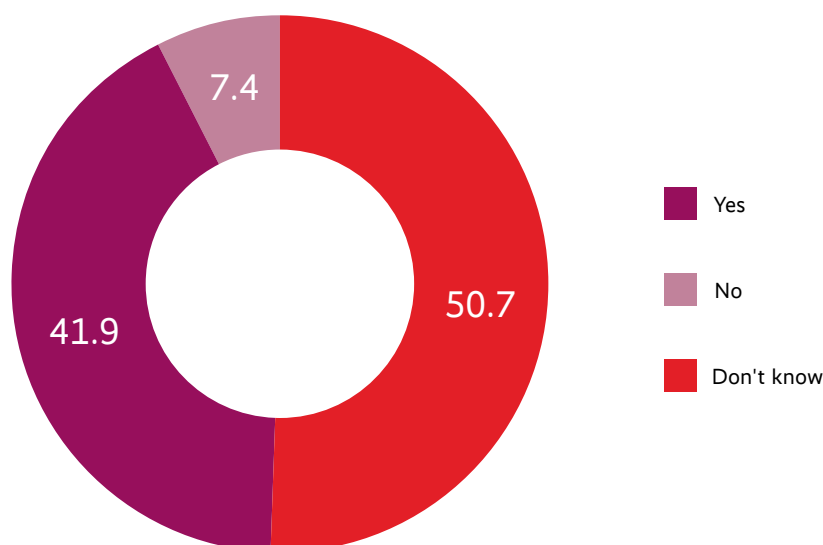
The pie chart below shows responses from 4308 individuals about their awareness of workplace sexual harassment regulations. Over half (50.7%) are unsure if their country has policies, indicating a significant communication gap in awareness campaigns. While 41.9% recognise the regulations, there’s ample scope for improvement in education. A small portion (7.4%) believe no laws exist, suggesting weak enforcement or a lack of policies in some regions. This underscores a critical gap in awareness and enforcement of workplace sexual harassment policies, necessitating more efforts to inform employees about existing regulations and ensure trust in their effectiveness.

We examined whether respondents’ employers have regulations in place to prevent, address, and penalise workplace sexual harassment. Respondents were asked about all the possible types of which they are aware. Here are the findings:

A high level of uncertainty (33.2%): a significant number of employees are unaware whether their employer has regulations in place to address sexual harassment. This underscores a considerable lack of communication and awareness regarding workplace policies.

### Awareness of the regulations to prevent, address, and penalise workplace sexual harassment in respondents’ country (N= 4308, %)

Fig. 12



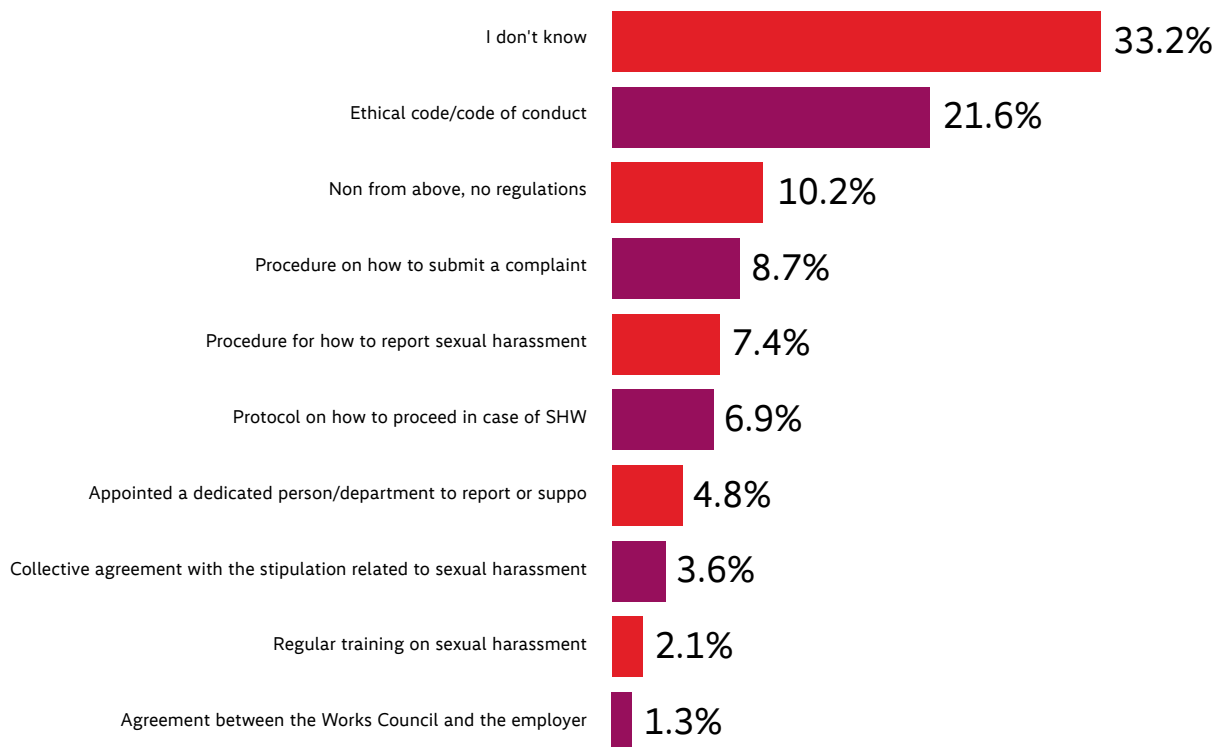
Q. Are there any regulations to prevent, address, and penalise workplace sexual harassment in your country?

Limited implementation of specific procedures (below 10%): only a small percentage of employers have established procedures, such as how to report sexual harassment (7.4%) or how to proceed in cases of sexual harassment (6.9%). This suggests that even if policies exist, they may not be well-defined or easily accessible to employees.

Reliance on general ethical codes (21.6%): the most commonly cited regulation is an ethical code or code of conduct (21.6%), rather than specific sexual harassment policies. While ethical codes are important, they may lack enforceability or detailed guidance on handling harassment cases.

### Types of employers' anti-SHW regulations that respondents are aware of (N= 5484, %)

Fig. 13



Q. Does your current employer have any regulations in place to prevent, address, and penalise workplace sexual harassment? If yes, what kind? Please select all applicable options.

We investigate the circumstances under which respondents would seek information regarding the anti-SHW regulations to enhance the efficacy of information dissemination concerning these issues.

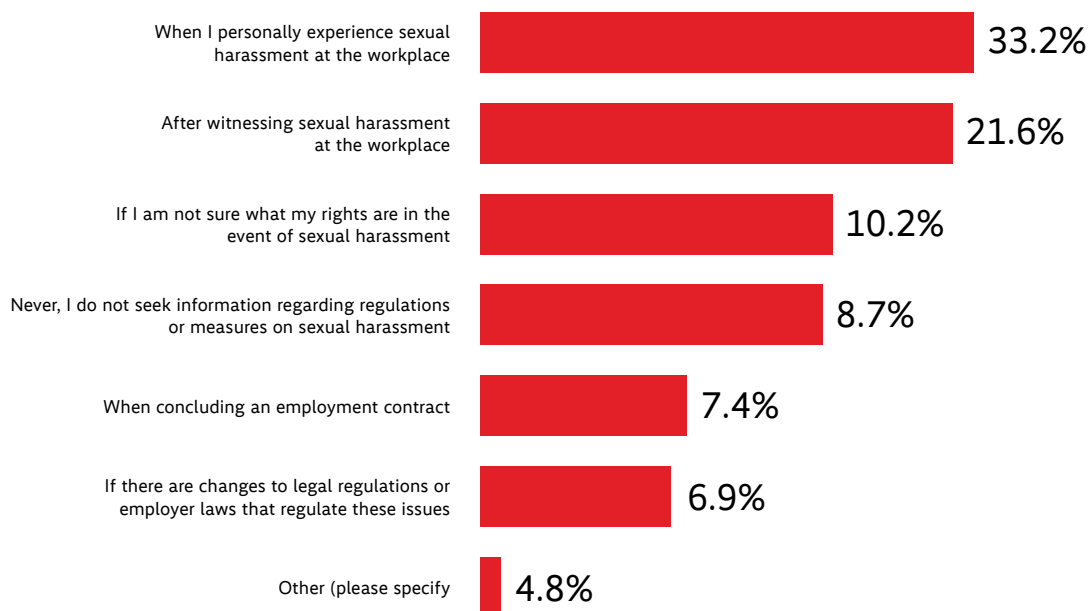
Employees seek information reactively. The data most likely indicates that the majority of employees pursue information only when they experience or observe sexual harassment (SHW), rather than taking the initiative to understand their rights and protections beforehand. There are gaps in proactive education and awareness. Figure 13 highlights a lack of awareness concerning workplace policies, while the

subsequent figure indicates that individuals only seek information when it is necessary. This suggests a failure in workplace training and communication strategies related to sexual harassment regulations. Considering the low percentage of employees aware of specific procedures, employers must enhance the accessibility of policies, ensure employees are aware of their rights, and offer regular training sessions.



## Circumstances when the workers would seek information on anti-SHW regulations (N= 6071, %)

Fig. 14



Q. When would you seek information about regulations, procedures and measures related to workplace sexual harassment? Select all options that apply to you. Note: Based on the number of responses on the multiple response questions.

The findings reveal serious information gaps between employers and employees regarding sexual harassment regulations, highlighting a gendered power dynamic in workplaces. Many employees are unaware of existing policies, and lack of easy-to-access complaint procedures worsens this problem. Additionally, employees often do not seek information, perpetuating ignorance and increasing vulnerability for potential victims of harassment. Therefore, employers must enhance transparency, provide thorough training on reporting procedures, and develop accessible policies that consider the experiences of marginalised gender identities. These steps are vital for creating safer, more equitable workplaces and upholding the ethical responsibility to protect all employees from harassment while addressing systemic inequities.

# 4

## Role of trade unions in fighting sexual harassment in the workplace

### 4.1 Opinions and expectations on the role of trade unions in addressing sexual harassment in the workplace

The vast majority of workers from the six targeted countries participating in the survey support the idea that trade unions should play a significant and varied role in combating SHW. The survey showed that the most desirable role of trade unions in the workplace should be to support the victims in the first place.

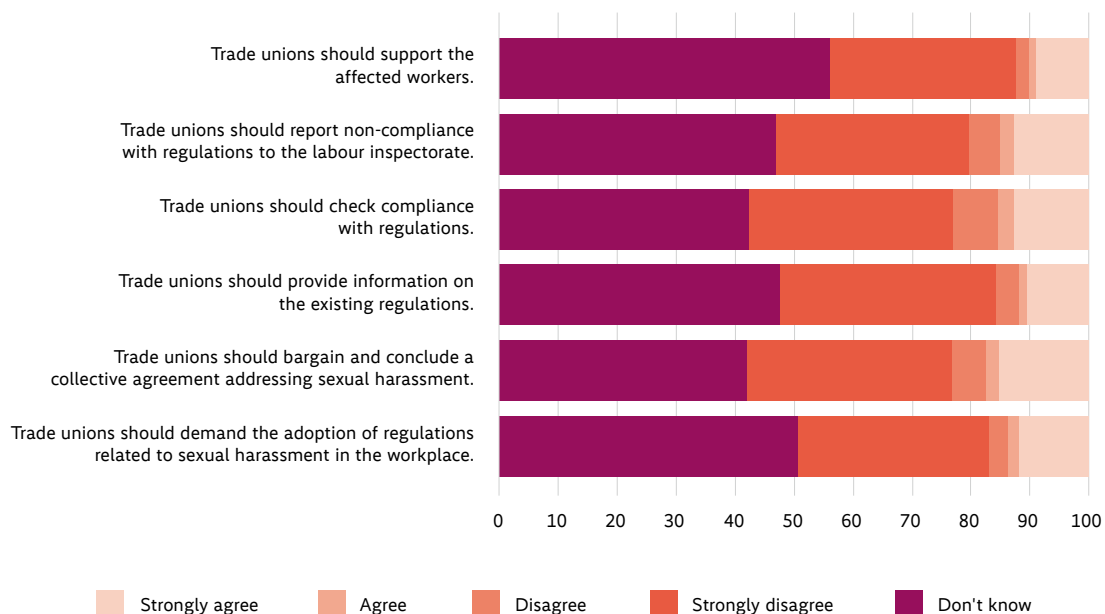
The survey results indicate that most workers support trade unions proactively addressing sexual harassment in the workplace. Firstly, the highest level of support (56.1% strongly agree, 31.7% agree) is for trade unions providing direct support to affected workers, showing that workers view victim support as a priority.

Secondly, a significant proportion of respondents strongly agree (50.7%) that trade unions should demand the adoption of regulations related to sexual harassment, reinforcing the expectation that unions should actively advocate for regulatory improvements.

Thirdly, while training is considered important, with 33.9% strongly agreeing and 34.5% agreeing, it has a slightly lower level of strong support compared to other roles. Meanwhile, opposition to union involvement is minimal, with only 4.8% strongly agreeing that unions should play no role and 39.1% strongly disagreeing with that statement, indicating broad consensus on the importance of union engagement in tackling this issue.

### Role of trade unions in addressing sexual harassment in the workplace (N= 3527, %)

Fig. 15



Q. What role should trade unions play in addressing sexual harassment in the workplace? Please express if you agree or disagree with each of the roles below. Note: Descending order by the category “Strongly agree.”

The growing expectation and endorsement for trade unions to take on a more enhanced role in combating sexual harassment in the workplace has been increasingly acknowledged in recent discussions. This societal push reflects a belief that trade unions should be at the forefront of addressing these issues, providing support for victims and helping to create safer work environments. However, this progressive vision stands in stark contrast to a troubling reality encapsulated in our findings that reveal only 5% of victims have reported incidents of SHW to their respective trade unions. This, however, should be viewed in the overall low rate of reporting the incidents to official institutions.

*“I didn’t even call my union, because they just gossip all day long. [...] I have no reason to make my case and ask for help from such people. In the end, I don’t know why I even joined that union, I guess I’m deceiving myself that they would help me if needed.”*

(Croatia)

This statistic is particularly alarming given that over 38.6% of the victims were, in fact, members of a trade union at the time they experienced such harassment. This significant discrepancy suggests that despite the heightened expectations for trade unions to advocate for the rights and safety of their members, victims of sexual harassment face numerous obstacles when attempting to seek help from these organisations.

*“I don’t trust institutions. Literally, I don’t trust them at all because we know how they work. If I had a really traumatic experience, I would approach an NGO.”*

(Croatia)

Barriers may include a lack of trust in the union’s ability to handle complaints, fear of retaliation from colleagues or employers, or a perception that their cases will not be taken seriously. Such challenges highlight the need for trade unions to improve their approach to handling SHW incidents and raise questions about their role in promoting an inclusive and supportive environment for all workers. It underscores an urgent necessity for trade unions to reassess their strategies and enhance their support systems to effectively assist victims of sexual harassment and actively work towards eliminating such injustices in the workplace.

The comments from survey respondents reflect a diverse range of perspectives on the role of trade unions in combating sexual harassment in the workplace. The feedback can be categorised into three main themes:

Many respondents support trade unions’ active involvement and believe that trade unions should play a proactive role in addressing sexual harassment by providing education, advocating for regulations, and supporting victims. As one respondent suggests:

*“Trade unions should create an electronic information leaflet to be distributed to employees, containing all relevant details on the procedures to follow in cases of sexual harassment.”*

(Greece)

Similarly, another comment emphasises the need for unions to pressure employers:

*“It is necessary to implement laws at the state level that must be enforced in every workplace. Trade unions should represent their members in cases of harassment or legal violations.”*

(Croatia)

A significant number of survey respondents’ express criticism of trade unions’ effectiveness and trustworthiness and scepticism about trade unions’ ability to handle sexual harassment cases effectively. Some believe that unions are often absent on critical issues or are controlled by individuals who may not be committed to tackling harassment. One respondent criticises:

*“Trade unions are generally absent from all serious issues.”*

(Greece)

Another respondent questions the integrity of unions:

*“But only if you feel like trade unions are trustworthy. Are they? Full of middle-aged white men.”*

(Slovakia)

Moreover, some respondents argue that unions themselves may have internal harassment issues, making them ineffective advocates:

*“But trade unions are organisations where sexual harassment frequently happens. I fear that unless older men, who are often perpetrators, leave leadership positions, no change will be possible.”*

*(Czechia)*

Some respondents suggest alternative perspectives regarding the role of employers and HR departments, believing that addressing sexual harassment should primarily rest with employers and HR departments rather than trade unions. One respondent states:

*“I am not sure if trade unions should replace the responsibilities of HR, which belong to the employer.”*

*(Slovakia)*

Another view suggests that trained professionals should handle harassment cases instead of workplace colleagues within the union:

*“The resolution of sexual harassment should remain the responsibility of professionals. Trade unions mostly consist of ‘colleagues’ from the same workplace—I think it might be uncomfortable for the victim if such an experience is discussed among colleagues even more.”*

*(Slovakia)*

The comments reveal a mixed perception of trade unions’ role in tackling sexual harassment. While many advocate for unions to take a strong stance in education, advocacy, and victim support, others criticise their effectiveness and internal structures. Some argue that the responsibility should lie primarily with employers and HR professionals rather than unions. These differing viewpoints highlight the complexity of addressing workplace harassment and the need for multiple stakeholders, including trade unions, to be involved in prevention and resolution efforts.

**Box 2**

## Reasons why violence and harassment against women matter to unions

### Four reasons why violence and harassment against women matter to unions

*A safe working environment is a basic worker’s right*

*Violence and harassment are a serious workplace issue which has a lasting impact on the dignity, employment and livelihoods of the victims. An unsafe workplace hinders not only career progression but also the overall quality of life. It can lead to absenteeism, a reluctance or inability to take on certain tasks or roles, or even force women to leave their jobs, thereby hampering their economic independence and professional development.*

*Nobody is equal until everyone is equal*

*A workplace which tolerates violence and harassment against women is conducive to many other forms of discrimination. Violence and harassment against women are at the intersection of several other forms of oppression. While gender is a significant risk factor in the experience of violence and harassment, it becomes a particularly prevalent factor in combination with race, class, dis-*

*ability, sexual orientation, gender identity and other grounds of discrimination.*

*Fighting for decent work also means fighting for gender equality*

*There is a strong connection between, on the one hand, precarious and badly paid jobs and, on the other hand, violence against women. Women in vulnerable situations are particularly exposed to violence and harassment at work. Economic dependency is also intertwined with domestic violence.*

*Unions make a difference*

*In a context of ineffective legal and preventive and reporting mechanisms, trade unions have a crucial role to play in ensuring safe workplaces for all workers. They can support victims of violence or harassment and negotiate policies and agreements that prevent, sanction and ultimately eradicate gender-based violence and harassment.*

Source: ETUC (2024a)

Trade unions in the EU play a vital role in advancing occupational health and safety (OHS) standards, contributing to safer and healthier workplaces throughout Europe. Their collaboration with EU institutions has produced policies that safeguard workers' well-being. The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) advocates for robust OHS legislation across Europe, emphasising strong regulations and independent inspections. Tripartite collaboration among governments, employers, and workers' representatives is key to the EU's OHS strategy, exemplified by the Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work (ACSH).<sup>8</sup> This partnership allows trade unions to significantly influence policies affecting workers' health and safety. They have been instrumental in enacting directives like 89/391/EEC, promoting safety improvements and ensuring compliance with these standards in member states.<sup>9</sup> The European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) supports the ETUC through research on labour and OHS, providing data that informs policy and training for workplace safety in the EU.<sup>10</sup> Despite progress, challenges persist in uniformly applying OHS standards across member states.

## 4.2 Effective practices of trade unions in combating SHW

The subsequent section is grounded in desk research, which involves a comprehensive analysis of policy and white papers produced by social partners at the national and European levels. Trade unions across the EU have played a crucial role in developing policies, enforcing collective bargaining agreements, running awareness campaigns, and negotiating stronger workplace protections. These initiatives have led to stricter legal frameworks, improved worker protections, and increased employer accountability in tackling workplace sexual harassment. Below are key initiatives from different countries:

### 4.2.1 Workplace Policies & Training

Germany, Deutsche Bahn AG established an agreement in 2016 to ensure equal treatment and protection against sexual harassment. This agreement includes legal obligations, appeal procedures, sanctions (ADG) and training sessions for managers and employees. It also provides external helplines for employees and empowers female workers by offering self-defence training against physical and sexual violence perpetrated by clients.<sup>11</sup>

### 4.2.2 Joint statements

A crucial aspect of tackling workplace harassment is the establishment of joint statements between trade unions and employers. Such agreements reinforce shared principles and procedures for preventing harassment. A notable example is IUF (International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations) fight to end the epidemic of sexual harassment and gender-based violence in the world of work. They have negotiated agreements with global corporations that cover workers in 54 countries worldwide. Here are some extraordinary examples:

IUF- IndustriAll<sup>12</sup>-Unilever Joint Commitment on preventing sexual harassment contain, among others, the following principles and practical steps<sup>13</sup>:

The procedures agreed to between the IUF, IndustriAll and Unilever are based on the following principles:

- Sexual harassment is a disciplinary offence.
- Cases of sexual harassment will be investigated confidentially and handled in a manner that ensures the confidentiality of the persons involved and within strict timescales.
- In cases of sexual harassment, it is the perpetrator and not the person making the complaint who will, where necessary, be redeployed.
- The Company will train all staff and managers on the policy and their responsibilities under it.
- The Company will monitor cases of sexual harassment to identify where further action might be appropriate.

Trade Union representatives play a key role:

- With management, on advising their members of what constitutes Sexual Harassment in the workplace .
- Working on awareness-raising and training.
- Assisting employees/members to raise complaints and issues either through the Unilever Code process or via the established individual or collective grievance procedures and/or national legislation.

<sup>8</sup> More information at [https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/rights-work/health-and-safety-work/advisory-committee-health-and-safety-work-0\\_en?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/rights-work/health-and-safety-work/advisory-committee-health-and-safety-work-0_en?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

<sup>9</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=celex%3A31989L0391>

<sup>10</sup> More information at <https://www.etui.org/topics/health-safety-working-conditions>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.thirdpartyviolence.com/germany>

<sup>12</sup> IndustriAll Global Union represents 50 million workers in 140 countries in the mining, energy and manufacturing sectors. More at <https://www.industrialunion.org/who-we-are>

<sup>13</sup> More at <https://www.iuf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/1-2016-IUF-IndustriAll-Unilever-Joint-Commitment-on-preventing-sexual-harassment.pdf>

## Joint Commitment on preventing sexual harassment

### *MELIÁ-IUF Joint Commitment on preventing sexual harassment – addressing specific circumstances of protection against SHW*

*Sexual harassment in the workplace can have aggravating circumstances when it occurs in a situation where it is a precondition to hiring, or a condition to keep a job and a factor influencing working conditions and/or career development.*

*The committed parties wish to ensure that all employees are aware of what constitutes sexual harassment, fully understand what is expected of them, know how to report any problem and are able to report alleged abuses in total confidence by contacting Meliá through its own dedicated reporting channel as one of the means of prevention.*

*Principles, procedures and processes to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace*

- *Sexual harassment is the subject of zero tolerance by Meliá and the IUF and its affiliated organisations;*
- *In cases of sexual harassment, when the perpetrator is a Meliá staff member, it is the perpetrator who will, where necessary, be redeployed or subject to any other penalty, including dismissal from the company, in accordance with the legislation of the country, irrespective of their position in the company;*
- *Meliá shall ensure that all of its workers receive information about this policy and about their rights and responsibilities, and may also arrange training on this subject;*
- *False accusations of sexual harassment shall result in the same consequences as mentioned above;*
- *IUF-affiliated trade unions representing Meliá employees shall be able to ensure awareness-raising and training activities for their own members.*

Source: IUF (2019)<sup>14</sup>

### 4.2.3 Collective bargaining agreements addressing SHW

Collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) enhance workplace protections against sexual harassment, which undermines women's rights and equity. CBAs act as legal frameworks and platforms for advocating systemic changes to combat gender-based violence and discrimination. They empower marginalized workers by ensuring their voices are heard in negotiations affecting their safety and well-being. CBAs should include proactive measures addressing women's unique challenges, such as training programs to prevent harassment and foster respect in organisations. Collective action in the labour movement is crucial; united workers can confront oppressive systems more effectively than individuals. Thus, through effective bargaining, CBAs not only protect workers' rights but also support the broader fight against patriarchal structures that perpetuate workplace inequality. Here are few examples on the CBA and specific clauses addressing SHW:

In 2022, the Danish Trade Union Confederation, the Confederation of Danish Employers, and the Minister for Gender Equality signed a national Tripartite Agreement to End Sexual Harassment in the Workplace. This groundbreaking agreement addresses both internal and external sexual harassment with binding measures implemented by law, enhancing protection, prevention, and cultural change in the workplace. It imposes stricter obligations on employers and employees, including higher penalties for violations. The Danish Working Environment Authority's APV (risk assessment) checklists will emphasize sexual harassment in risk assessments. Additionally, the Authority will prepare annual reports on decisions and Guidelines related to harassment and bullying harassment.

<sup>14</sup> More information at: <https://www.iuf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/1-2016-IUF-IndustriAll-Unilever-Joint-Commitment-on-preventing-sexual-harassment.pdf>

French unions have added sexual harassment and violence against women at work to negotiations on gender equality, highlighting employers' duty to prevent harassment and mobbing. Notable practices include a 2013 agreement with SAFRAN on workplace harassment prevention and a 2015 agreement with La Poste focusing on workplace and domestic violence prevention. Additionally, a 2013 public sector agreement outlines obligations to prevent gender-based violence and includes training as part of health and safety measures (ETUC, 2024).

Health care unions in Bulgaria have addressed psychosocial risks, violence, and harassment at work in agreements dating back to 2013, when the first clauses on psychosocial risks and violence and stress at the workplace were included in the health sectoral collective agreement of 2013, including sexual harassment. Despite some progress in implementing policies and procedures to prevent SHW in collective bargaining, unions report that there have been higher levels of violence and harassment. A high-profile national campaign amongst unions and civil society organisations has called for the ratification of the ILO Convention

No. 190, including stronger laws and obligations on employers.

A sectoral CBA between the Bulgarian national health insurance fund, the Union of Civil Servants and the Federation of Health Care Unions, 14 May 2015, states that the employer shall protect the dignity and honour of the employee during the performance of their duties within the labour contract (Art, 12, para, 5). The employer shall undertake all measures provided by law – inclusive of providing legal protection against moral or physical violation against the employee during the time of performing labour duties as per the labour contract (Art, 6).

In Italy, several sectoral agreements have addressed sexual harassment. An agreement with the energy company ENEL under the corporate welfare agreement 'People Care in ENEL' covers wellbeing and health, and addresses sexual harassment and violence at work. In the woodworking sector an agreement on addressing and preventing sexual harassment at work was signed by the three unions in the building sector and employers (ETUC, 2024).

## Ten things that unions can do to tackle harassment and violence especially against women work

Box 4

### Ten things that unions can do to tackle harassment and violence against women work

1. *Prioritise social dialogue between employers and unions, in jointly agreeing policies, procedures and awareness raising amongst managers and workers.*
2. *Ensure that women are in senior negotiating positions, as this has been shown to be critical to getting issues of violence against women and sexual harassment onto bargaining agendas, particularly in male dominated sectors.*
3. *Produce guidance, model workplace policies and train workplace representatives to negotiate agreements and policies to tackle violence and sexual harassment at work and the prevention of domestic violence at work.*
4. *Ensure that safety and health and wellbeing at work initiatives include a strong focus on the causes of and solutions to harassment and violence against women work, by taking into account gender inequalities and discrimination.*
5. *Give information and support to workers experiencing sexual harassment and domestic violence.*
6. *Work in partnership with NGOs and organisations that deal with the issue of violence against women, for example, carrying out campaigns and union surveys to raise awareness about the extent and nature of violence against women at work.*
7. *Encourage male trade union leaders, negotiators and men to publicly raise awareness and champion a zero-tolerance approach to violence against women.*
8. *Highlight the economic and social case for tackling violence at work, including the business arguments that tackling violence against women can help to improve workplace relations, enhance wellbeing at work, retain workers, reduce absence from work, increase motivation and productivity.*
9. *Lobby for the inclusion of measures to address sexual harassment and violence at work, and domestic violence at work in government national actions plans on violence against women.*
10. *Training and awareness raising for union representatives, leaders, and supervisors.*

Source: ETUC (2023)

#### 4.2.4 Campaigns

Awareness campaigns are vital in changing the sexist culture in workplaces. They aim to raise awareness about gender discrimination, foster inclusivity, discourage sexual harassment, and promote respect. By implementing educational initiatives and facilitating open dialogues about sexism and its harmful effects, organizations can build a culture that values equality and supports individuals' rights. Commitment to these campaigns is essential for creating a workplace free from sexual misconduct, empowering and advancing all employees' genders. Below are some examples of such campaigns:

The Austrian trade union, VIDA, has a long-standing strategy and priority to address violence and harassment in the world of work, particularly third-party violence. Actions include a trade union campaign for the ratification of ILO Convention No. 190.0; union education and training on third-party violence, and lobbying for stronger legislation with penalties against perpetrators of assault on staff in public transport (2017) and in the health sector (2020). Sector-specific actions in the railway sector, public transport and in health, social services and the social sector include protection and security of women and LGBTI workers.

The "Get me home safely" campaign in the transport sector recognises that travel to and from work is a significant risk for workers travelling late at night or during unsocial times, such as shift workers in hospitals and urban public transport. The European Transport Workers Federation's (ETF) Congress Resolution in 2017, called on the ETF and affiliated unions to actively support and promote the campaign, putting a responsibility on employers to ensure shift workers are safe travelling home at night. Assaults during the pandemic increased significantly and the ETF has called for more trained staff and stronger enforcement of laws against sexual assault and harassment on public transport, and to explicitly extend employers' duty of care to include safe transport home policies for all workers.

The European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions (EFFAT) has launched campaigns promoting zero tolerance for sexual harassment and violence in the workplace. They provide recommendations for establishing comprehensive workplace policies and emphasize the importance of awareness-raising initiatives.

#### 4.2.5 Guidance

Guidance documents are essential in combating sexual harassment in the workplace. They provide resources to understand harassment, its implications, and prevention measures. Typically, they define inappropriate behaviours, outline legal frameworks, and suggest best practices for fostering safe workplace cultures. Additionally, these documents equip employees and employers with practical strategies to recognise, report, and address harassment effectively. By promoting awareness and dialogue, they help create a respectful workplace prioritising dignity and safety for all employees. Here are some noticeable examples:

The European Transport Workers Federation's Guidance (2020) for transport unions on violence and harassment against women include guidance on drawing up comprehensive workplace policy and a step-by-step guide to carrying out gender-responsive risk assessment. The guidance is aimed at supporting union negotiations on violence and harassment. The guidance, which was also tailored to specific challenges arising from the pandemic, drew on many years of campaigning, advocacy, and negotiations by transport unions nationally, at the European level, and globally.

The European Trade Union Confederation's guidance 'Safe at work safe at home safe online a guide for trade unions to eliminate violence and harassment against women in the world', identified numerous examples of collective bargaining agreements and workplace policies that tackle domestic violence as a workplace concern. These initiatives often involve partnerships with domestic violence organizations to raise awareness, provide training, and support affected workers.



# 5

## Recommendations comparing insights from the six countries

The comparative analysis of recommendations for policymakers, trade unions, employers, and training implications across Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Greece, Hungary, and Slovakia is based solely on the national reports and the recommendations outlined therein, reflecting the country context and identified issues.

### 5.1 Recommendations for Policymakers

To effectively address sexual harassment in the workplace, common recommendations across all six countries emphasise the importance of stronger legislation, institutional coordination, awareness-raising, and robust enforcement mechanisms.

A key shared recommendation is the ratification and implementation of International Labour Organization Convention No. 190. Several countries, including Bulgaria, Hungary, and Croatia, stress aligning national legislation with international standards and ensuring better enforcement of existing legal frameworks. Additionally, harmonising internal regulations, administrative sanctions, and criminal law is suggested to prevent legal loopholes that allow SHW to persist.

Another common recommendation is awareness-raising and transparency in reporting procedures. Countries advocate for fostering a “speak-up” culture by educating employees and employers about their rights and responsibilities. This includes simplified reporting mechanisms, improved legal guidance, and ensuring institutions adequately support victims. Slovakia, for example, recommends nationwide media campaigns to educate the public about SHW and available resources. Czechia suggests enhancing transparency in legal procedures by introducing a simplified legal advisory system, such as brochures or AI-driven chatbots, to guide victims through legal options and ensure they understand the reporting process.

Moreover, institutional oversight and coordination are emphasised at the national level, underscoring the significance of coordination among ministries, independent authorities, and social partners at the national level to enhance data collection and enforcement mechanisms. Greece, in particular, emphasises the necessity of interministerial cooperation to ensure a comprehensive approach to addressing SHW. Croatia suggests establishing a national

body for tripartite coordination to oversee the development and implementation of policies aimed at preventing SHW and to investigate underreporting issues by researching the causes of low reporting rates.

### 5.2 Recommendations for Trade Unions

Trade unions across all six countries should play a crucial role in preventing and addressing sexual harassment in the workplace. A key shared recommendation is the integration of SHW prevention and response measures into collective agreements, ensuring that clear policies are in place at sectoral and company levels. Bulgaria, for example, suggests advocating for sector-wide collective agreements against SHW and including SHW prevention clauses in contracts. Trade unions are encouraged to advocate for national agreements on SHW, aligning with the European framework on harassment and violence at work. They are also expected to collaborate with employers, authorities, and civil society to improve workplace protections and compliance.

Another common priority is raising awareness and providing training. Trade unions should actively educate their representatives and members about SHW, ensuring that workers understand their rights and the procedures for reporting incidents. This includes specialised training for union officials to improve their ability to support victims and awareness campaigns at all levels, from national to enterprise-level unions.

Additionally, trade unions are urged to monitor and enforce employer compliance with SHW regulations. They should be involved in appointing workplace equality coordinators or dignity officers, ensuring that reporting mechanisms are trusted and effective. For example, Slovakia proposes establishing SHW ombudspersons within trade unions and creating action plans for union involvement in SHW prevention. Trade unions in the countries should also lobby governments for stronger legal protections, including the ratification of ILO Convention No. 190 and other international agreements that address workplace violence.

### 5.3 Recommendations for Employers

Employers across these countries are urged to take proactive and comprehensive measures to combat sexual harass-

ment in the workplace. A key common recommendation is the development of clear internal policies and mechanisms to prevent and address SHW. This includes establishing formal reporting systems, training programs, and transparent complaint-handling procedures that ensure employees understand their rights and protections.

A key shared focus should be also fostering trust in the reporting process. Employers must strengthen transparency in complaint procedures, making them accessible and impartial. An emphasis should be placed on the implementation of anonymous reporting options and trained personnel to handle complaints, ensuring that victims feel safe to come forward. For instance, Slovakia recommends developing trauma-informed reporting procedures in collaboration with academia or NGOs, ensuring that victims receive support without re-traumatisation while maintaining confidentiality throughout the process. Another common recommendation for all countries is that employers should guarantee non-retaliation policies, offering legal and psychological support to individuals who experience harassment.

Moreover, employers should embed SHW prevention into corporate culture. This includes training employees and managers, reinforcing zero-tolerance policies, and making ethical workplace behaviour a core company value. Countries like Hungary and Slovakia highlight the need for leadership engagement, urging senior management to support and uphold SHW prevention measures actively.

## 5.4 Training Implications

The upcoming training series is a subsequent part of this project. Here, we summarise common implications for anti-SHW training or educational programmes, as suggested by the national research teams in their reports. The training implications reflect the topics and needs based on the findings.

Training on sexual harassment in the workplace is vital for promoting safe and inclusive work environments. In all six countries, a common recommendation is to integrate SHW training at various levels, ensuring that employees, managers, and HR personnel are sufficiently equipped to recognise, prevent, and tackle harassment.

A key shared implication is making SHW training a continuous, structured process rather than a one-time event. Training should be embedded in organisational culture, focusing on awareness, prevention, and response mechanisms. Special emphasis is placed on equipping managers and HR personnel with skills to handle SHW cases competently, as they play a pivotal role in creating and enforcing workplace safety policies. In addition, workshops and inter-

active training sessions are preferred over passive lectures, as they allow employees to engage, share experiences, and practice intervention techniques.

For example, training in Greece must be inclusive and widely accessible, incorporating both in-person and online learning formats to reach diverse groups, including marginalized populations such as women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and migrants. The training should cover legal rights, reporting mechanisms, and psychological support to create a comprehensive learning experience. Hungary's stress on gender-focused training approaches should be implemented, addressing men's role in preventing SHW, women's solidarity, and power dynamics in workplace harassment. Encouraging male employees to become allies in preventing SHW can significantly impact workplace culture and reduce tolerance for harassment.

Another common theme is the need for national-level initiatives to standardise SHW training. Ministries of Labour and Education, along with employer and worker organisations, should collaborate to develop preventive education programs that integrate SHW awareness into workplace policies and educational curricula. In some countries, the lack of awareness about what constitutes SHW has been identified as a key issue, necessitating a focus on clarifying definitions and reporting procedures in training sessions.

## 5.5 Implications for future research

This project provides a unique and profound insight into the experiences of victimisation and how these experiences relate to trade unions, trust, expectations, and the need for information and regulation. It highlights the significant challenges faced during data collection, particularly noting that partner countries were highly motivated to gather this data, as in some instances, it represented the first recorded information on Sexual Harassment and Violence (SHW) in their respective countries. (e.g. Greece, Hungary).

Future research on sexual harassment in the workplace must focus on long-term, in-depth studies that capture the lived experiences of victims and evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies and interventions. A key, common implication is the need for collaborative research efforts across stakeholders, including academia, trade unions, employers, and applied research organisations, to enhance awareness, improve complaint processes, and establish stronger workplace norms against SHW.

Another shared priority is the importance of representative, large-scale studies. Many current studies face limitations due to small sample sizes or non-representative data, which hinder the ability to develop targeted interventions. Future research should use comprehensive survey methods

that account for industry-specific risks and worker demographics, ensuring that findings can inform evidence-based policies and tailored preventive measures.

Additionally, the Croatian research team recommends exploring the wider societal effects of SHW, which include its psychological, economic, and social repercussions. This effort aims to bolster advocacy initiatives and enhance legislative and institutional responses. Meanwhile, the Bulgarian team advises examining the cultural and institutional obstacles that hinder victims from reporting SHW. Their focus should be on societal attitudes, workplace dynamics, and legal restrictions. Addressing these issues could lead to improved complaint mechanisms and policy reforms.

In conclusion, efforts to tackle sexual harassment in the workplace across Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Greece, Hungary, and Slovakia reveal a set of common recommendations focused on policy reform, trade union engagement, employer accountability, training, and future research. Across all countries, the core strategies emphasise bolstering legislation, raising awareness, enhancing enforcement, and promoting institutional cooperation.

A key shared recommendation is the ratification and implementation of International Labour Organization Convention No. 190, ensuring that national legislation aligns with international standards. Additionally, all countries emphasise the importance of raising awareness and creating transparent reporting mechanisms to foster a “speak-up” culture in which employees feel safe reporting SHW. Countries such as Slovakia and Czechia stress the necessity for nationwide media campaigns and simplified legal guidance tools, such as AI-driven legal advisory systems, to improve transparency in procedures. Furthermore, interministerial cooperation and institutional coordination are recommended to bolster enforcement and accountability, with Greece highlighting the need for cross-ministerial collaboration, while Croatia proposes the establishment of a national body for tripartite coordination to oversee SHW prevention policies.

Trade unions across all six countries are encouraged to incorporate SHW prevention measures into collective agreements, thereby ensuring sector-wide protections and employer accountability. A stronger monitoring role is necessary, including the appointment of workplace equality coordinators or SHW ombudspersons, as suggested in Slovakia. Furthermore, educational initiatives should be prioritised, with Bulgaria advising that trade unions advocate for sector-wide collective agreements against SHW and Hungary highlighting gender-focused education and awareness campaigns.

Employers must take proactive measures to combat sexual harassment in the workplace, including establishing clear

policies, developing confidential reporting mechanisms, and ensuring that retaliation is strictly prohibited. A key shared recommendation is the implementation of formal reporting systems and transparent complaint-handling procedures, with Slovakia suggesting a trauma-informed approach in collaboration with non-governmental organisations or academia to ensure that victims are not re-traumatised. Employers are also urged to embed sexual harassment prevention into workplace culture, with Hungary and Slovakia stressing the need for leadership engagement in enforcing zero-tolerance policies.

Across all countries, continuous and structured SHW training is emphasised rather than one-off initiatives. Training should be integrated into corporate culture, targeting employees, managers, and HR personnel to enhance their capacity to prevent, identify, and respond to SHW. Workshops and interactive sessions are preferred over passive lectures, ensuring practical engagement. Greece underscores the importance of inclusive training, incorporating online and in-person formats to reach marginalised populations, such as LGBTQIA+ individuals, migrants, and persons with disabilities. Hungary recommends gender-focused training approaches, encouraging male employees to become allies in SHW prevention by addressing power dynamics in workplace harassment.

Future studies should conduct long-term research on SHW to understand victim experiences and evaluate policy effectiveness. Collaborative efforts among academia, trade unions, and employers are essential for targeted interventions. Large, representative studies are needed to analyse industry-specific risks and worker demographics, aiding in the development of tailored preventive measures. Croatia recommends examining the societal effects of SHW, such as psychological, economic, and social consequences, in order to enhance advocacy and legislation. Bulgaria suggests exploring cultural and institutional barriers preventing victims from reporting SHW, with a focus on societal attitudes, workplace norms, and legal constraints.

By implementing these collective and country-specific recommendations, stakeholders can create safer workplaces, enhance reporting and response mechanisms, and cultivate a culture of accountability and zero tolerance for SHW.

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## Annexes

Table 9. Structure of the survey sample by country

| Country  | Bulgaria | Croatia | Czechia | Greece | Hungary | Slovakia | Total        |
|--|----------|---------|---------|--------|---------|----------|--------------|
| <b>Data collection period starts from 1, July (2024) to:</b>                                 | 2, Aug   | 18,Jul  | 12, Aug | 9,Sep  | 2, Sep  | 16, Sep  | 06 – 09 2024 |
| <b>Number of respondents</b>   | 838      | 1197    | 1214    | 876    | 760     | 560      | <b>5445</b>  |
| <b>% of respondents out of total</b>   | 15.4%    | 22.0%   | 22.3%   | 16.1%  | 14.0%   | 10.3%    | 100.0%       |
| <b>Gender (% out of total)</b>   |          |         |         |        |         |          |              |
| Female   | 12.4%    | 18.5%   | 16.5%   | 10.4%  | 8.9%    | 7.3%     | 74.1%        |
| Male   | 2.8%     | 3.4%    | 5.2%    | 5.3%   | 4.7%    | 2.7%     | 24.1%        |
| Other  |          | 0.0%    | 0.1%    | 0.2%   | 0.0%    | 0.0%     | 0.4%         |
| Prefer not to answer   | 0.1%     | 0.2%    | 0.5%    | 0.2%   | 0.2%    | 0.2%     | 1.5%         |
| Total  |          |         |         |        |         |          | 100%         |
| <b>Age categories (% out of total)</b>   |          |         |         |        |         |          |              |
| 18 - 29  | 0.6%     | 1.3%    | 1.5%    | 1.4%   | 0.6%    | 1.5%     | 7.0%         |
| 30 - 39  | 2.1%     | 4.9%    | 4.5%    | 2.6%   | 2.5%    | 3.7%     | 20.3%        |
| 40 - 49  | 4.7%     | 8.3%    | 6.8%    | 7.1%   | 4.7%    | 3.2%     | <b>34.7%</b> |
| 50 and over  | 8.0%     | 7.5%    | 9.5%    | 5.0%   | 6.2%    | 1.8%     | <b>38.1%</b> |
| Total  |          |         |         |        |         |          | 100.0%       |
| <b>Education (% out of total)</b>  |          |         |         |        |         |          |              |
| No formal education + primary education  | 0.2%     | 0.1%    |         | 0.7%   | 0.4%    | 0.1%     | 1.6%         |
| Secondary education  | 1.9%     | 5.6%    | 8.4%    | 5.0%   | 5.1%    | 4.6%     | 30.5%        |
| Tertiary education (Bachelor's, Master's, Doctoral)  | 13.2%    | 16.4%   | 14.0%   | 10.4%  | 8.3%    | 5.5%     | <b>67.9%</b> |
| Total  |          |         |         |        |         |          | 100.0%       |
| <b>Marital status (% out of total)</b>   |          |         |         |        |         |          |              |
| Single + never been married/in a civil partnership   | 3.4%     | 4.6%    | 4.1%    | 4.9%   | 2.9%    | 4.0%     | 23.8%        |
| Married/in a civil partnership   | 10.0%    | 15.0%   | 14.9%   | 9.3%   | 9.0%    | 5.1%     | <b>63.3%</b> |
| Divorced + widowed   | 2.0%     | 2.6%    | 3.3%    | 1.8%   | 1.9%    | 1.1%     | 12.8%        |
| Total  |          |         |         |        |         |          | 100%         |
| <b>Trade unions membership (% out of total)</b>  |          |         |         |        |         |          |              |
| Trade union or employee representatives operating at current workplace in time of the survey | 14.3%    | 15.3%   | 20.9%   | 10.1%  | 10.5%   | 6.2%     | <b>77.3%</b> |
| Member of trade union in time of the survey  | 14.3%    | 12.5%   | 10.8%   | 8.3%   | 10.4%   | 3.5%     | <b>59.7%</b> |
| Member of the trade union in time of SHW experience  | 3.8%     | 11.7%   | 6.3%    | 9.7%   | 5.8%    | 1.4%     | <b>38.6%</b> |

Table 10. Overview of the interviews

| Country  | IDI Code | Interview Date | Gender | Age         | Sector  | Trade Union Member |
|----------|----------|----------------|--------|-------------|---|--------------------|
| Bulgaria | IDI1     | 12.8.2024      | Female | 30-40       | Private (IT)  | No                 |
| Bulgaria | IDI2     | 19.8.2024      | Female | 30-40       | Public (Local Government)                           | Yes                |
| Bulgaria | IDI3     | 16.9.2024      | Female | 20-30       | Public (State Institution)                          | No                 |
| Bulgaria | IDI4     | 2.10.2024      | Female | 30-40       | Private (Online Gambling)                           | No                 |
| Czechia  | IDI1     | 29.8.2024      | Female | 30          | Public administration                               | No                 |
| Czechia  | IDI2     | 30.8.2024      | Female | 50          | Average   | No                 |
| Czechia  | IDI3     | 30.8.2024      | Female | 35          | Education   | No                 |
| Czechia  | IDI4     | 10.9.2024      | Female | 20          | Hospitality   | No                 |
| Czechia  | IDI5     | 11.9.2024      | Female | 20          | Hospitality   | No                 |
| Czechia  | IDI6     | 11.9.2024      | Female | 23          | Legal services                                      | No                 |
| Czechia  | IDI7     | 12.9.2024      | Female | 28          | Education and consulting services                   | No                 |
| Czechia  | IDI8     | 24.9.2024      | Female | 21          | Hospitality   | No                 |
| Croatia  | IDI1     | 24.6.2024      | Female | 30-49       | Education   | Yes                |
| Croatia  | IDI2     | 26.8.2024      | Female | Under 30    | Human health and social work                        | No                 |
| Croatia  | IDI3     | 10.9.2024      | Female | 30-49       | Accommodation and food service                      | Yes                |
| Croatia  | IDI4     | 2.9.2024       | Female | 30-49       | Human health and social work                        | Yes                |
| Croatia  | IDI5     | 18.9.2024      | Female | 30-49       | Professional, scientific and technical activities   | No                 |
| Croatia  | IDI6     | 25.9.2024      | Female | 30-49       | Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply | No                 |
| Croatia  | IDI7     | 11.9.2024      | Female | 50 and over | Manufacturing                                       | No                 |
| Croatia  | IDI8     | 12.9.2024      | Female | 50 and over | Human health and social work                        | Yes                |
| Croatia  | IDI9     | 17.10.2024     | Female | 30-49       | Financial and insurance activities                  | No                 |
| Greece   | IDI1     | 12.8.2024      | Female | 30-40       | Private (IT)  | No                 |
| Greece   | IDI2     | 19.8.2024      | Female | 30-40       | Public (Local Government)                           | Yes                |
| Greece   | IDI3     | 16.9.2024      | Female | 20-30       | Public (State Institution)                          | No                 |
| Greece   | IDI4     | 2.10.2024      | Female | 30-40       | Private (Online Gambling)                           | No                 |
| Hungary  | IDI1     | 3.10.2024      | Female | 31-50       | Automotive industry                                 | No                 |
| Hungary  | IDI2     | 4.10.2024      | Female | 31-50       | Mechanical engineering                              | No                 |
| Hungary  | IDI3     | 4.10.2024      | Female | 31-50       | Public transport, passenger transport               | Yes                |
| Hungary  | IDI4     | 10.10.2024     | Female | 31-50       | Waste management                                    | No                 |
| Hungary  | IDI5     | 10.10.2024     | Female | 50          | Media, TV, radio                                    | No                 |
| Hungary  | IDI6     | 12.10.2014     | Male   | 31-50       | Security  | No                 |
| Slovakia | IDI1     | 30.7.2024      | Female | 40          | Administration, Mining                              | No                 |
| Slovakia | IDI2     | 31.7.2024      | Female | 45          | Postal services                                     | No                 |
| Slovakia | IDI3     | 5.8.2024       | Female | Unknown     | Accommodation and food service, Manufacturing       | No                 |
| Slovakia | IDI4     | 14.8.2024      | Female | 26          | Healthcare  | No                 |
| Slovakia | IDI5     | 21.8.2024      | Male   | 21          | Research  | No                 |
| Slovakia | IDI6     | 23.8.2024      | Female | 30s         | Art, Marketing                                      | No                 |

|                 |       |           |        |                          |                               |                            |
|-----------------|-------|-----------|--------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Slovakia</b> | IDI7  | 23.8.2024 | Female | 50s                      | Healthcare/Social services    | No                         |
| <b>Slovakia</b> | IDI8  | 26.8.2024 | Female | 36                       | Media, Information Technology | No                         |
| <b>Slovakia</b> | IDI9  | 27.8.2024 | Female | 30s                      | Education                     | No                         |
| <b>Slovakia</b> | IDI10 | 27.8.2024 | Female | Early 30s                | Information Technology        | No                         |
| <b>Slovakia</b> | IDI11 | 27.8.2024 | Female | 24                       | Event Management, Healthcare  | No                         |
| <b>Slovakia</b> | IDI12 | 5.9.2024  | Female | 25                       | Information Technology        | No                         |
| <b>Slovakia</b> | IDI13 | 12.9.2024 | Female | 29                       | Administration, Public sector | No                         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>    | 44    |           | 40F/4M | More than 50% in 30 - 50 |                               | 16%-members of trade union |

*Table 11. Overview of the focus groups*

In total, seven focus groups were organised by the six countries from September to October 2024, with 67 participants in total: 54 women and 13 men representing diverse types of institutions, state agencies, and responsible offices.

| Country         | Date      | Type of Organisation  | Female | Male |
|-----------------|-----------|---|--------|------|
| <b>Bulgaria</b> | 2.10.2024 | Trade Union at the sectoral level                               | 1      | 0    |
| <b>Bulgaria</b> | 2.10.2024 | HR in a big private corporation                                 | 1      | 0    |
| <b>Bulgaria</b> | 2.10.2024 | Non-governmental organisation                                   | 1      | 0    |
| <b>Bulgaria</b> | 2.10.2024 | Researcher in SHW (with law background)                         | 0      | 1    |
| <b>Bulgaria</b> | 2.10.2024 | Commission for protection against discrimination (state agency) | 1      | 0    |
| <b>Czechia</b>  | 23.9.2024 | Ombudsperson  | 0      | 1    |
| <b>Czechia</b>  | 23.9.2024 | Research institution  | 1      | 0    |
| <b>Czechia</b>  | 23.9.2024 | Law Office  | 1      | 0    |
| <b>Czechia</b>  | 23.9.2024 | Consulting and training company                                 | 1      | 0    |
| <b>Czechia</b>  | 23.9.2024 | Trade union   | 1      | 0    |
| <b>Czechia</b>  | 23.9.2024 | Multinational Private Company                                   | 1      | 0    |
| <b>Czechia</b>  | 23.9.2024 | Consulting and training company                                 | 0      | 1    |
| <b>Czechia</b>  | 23.9.2024 | Non-profit organization   | 1      | 0    |
| <b>Czechia</b>  | 23.9.2024 | Regional Labour Inspectorate                                    | 0      | 1    |
| <b>Greece</b>   | 30.9.2024 | Greek General Confederation of Labour                           | 3      | 2    |
| <b>Greece</b>   | 30.9.2024 | Greek Federation of Bank Employee Unions                        | 1      | 0    |
| <b>Greece</b>   | 30.9.2024 | Hellenic Federation of Insurance Company Employee Associations  | 1      | 0    |
| <b>Greece</b>   | 30.9.2024 | Panhellenic Federation of Workers in Food in Tourism Sector     | 1      | 0    |
| <b>Greece</b>   | 30.9.2024 | Hellenic Federation of Unions of Hospital Institutions          | 2      | 1    |
| <b>Greece</b>   | 30.9.2024 | Hellenic Federation of Spectacles and Audio                     | 1      | 1    |
| <b>Greece</b>   | 30.9.2024 | Journalists' Union of Athens Daily Newspapers                   | 1      | 0    |
| <b>Greece</b>   | 30.9.2024 | Labour Center of Athens   | 1      | 0    |
| <b>Greece</b>   | 30.9.2024 | Labour Center of Thessaloniki                                   | 1      | 0    |
| <b>Greece</b>   | 30.9.2024 | Labour Center of Herakleion                                     | 0      | 1    |
| <b>Greece</b>   | 30.9.2024 | Labour Centre of Rhodes   | 1      | 0    |
| <b>Greece</b>   | 30.9.2024 | Labour Centre of Korinthos                                      | 1      | 0    |

|                           |           |  |           |           |
|---------------------------|-----------|--|-----------|-----------|
| Greece                    | 30.9.2024 | Labour Centre of Fthiotida   | 1         | 0         |
| Greece                    | 30.9.2024 | Labour Centre of Katerini  | 1         | 0         |
| Greece                    | 30.9.2024 | Labour Centre of Veroia  | 0         | 1         |
| Greece                    | 30.9.2024 | Labour Centre of Florina   | 2         | 0         |
| Greece                    | 30.9.2024 | Ministry of Labour and Social Security                                     | 1         | 0         |
| Greece                    | 30.9.2024 | Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family                                     | 2         | 0         |
| Greece                    | 30.9.2024 | Ministry of the Interior   | 2         | 0         |
| Greece                    | 30.9.2024 | Ombudsman  | 1         | 1         |
| Greece                    | 30.9.2024 | Hellenic Labour Inspectorate   | 1         | 0         |
| Greece                    | 30.9.2024 | National Transparency Authority  | 1         | 0         |
| Greece                    | 30.9.2024 | Greek National Commission for Human Rights                                 | 1         | 0         |
| Greece                    | 30.9.2024 | Greek Member of the European network of legal experts in gender equality   | 0         | 1         |
| Croatia                   | 17.9.2024 | Ombudsperson (Specialist Adviser on Legal Issues)                          | 1         | 0         |
| Croatia                   | 17.9.2024 | Employer organisation at national level                                    | 1         | 0         |
| Croatia                   | 17.9.2024 | Other – former member of Faculty SH Committee (public university)          | 1         | 0         |
| Croatia                   | 17.9.2024 | Trade union at national level  | 1         | 0         |
| Croatia                   | 17.9.2024 | Trade union at sectoral level  | 1         | 0         |
| Croatia                   | 17.9.2024 | Non-governmental organisation  | 1         | 0         |
| Croatia                   | 17.9.2024 | Individual expert/researcher in SHW  | 1         | 0         |
| Hungary                   | 25.9.2024 | Trade union  | 1         | 0         |
| Hungary                   | 25.9.2024 | Trade union  | 0         | 1         |
| Hungary                   | 25.9.2024 | Trade union  | 1         | 0         |
| Hungary                   | 25.9.2024 | Trade union  | 1         | 0         |
| Hungary                   | 25.9.2024 | Foundation, attorney-at-law, advocacy                                      | 1         | 0         |
| Hungary                   | 25.9.2024 | FES local office   | 1         | 0         |
| Hungary                   | 25.9.2024 | FES local office   | 1         | 0         |
| Hungary                   | 25.9.2024 | Author of this study, lawyer, trainer, advocacy                            | 1         | 0         |
| Slovakia                  | 12.9.2024 | Labour Inspectorate  | 1         | 0         |
| Slovakia                  | 12.9.2024 | Trade Union at the national level  | 1         | 0         |
| Slovakia                  | 12.9.2024 | Trade Union at the national level  | 1         | 0         |
| Slovakia                  | 12.9.2024 | National anti-discrimination organ   | 1         | 0         |
| Slovakia                  | 12.9.2024 | Non-profit foundation  | 1         | 0         |
| Slovakia                  | 12.9.2024 | Higher education institution   | 1         | 0         |
| Slovakia                  | 12.9.2024 | Initiative supporting good practices and responsible practices of business | 1         | 0         |
| <b>TOTAL PARTICIPANTS</b> | <b>67</b> |  | <b>54</b> | <b>13</b> |



## About the authors

**Barbora Holubová**, PhD, is a senior researcher at the Central European Labour Studies Institute (CELSI) in Bratislava. She coordinates international research projects on care and employment policies, social dialogue, and collective bargaining in the CEE region. Holubová has experience in applied social research on the labour market, social policies, and gender inequalities, using both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods. She also has skills in comparative policy analysis and research design. Holubová earned her PhD in sociological methodology and quantitative analysis from Comenius University, Slovakia. Before CELSI, she worked at the Institute for Labour and Family Research, the European Institute for Gender Equality, and the Slovak Academy of Sciences. Additionally, she engages in projects involving AI tools in the workplace and efforts to combat undeclared work.

**Kristína Gotthardová**, M.A., works as a researcher at CELSI – Central European Labour Studies Institute, mostly dealing with topics related to gender equality, gender-based violence, social dialogue and collective bargaining. She completed her master's degree in Public Policy at the Central European University, with a heavy focus on gender and public policy and violence against women. In the past she completed research on online violence against women in the public sphere in Slovakia and comparative research on aesthetics of feminist protest movements. Previously she worked at the Chamber of Commerce as a policy officer for digitalisation and diversity and inclusion.

## Report on Workplace Sexual Harassment in Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Greece, Hungary and Slovakia

The report examines workplace sexual harassment (SHW) in Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Greece, Hungary, and Slovakia, revealing its widespread nature. Common forms of harassment include verbal abuse, unwanted physical contact, coercion for job promotion, and digital harassment. Despite legal prohibitions in all six countries, enforcement remains inconsistent, with many depending on labour and civil laws that lack clear penalties and protections for victims. The report highlights that only half of the victims take action, mostly informal, often due to mistrust in institutions or fear of retaliation, while many endure in silence. SHW significantly affects victims' mental health and career progression, with many reporting feelings of unsafety, avoiding social interactions, or suffering from depression and anxiety, with 1 in 10 victims contemplating leaving their jobs. The report recommends that policymakers ratify ILO Convention No. 190, strengthen anti-SHW laws, mandate annual training, and enhance data collection. It also suggests that trade unions advocate for SHW protection in collective agreements, establish support units, and run awareness campaigns among their members. Employers are encouraged to enforce zero-tolerance policies, implement confidential reporting, train staff in trauma-informed response procedures, and provide counselling and legal aid to victims.

Further information on this topic can be found here:

➔ [fes.de](https://fes.de)