

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

NATIONAL REPORT ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT THE WORKPLACE SLOVAKIA

Kristína Gotthardová
November 2024



Sexual harassment in the workplace is a widespread phenomenon, often analysed in the context of gender equality and gender-based violence. It is closely linked to the presence of continued gender inequality and sexism in the society, which is also reflected in work relations.



There is low awareness about both national and employer-level SHW policies: almost half of respondents didn't know whether their employer has any policies or regulations addressing SHW in place.



Based on the research findings, trade unions should actively pursue and implement policies related to prevention and sanctioning of SHW. Trade unions should actively push for inclusion of SHW policies in collective agreements.

Table of Contents

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	2
LIST OF FIGURES	2
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
INTRODUCTION	4
METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS	5
1 STATE OF THE ART OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE	6
1.1 CURRENT KNOWLEDGE ABOUT SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE IN THE COUNTRY FROM THE PREVIOUS STUDIES	6
1.2 LAWS, POLICIES AND ACTORS RELATED TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE	7
2 LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE	9
2.1 OCCURRENCE OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS	9
2.2 FORMS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT OBSERVED	9
2.3 VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS	10
2.4 CONSEQUENCES OF EXPOSURE TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT	11
2.5 VICTIMS' RESPONSES TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT	12
2.6 VICTIMS' SATISFACTION WITH THE CASE(S) OUTCOMES AND HER/HIS NEEDS	13
2.7 AWARENESS AND ATTITUDES TO EXISTING PROTECTION AGAINST SHW	13
2.8 ROLE OF THE TRADE UNIONS AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS IN SHW POLICIES	14
2.9 EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CURRENT REGULATIONS AND STEPS FORWARD	15
3 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS	16
3.1 GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS	16
3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS	16
3.3. TRAINING PROVIDED BY THE EMPLOYERS	17
3.4.RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS	17
3.5.RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRADE UNIONS	17
3.6.IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UPCOMING TRAINING	18
3.7.STRUCTURE OF THE SURVEY SAMPLE	19
3.8.LIST OF THE INTERVIEWS	19
3.9.DESCRPTION OF THE FOCUS GROUP(S) PARTICIPANTS	19
REFERENCES	20
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	23
ANNEXES	23

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full text
SHW	Sexual harassment at the workplace
SH	Sexual harassment
IDI	Individual interview
FG	Focus group
SHWS	Sexual harassment in the workplace survey
ILO	International Labour Organization
SNCHR	Slovak national centre for human rights
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality

List of Figures

Figure 1: Forms of sexual harassment experienced in the workplace.....	12
Figure 2: Intensity and frequency of exposure to different forms of SHW.	13
Figure 3: Gender and Position of Perpetrators of Sexual Harassment.	15
Figure 4: Reasons why harassed individuals didn't take any action following SHW.	16
Figure 5: Responses after experiencing SHW.....	17
Figure 6: Workplace policies for preventing, addressing, and sanctioning SHW.	19
Figure 7: Perception of the adequacy of employer's SHW policies.	20
Figure 8: Perception of the desired role of trade unions related to SHW policies.....	21

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research report summarises and analyses the findings of the project »Sexual Harassment in the Workplace« in Slovakia. This project was coordinated by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in cooperation with the Central European Labour Studies Institute. The research findings corroborate and deepen the available knowledge on the presence and characteristics of sexual harassment in the workplace and offer supplementary insights into the presence and potential role of trade unions in preventing, addressing, and sanctioning sexual harassment in the workplace.

The key research findings include:

- There is low awareness about both national and employer-level SHW policies: almost half of respondents didn't know whether their employer has any policies or regulations addressing SHW in place.
- Individuals exposed to SHW prefer to report it informally to co-workers or to managers, if trust is established, or directly confront the perpetrators. A third of those who experienced SHW didn't respond in any way. 57% didn't consider the SHW to be serious enough to report it and further 30% thought that nothing could be done, which points to considerable acceptance of SHW.
- Respondents identified high levels of sexist behaviour and comments in the workplace and their acceptance as part of organisational culture, along with the predominance of informal relations and authority, which makes it difficult to address SHW.
- Formally declared SHW policies are insufficient without proper training and skill development of persons responsible for the SHW reporting system and for handling complaints.
- Both interview and survey respondents agreed that trade unions should actively pursue and implement policies related to prevention and sanctioning of SHW.

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations have been introduced:

- Create, implement and inform about a procedure for reporting SHW. Offer a variety of ways to report, such as an anonymous reporting system and at least one, ideally two people trained to receive and follow up on reports of SHW to ensure impartiality when dealing with the reports and cases when the designated contact person is also the perpetrator of SHW. Persons of confidence can be selected and trained in cooperation with trade union representatives.
- Ensure that following an investigation appropriate and effective sanctions are implemented against the perpetrator and remedies offered to the affected person (beware that transferring the victim into another department or offering them a different position is not a good practice as it indirectly places the consequences on the victim, unless it is their preference and the perpetrator has faced some sanctions).
- Managers and contact persons (be it HR representatives, persons of confidence, ombudsperson, or trade union representatives) should receive specific trauma-informed training aimed at developing managerial and communication skills and skills specific to dealing with conflicts in the workplace as well as how to deal with receiving formal or informal complaints and reports of SHW. The skills should be assessed during yearly anonymous performance surveys by employees.
- Trade unions should actively push for inclusion of SHW policies in collective agreements, monitor and report on employer's compliance with these regulations, establish and train persons of confidence to receive complaints of SHW and offer information and support to workers affected by SHW.

INTRODUCTION

Sexual harassment in the workplace is a widespread phenomenon, often analysed in the context of gender equality and gender-based violence. It is closely linked to the presence of continued gender inequality and sexism in the society, which is also reflected in work relations. The project “Sexual Harassment in the Workplace” aims to deepen the existing knowledge about the incidence and characteristics of sexual harassment in the workplace in the specific context of the Slovak republic. The project is realised by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in cooperation with Central European Labour Studies Institute (CELSI). The focus on sexual harassment in the workplace enables us to consider worker vulnerability factors as well as to gather examples of good and bad practices when it comes to SHW policies on the national or employer levels. The project puts an emphasis on the current and potential roles of trade unions and their representatives in advocacy and policy processes related to the prevention, reporting, investigation and sanctioning of sexual harassment.

The outcomes of the project are tailored recommendations for the relevant stakeholders including trade unions, employers, labour inspectorates and others in order to improve the existing processes and policies or implement new ones. The recommendations are related to awareness raising, prevention, investigation, and sanctioning of SHW. This project further presents training implications detailing different training target groups and specific content of the trainings to be implemented for each. The findings, recommendations and training implications presented in this report acknowledge and draw on existing research and identified best-practices and recommendations (Michelčíková & Ujházyová, 2023; Valkovičová & Kuruc, 2019; Valkovičová et al., 2021; Valkovičová et al., 2023).

For the purposes of this research project, the understanding of sexual harassment in the workplace follows the definition from the Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on combating violence against women and domestic violence, which understands 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.”¹ This research project employs a complex understanding of sexual harassment, with different forms of sexual harassment. The definition and understanding of certain behaviours as sexual harassment in this research is based on the victim’s understanding of the perpetrator’s behaviour as such and is thus not limited to reported SHW incidents or to incidents when the person affected by SHW declared it to be unwanted or inappropriate.

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

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The project's research design consists of three parts – an online survey, in-depth individual interviews (IDI) with victims of workplace sexual harassment and a focus group with stakeholders. The online survey (SHWS) (for the structure of the online survey sample see Annex 3.7.) was aimed at the entire working population over 18 years old, irrespective of the type of working contract the worker has. The online survey has been at least partially completed by 560 people working in Slovakia. The gender distribution was comprised of 393 women and 144 men. The survey focused primarily on the experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace but also attitudes towards sexual harassment and knowledge of existing national and employer level policies aimed at prevention, reporting, investigating and sanctioning of SHW, and lastly, the perception of the potential role of trade unions in practices related to SHW. The online survey was widely distributed through social media, trade union representatives, and employer organizations. Although the SHWS dissemination method led to a non-representative sample, it offers rich insights into individual experiences of SHW and perceptions of available and desired policies.

The second part of the research project consisted of 13 individual in-depth interviews with persons who experienced SHW. The interviews were conducted in-person, online or in writing, for the list of interviews, see Annex 3.8. The respondent recruitment strategy involved the option in the SHWS to leave email address and be contacted by a researcher for an interview, social media campaign via number of popular social media accounts, non-governmental organisations specialising in gender-based violence and other feminist topics, as well as personal networks of the researchers. The interviews were conducted in a trauma-informed way and all individuals were provided a list of contacts and organisations they can reach out to. In order to ensure individual's anonymity, many similar individual experiences were reported on and analysed grouped together to prevent anyone from being able to identify individuals or connect their multiple experiences.

Focus group with seven stakeholders was organised following a preliminary analysis of the survey data and key findings from the interviews to be discussed and to support the formulation of recommendations and training implications. The focus group was attended by the representatives of institutions and authorities relevant to the implementation of national SHW policies, trade unions, higher education institution, and employer best practice initiative.

The major limitation of the research design is the lack of representativeness of the online survey data, which hindered the data analysis especially considering the effects of trade union presence in the workplace. Another related limitation is the lack of unionised interviewees who experienced SHW to be able to draw significant conclusions about the effectiveness of trade union policies, such as the prohibition of SH included in collective agreement. A more detailed focus on workplaces with strong trade union presence is recommended for future research.

1

STATE OF THE ART OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

The topic of sexual harassment in Slovakia has been relatively extensively researched – both as part of violence against women prevalence research (Holubová, 2008) and through a large scale national project Prevention and Elimination of Gender-based Discrimination, realized by the Labour and Family Research Institute, an institute established by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic. The project comprised several in-depth studies on sexual harassment – legal framework and its effectiveness, outcomes, recommendations as well as practical mechanisms and capacity-building activities aimed at providing services and support to women experiencing gender-based violence.² While Slovak legislation places requirements on employers and offers ways to seek justice for victims of SH, many proactive steps to address SHW are done by individual employers, institutions, or NGOs.

1.1 Current knowledge about sexual harassment in the workplace in the country from the previous studies.

The most recent representative study on the prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace was carried out in 2023 by the Labour and Family Research Institute in cooperation with Eurofound in the survey on “Gender-based violence” as one of the partial goals of the European gender equality strategy for years 2020-2025. The research covered multiple forms of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment at the workplace, with a focus on its prevalence and frequency and the existence and effectiveness of reporting mechanisms and frameworks from the perspective of respondents. According to the findings, 50% of all women had experience with sexual harassment at the workplace, and 77% of these, experienced sexual harassment repeatedly (Gerbery, 2023). The most commonly experienced forms of sexual harassment included inappropriate and vulgar staring, reported by over 40% of respondents, followed by sexual jokes, inappropriate comments about physical appearance or personal life, reported by 25,6% of respondents. Unwanted physical contact and closeness, such as close proximity, touching, kissing, or hugging was experienced by 21,4% respondents. Further-

more, the survey revealed that in almost 30% of cases the perpetrator of the sexual harassment was a male colleague or, in nearly 25% of cases, a male the respondent was in regular contact with, such as a client, patient, or a pupil. In around 10% of cases the perpetrator was a male supervisor or a boss. The data clearly show that in most cases, the perpetrator of sexual harassment in the workplace is a male.

Slovak National Centre for Human Rights (SNCHR) realised and published representative research on the prevalence of sexual harassment in the healthcare sector in Slovakia in 2023. This quantitative research focused and considered several aspects of sexual harassment – its prevalence, gendered-aspects of victims and perpetrators, their hierarchical position, as well as socioeconomic characteristics. The survey further concentrated on the sensitivity to experiences of different forms of sexual harassment in the workplace as well as awareness and knowledge of available legal instruments and frameworks. This research employed the division of sexual harassment into three larger categories following the categorisation introduced by Fitzgerald et al. (1988): gender-motivated harassment, unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion. The survey results show that every second person has in the last 10 years experienced gender-motivated harassment and unwanted sexual attention. More than 6% of employees in the healthcare sector have experienced some form of sexual coercion (Ujházyová and Michelčíková, 2023, p. 41). When it comes to the significance of different individual vulnerabilities for experiences of sexual harassment, neither age nor family status has proven significant. However, gender identity and minority sexual orientation have resulted in a higher prevalence of sexual coercion. (Ujházyová and Michelčíková, 2023, p. 27). The survey noted occurrences of harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and coercion during internships, interviews, or probation. These findings highlight significant power dynamics, with harassment most often committed by those in higher positions. Additionally, the survey revealed that younger individuals experience more gender-motivated harassment and are more sensitive to its various forms (Ujházyová and Michelčíková, 2023, p. 42).

Valkovičová (et al., 2021) study examined sexual harassment prevalence in academia. Results showed 5.6% to 51.6% of respondents experienced gender-motivated harassment, 6.5% to 22.2% faced unwanted sexual attention, and 0.3%

² For information on the Prevention and Elimination of Gender-based Discrimination project, see <https://ivpr.gov.sk/perd/>.

to 2.6% encountered sexual coercion. The research highlighted men predominantly as perpetrators: 37.48% were classmates, 24.45% were male professors, and 23.17% were female students. Most victims experienced harassment repeatedly: 86% for gender-motivated harassment, 78% for unwanted attention, and 50% for sexual coercion (Valkovičová et al., 2021, p. 103).

1.2 Laws, policies and actors related to sexual harassment in the workplace

1.2.1 International and EU level

On the international level, one of the key frameworks addressing sexual harassment and other violence in the workplace is the ILO's Convention on Violence and Harassment (C190) (2019a) and Recommendation 206 ratified in 2019, which enshrines the right of everyone to a workplace free from violence and harassment and places the obligation on signatory states to respect, promote, and realise these rights (ILO, 2019b). As of 2024, Slovakia has not signed or ratified the ILO's Convention on Violence and Harassment.

Another key international document is the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence commonly known as "the Istanbul Convention" of the Council of Europe, which is the first legally binding instrument that recognizes sexual harassment as a form of violence against women and in Article 40 puts obligations on signatory parties to take legislative and other measures to criminalize and sanction all forms of "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" (CoE, 2011). Slovak Republic has signed and ratified the Convention on Human Rights and signed the Istanbul Convention in 2011, however in 2019 the parliament declared it will not ratify the Convention.³ The Istanbul Convention has been signed and ratified by the European Union as a whole and has entered into force on October 1st, 2023, thus extending its provisions also on the 6 EU countries, which have not ratified it, including 2023 Slovakia.⁴

On the European Union level, there is the Directive 2004/113/EC, which defines sexual harassment and anchors the principle of equal treatment between men and women in access to goods and services (European Council, 2004). Directive 2006/54/EC defines harassment and sexual harassment as forms of discrimination on the grounds of sex and further implements the principles of equal treatment of men and women in employment and occupation (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2006). The Directive 2010/41/EU extends this principle also to those self-employed

(European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2010).

Most recently, the EU has adopted Directive 2024/1385, also known as the Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence, which includes sexual harassment as one of the forms of violence against women and directly links it to the workplace. The directive stresses the importance of services and comprehensive support for victims of workplace sexual harassment, sets minimum standards, and requires states to provide remedies and ensure penalties for such conduct (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2024).

1.2.2 National level

On the national level, the Slovak legal framework approaches SHW from three different angles. The first takes the approach of the European Union. It recognises sexual harassment as a form of discrimination and offers legal protection through the Act no. 365/2004 on Equal Treatment in Certain Areas and Protection against Discrimination, amending and supplementing certain other laws, more commonly known as the Anti-Discrimination Law (National Council of the Slovak Republic, 2004). The law was adopted in 2004, conditioned by the Slovak Republic's entry into the European Union (Valkovičová et al., 2023b, p. 9).

Before 2008, the Anti-Discrimination Law did not contain specific definitions and provisions on sexual harassment, which were added in 2008, only harassment in general (Valkovičová et al., 2023b, p. 9). Sexual harassment in the Anti-Discrimination Law is defined 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 Anti-Discrimination Law aligns with the Istanbul Convention's definition of sexual harassment. It promotes equal treatment and prohibits discrimination based on sex, age, ethnicity, race, political or religious belief, disability, family status, and sexual orientation. However, its applicability is limited to employment, education, and public institutions, excluding incidents in public space. The law mandates employers to prevent workplace sexual harassment through training and implementing reporting procedures, or by establishing zero-tolerance in their ethical codes. Employees can formally complain if the principle of equal treatment is violated, prompting timely proceedings from the employer. Several researchers have highlighted the challenges stemming from the approach of Slovak lawmakers of including sexual harassment in the Anti-Discrimination Law and thus in civil proceedings, rather than criminal law, where sexual harassment could be covered under instances of crimes of sexual violence or dangerous stalking (Valkovičová and Kuruc, 2019).

The authority responsible for implementing and enforcing the Anti-Discrimination Law is the SNCHR, which has the

3 <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2023/domain/violence/SK>

4 <https://www.reneweuropegroup.eu/news/2023-05-10/istanbul-convention-eus-long-awaited-ratification-will-pressure-remaining-states-to-implement-2>

mandate to offer legal support and services and represent clients in court proceedings as the official equality body of the Slovak Republic. The Centre further monitors compliance with and adherence to anti-discrimination legislation, publishes expert opinions and research activities and raises awareness about discrimination and human rights abuses among the general public. Experts agree that despite satisfactory legal regulation, the number of court proceedings related to discrimination is very low. Experts link this to a general lack of information, consultation, and legal services available to victims of sexual harassment, low sensitivity of workers in the judicial system, and other barriers (Valkovičová & Kuruc, 2019; Valkovičová et al., 2023b).

Other authority with a significant mandate when it comes to SHW policies are labour inspectorates, which have the responsibility to ensure the principles of equal treatment of all employees and equal pay, obligations which stem from the National Action Plan for Elimination and Prevention of Violence against Women.⁵ The rights and responsibilities of Labour Inspectorates are detailed in the Act no. 125/2006 The law on labour inspection and amendment and supplementation of Act No. 82/2005 Coll. on illegal work and illegal employment and on amendment of certain acts (National Council of the Slovak Republic, 2006). Labour inspectorates have the right to carry out an inspection, gain access, inspect documentation and ask for an explanation from the employer upon receiving a complaint. If the Labour Inspectorate finds a violation of employers' obligations, it can require the employer to implement changes, remedy the situation, levy a fine or start official proceedings to impose a ban on their activity.

The major shortcomings of the labour inspectorates' power and their enforcement include a general lack of awareness and knowledge of employees about their rights and the labour inspectorates' mandate. Experts agree that regional labour inspectorates lack human and financial capacities as well as sufficient knowledge base to be able to provide reliable evidence of unequal treatment or harassment at the workplace (Valkovičová et al., 2023b), which is closely connected to the burden of proof, which falls on the person filing a complaint against an employer and is required in order for the inspectorate to be able to proceed with investigation. A methodological handbook is available for labour inspectors with detailed explanations of different forms of discrimination and practical guidelines and recommendations on how to proceed during labour inspections written by Lajčáková (2021).

Sexual harassment in the workplace can further be seen in the context of different forms of unwanted behaviours, such as mobbing, staffing, or bossing, from the perspective of Occupational Health Safety as behaviours, which negatively impact the wellbeing, health, and safety of employees in the workplace. The publication by the Labour and Family Re-

search Institute, Recommendations and Mechanisms Suppressing Unwanted Practices (Kordošová, 2023) offers a detailed overview of national legislation, obligations and recommendations for employers on how to approach workplace health and safety so as to minimise negative effects of workplace violence. This approach extends the often limited understanding of workplace health and safety to include more extensive psychological and mental health and wellbeing of employees, thus making explicit the obligation of employers to ensure workplace free from unwanted behaviours such as sexual harassment, mobbing, bossing or staffing, as these have been directly linked to negative effects on health and safety.

Because employers are obliged to comply with both national and EU-level obligations to ensure equal treatment and to prevent and sanction discrimination, including sexual harassment, many employers implement specific guidelines, frameworks or other provisions in their internal norms, such as ethical codes. Complex research Workplace without sexual harassment – how to get started? carried out by the Labour and Family Research Institute analyses the legislative framework of sexual harassment in the Slovak Republic, findings based on in-depth interviews with sexually harassed individuals and highlights both positive and negative examples of employer practices and introduces recommendations based on victim's recommendations and expert consensus to be implemented at the workplace (Valkovičová et al., 2023a). Best practice examples implemented by signatories of the Charter of Diversity by the Pontis Foundation, which unites employers valuing inclusion and diversity, are also detailed in a methodological guidebook, which can serve as a guideline for all employers wanting to create a safe workplace environment free from sexual harassment (Valkovičová, 2021).

5 <https://www.employment.gov.sk/files/sk/ministerstvo/spolocny-sekretariat-vyborov/vybor-rodovu-rovnost/dokumenty-udalosti/nap-eliminacia-nasilia-zenach.pdf>

2

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

This report section looks at real experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace. It draws on findings from the SHWS, interviews with victims, and focus group discussions, along with available information from earlier studies.

2.1 Occurrence of sexual harassment in the workplace and its characteristics

Out of 422 respondents participating in the survey, 34% directly experienced at least one form of sexual harassment in their current employment. As the respondents could mark more types of sexual harassment, on average, each respondent experienced nearly two forms (1,96) of sexual harassment. Importantly, the SHWS was aimed at the experience of SHW at the current workplace, indicating that the frequency of SHW experience throughout the whole career would be higher.

2.2 Forms of sexual harassment observed

The most commonly reported form of sexual harassment was inappropriate staring or leering that made one feel uncomfortable, followed by the exposure to indecent sexual jokes or offensive remarks and comments about one’s body or private life, followed by unwanted physical contact, such as close proximity, touching body parts, kissing or hugs. For a complete list of SHW forms and the percentage of participants who experienced it, see Figure 1.⁶ These SHWS findings on most commonly encountered forms of SHW align with findings from other representative research (Gerbery, 2023).

⁶ It is important to note that certain severe forms of sexual harassment, which would be categorized as criminal offenses, such as rape, attempted rape, or sexual violence might not have been reflected in the survey results as these were not specifically included in the online survey between different forms of sexual harassment, meaning that some respondents might have reported these under choosing the available options while others have not, which would result in lower rates of sexual harassment reported.

Figure 1: Forms of sexual harassment experienced in the workplace.

Note: A multiple-response question, in % and answered by a total of N=144 respondents.

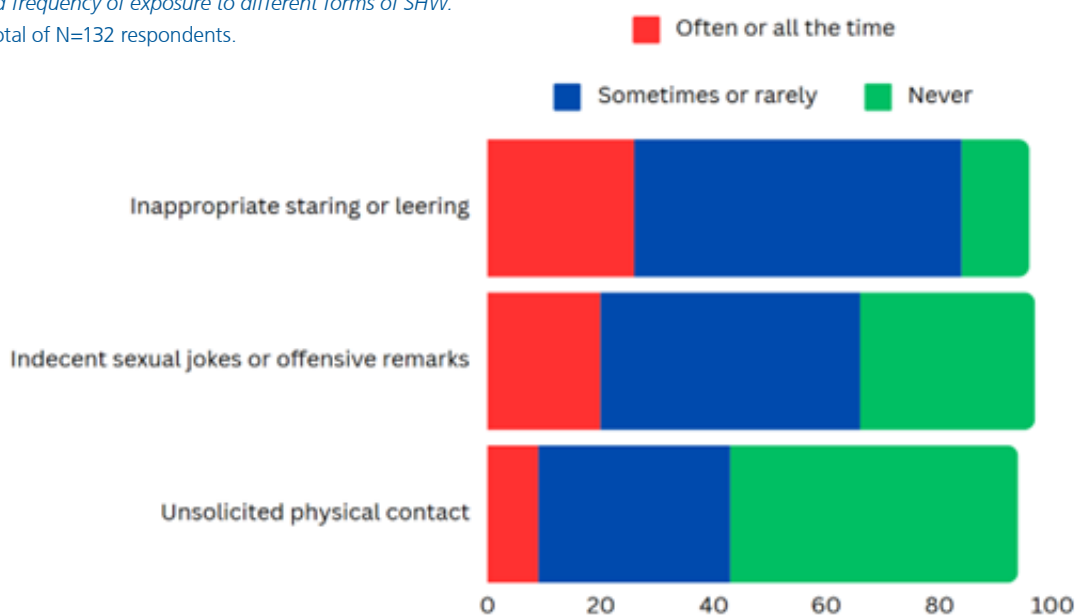


Interview respondents reported on a variety of unwanted behaviours and forms of sexual harassment. Most commonly reported forms included inappropriate staring or leering that made one feel uncomfortable, inappropriate and sexual comments, questions or jokes as well as unwanted comments and questions about physical appearance, clothes, or personal lives, reported by 8 respondents out of 13 interviews. The interviews further underscored the common presence of sexual and inappropriate comments and questions in the workplace and their acceptance, highlighting the increased sensitivity to gender-motivated harassment by younger interview respondents, supporting findings from the research by Ujházyová and Michelčíková (2023). Several

interviewees (7) experienced unwanted physical attention, such as kissing, touching of shoulders, leg or even breasts. One respondent disclosed an incident when she was physically restrained by the perpetrator and unable to move.

Refer to Figure 2 for a clear breakdown of the most frequent and intense forms of sexual harassment: inappropriate staring, indecent jokes, and unsolicited physical contact. These three forms occur most often and have the highest intensity according to the respondents' experiences. Of the 13 interview participants, 8 reported facing multiple and repeated forms of harassment at the same or different workplaces.

Figure 2: Intensity and frequency of exposure to different forms of SHW.
Note: Answered by total of N=132 respondents.



2.3 Victims and perpetrators

In most instances, victims of SHW were women. A notable 31% of female respondents reported experiencing SHW, compared to 14% of male respondents. Nearly half of all victims were between the ages of 30 and 39, while a quarter fell within the 40 to 49 age range. Regarding educational attainment, around 65% of victims had completed tertiary education, and 35% had finished secondary education.

42% of individuals who experienced sexual harassment reported having a vulnerable characteristic, such as financial difficulties, disability, or belonging to a sexual or national minority (60 out of 144). In contrast, only 30% of those who did not experience SHW noted such vulnerabilities, indicating that these factors can increase the risk of experiencing SHW.

When SHW victims were asked about what might have motivated their harassment, 46% cited the victim's gender or sex, while nearly a quarter mentioned age. This suggests that both gender and age significantly influence the likelihood of SHW. Interview data further supports this, with many respondents recounting experiences of sexual harassment early in their careers or during part-time jobs. These individuals often felt vulnerable and concerned about job security, un-

ware of options to report the harassment. Some even stated that they only recognized their experiences as sexual harassment years later.

One interviewee highlighted how perpetrators exploit victims' financial struggles and lack of support systems to continue their harassment and violence (ID103). Furthermore, 64% of those who experienced SHW held non-managerial positions, while about one third had medium managerial responsibilities. This illustrates that power dynamics are crucial in SHW cases, as most victims lack power in their work environments.

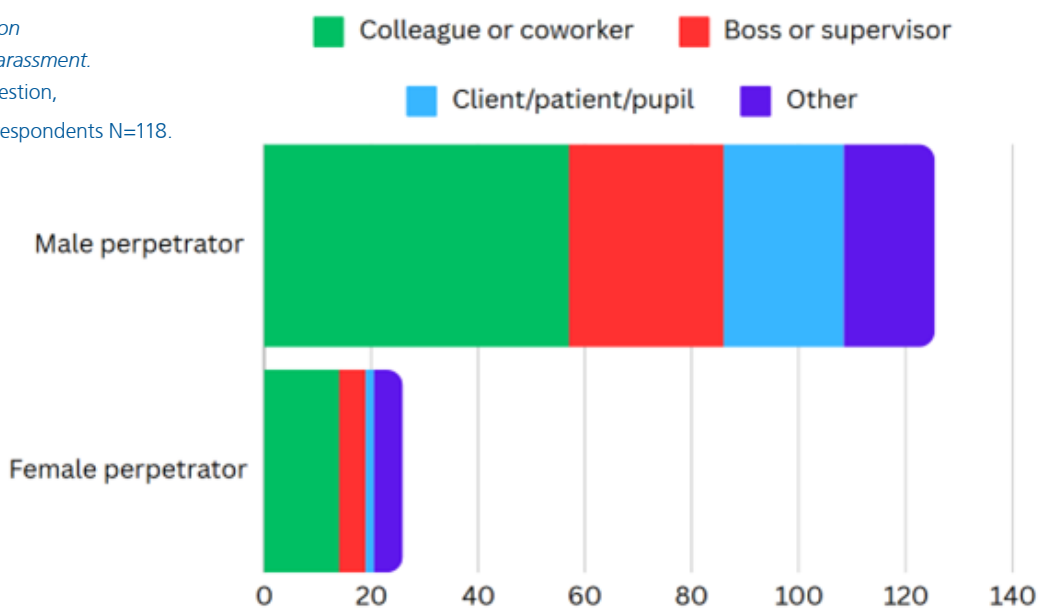
When it comes to the type of workplace where SHW occurs, almost 57% of victims work in the private sector, 40% in the public sector and around 3% in a non-profit organisation. For comparison, in the survey sample, the distribution of respondents was 65% working in the private sector, 30% in the public sector and less than 5% in the non-profit sector.

Sexual harassment victims can also be men. Research indicates that men often face sexual harassment from other men, particularly when societal gender roles are challenged (EIGE, 2020, p. 26). In the SHWS, 12 men reported being sexually harassed by other men, while 8 men experienced harassment

from women. One interviewee shared an incident during a teambuilding event where both men and women faced sexual harassment through inappropriate comments, jokes, and questions about personal lives, as well as unwanted physical contact. He expressed shock at being publicly questioned about not drinking alcohol and his relationship status. This incident affected the entire team and raised questions about why some tolerated such behaviour while others left. It also sparked discussions on how to address these situations properly and prevent them in the future (IDI05). This case illustrates that sexual harassment does not always stem from sexual motives, but can be used to discipline those who somehow violate stereotypical gender roles.

Figure 3: Gender and Position of Perpetrators of Sexual Harassment.

Note: Multiple response question, reported in %, number of respondents N=118.



One of the key findings from the interviews and FG discussion was that frequently (in 9 out of 13 interviews), the perpetrator is known to be a harasser. Some respondents found out after confiding in their colleagues, for example, those who were tasked with onboarding processes or when talking with employees whom they replaced, or by looking at reviews. In other instances, when one respondent reported the SHW to management, she was told, “He does that to everyone; it’s nothing special. You have to deal with it on your own. If you don’t want to work under his supervision, you will need to work alone” (IDI08). Such behaviour exemplifies a bad practice where the management tolerates and doesn’t address SHW and the victims tend to leave the workplace or department, only for other or new employees to suffer the harassment. One extreme case of SHW mentioned during a focus group was a workplace where multiple women left after writing several open letters because of SHW perpetrated by their manager, who was only let go as a result of organisational change after many years of employment.

2.4 Consequences of exposure to sexual harassment

The common effects of exposure to SHW included discomfort, difficulty concentrating, and challenges in completing tasks, reported by 68% and 31% of the 120 respondents,

When it comes to the identity of perpetrators, out of 208 responses, in 77,88% (162 responses) of cases was the perpetrator male and in 15,86% of cases female. See Figure 3 for the composition of male and female perpetrators according to their position and level of authority. SHW can be perpetrated by a person of any gender against a person(s) of any genders. During the interviews, one female respondent mentioned her female supervisor commonly engages in unwanted physical touch towards younger female colleagues, such as by slapping their buttocks (IDI04).

respectively. Additionally, 21% of respondents considered leaving their job due to SHW, while nearly 10% were afraid of going to work and reported experiencing depression or other adverse psychological effects.

Three interview respondents left their jobs as a direct consequence of repeated sexual harassment, which was perpetrated by their supervisor, who was at the same time the managing director of the company. Thus, the respondents felt they had no possibility to resolve the situation or confide in anyone.

One interview respondent developed severe gastrointestinal issues in response to stress (IDI01) and another revealed that multiple and continuous exposure to sexual harassment, both inside and outside the workplace, has led her to gain 60 kilograms of extra weight to become overweight purposefully and thus less attractive to potential aggressors and perpetrators of harassment and violence. She admitted her understanding that this is an unhealthy coping mechanism as well as her motivation to seek professional help from a psychologist to deal with her past trauma. The victim also contemplated that while her weight gain makes her feel physically stronger and thus safer, especially in the company of men, her self-confidence has suffered and she “doesn’t feel good in her body” (IDI03). Such psychological and health-related

problems also present financial strain on individuals who must often undergo therapy and other treatments to deal with the consequences of SHW, possibly further worsening their financial situation. Sexual harassment at work can have long-term effects on the harassed person’s private lives – one respondent links her decision not to have children to many disappointing interactions with men during her professional career (IDI01).

2.5 Victims’ responses to sexual harassment

Survey results indicate that a relatively high proportion of victims, almost a third, didn’t take any action following SHW. For their reasoning behind the decision not to take any action, see Figure 4. More than half of the respondents said they didn’t consider the incident to be serious enough, which can be connected to high levels of normalisation and acceptance of SHW and a lack of awareness about its different forms.

Figure 4: Reasons why harassed individuals didn’t take any action following SHW.
Note: Multiple response question, displayed in %, number of respondents N=37.

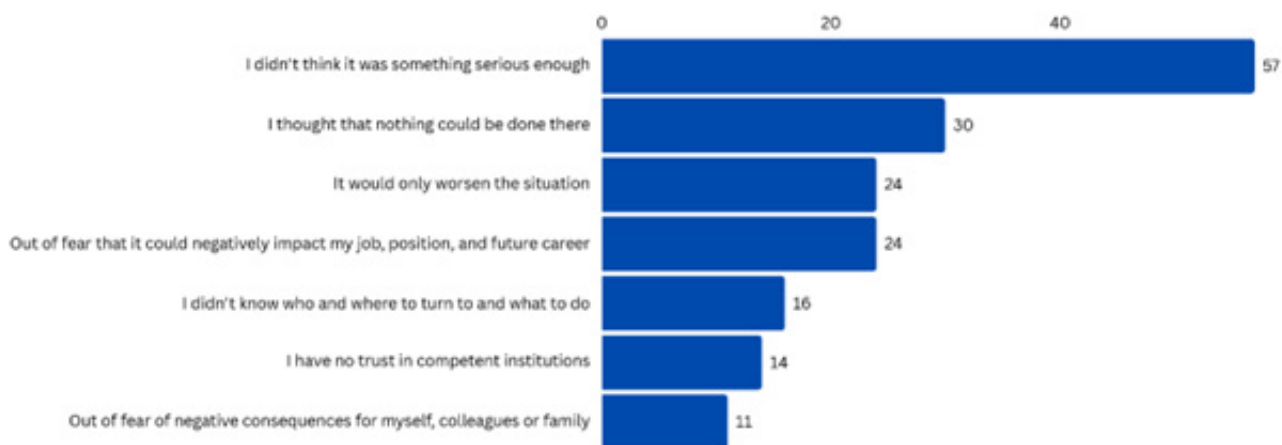


Figure 5 displays the responses of sexually harassed individuals, from the most commonly reported to those not used at all. Individuals who experienced SHW most commonly responded informally by telling a co-worker or another close person, such as a friend or family member. One-third con-

fronted the perpetrator directly or reported SHW to their superior. Only very few respondents utilised formal methods of responding, such as complaints, reporting to trade unions, the labour inspectorate, or other institutions..

Figure 5: Responses after experiencing SHW.
Note: Multiple response question, displayed in %, number of respondents N=114.



This corresponds to the findings from the interviews, which discuss the informal character of many workplaces combined with general presence and acceptance of sexist and inappropriate behaviours and discourse. Such behaviours were described as being part of “organisational culture”. The link between organisational culture and presence and/or (un)ac-

ceptance of sexual harassment has been explored in more detail in Valkovičová (at al., 2023a). The presence and acceptance of sexist behaviour and comments can be linked to two other phenomena: lack of formal procedures and rules for reporting harassment as well as a lack of knowledge on who to turn to or the unwillingness to report sexual harassment.

Furthermore, two interview respondents specifically mentioned work atmosphere where after witnessing sexual harassment by male bosses, other male colleagues were encouraged and started to engage in similar behaviour and comments, which shows that witnessing SHW can lead to more harassment as well as supports the findings of Ujházyová and Michelčíková (2023) that SHW often takes place in front of witnesses.

Several survey and interview respondents disclosed that they left their jobs as a direct result of sexual harassment as they did not see any possible remedy or change. Out of the 13 in-depth interviews, 7 respondents shared or reported SHW soon after the incident to their supervisor or manager with the hopes of stopping similar behaviour, with mixed results, to be discussed in the next section. Some reported the incident to their supervisors or managers because they were unaware of any official procedures or regulations, but they had good personal relationship with the manager and so they trusted that they would deal with the situation. Out of those 6 who didn't report SHW, 3 interviewees work in healthcare and social services and reported no existing regulations or procedures, in one case respondent's colleagues intervened on her behalf directly with the perpetrator.

In the three remaining instances, the perpetrator was a direct manager of the victim (2 cases) or a senior colleague with informal authority. All three interviewees shared that the perpetrators were popular at work and possessed a high degree of formal and/or informal authority and thus they felt like nobody would take them seriously or would be willing to take any action.

2.6 Victims' satisfaction with the case(s) outcomes and her/his needs

Based on findings from the SHWS and in-depth interviews, it can be concluded that most harassed individuals who decide to report the incident, prefer to report it informally to colleagues or their managers or supervisors, usually when they feel that they can confide in them or they are aware that the inappropriate behaviour is sexual harassment and it is something they have the right to be protected from and to a remedy.

In the SHWS results from 65 responses, no action was taken in 28 cases after reporting sexual harassment. In 12 cases, the harassment stopped, 7 were investigated, and only 3 led to disciplinary actions. Two anti-sexual harassment trainings were organized, 3 perpetrators left, one was fired, and 2 were moved to different departments. This indicates that having reporting procedures does not ensure that appropriate actions follow, with 43% of reports not investigated. Unaddressed complaints may discourage victims from reporting in the future and also affect witnesses' willingness to report. The results further show that sanctions are implemented very rarely, which supports the findings that SHW is often accepted and normalised.

Interviews revealed that those exposed to SHW faced belittlement of their harassment claims by colleagues and management. They reported inadequate remedies and unprofessional handling, such as disclosing victims' identity (IDI06). While some victims felt relieved when harassment ceased after intervention, many desired formal recognition and public denouncement of harassment, along with disciplinary actions. Numerous respondents expressed disappointment at their colleagues' lack of support or intervention, wishing they had acted on behalf of the victims. They noted that male intervention could have significantly impacted interactions with perpetrators. When witnesses did intervene, it was viewed positively by the harassed individuals.

An interviewee stated that HR investigated her claim without consulting her or informing her of the result. She and another colleague, who also lodged complaints against the same manager, were advised to remain silent to »protect him, as he is still with the company« (IDI08). Whereas large global corporations are more likely to have official procedures or anonymous helplines, one interview respondent expressed doubts about their effectiveness, noting that companies often prefer diplomatic conflict resolution. When filing a complaint, concrete evidence is essential; otherwise, it may be dismissed. Another respondent expressed disappointment with ineffective workplace helplines and reported that her harassment claims went unaddressed, eroding trust in institutional mechanisms (IDI03).

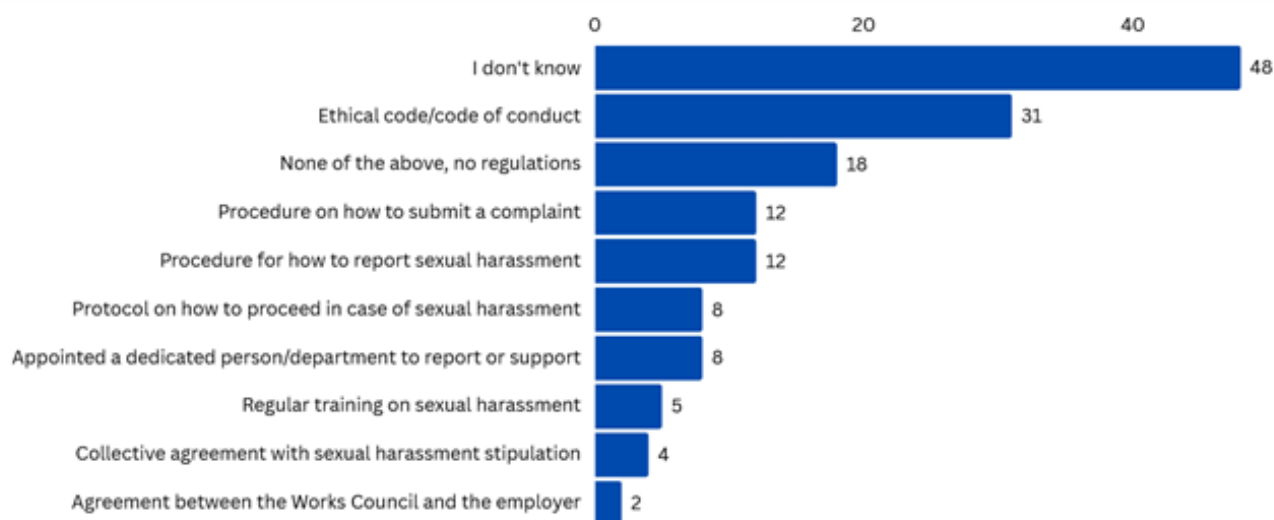
Respondents identified several good practices following complaints. One described a formal complaint of after stalking by a male manager. Although he received a warning for bad managerial conduct, the victim was offered a better position and was able to work from home during the investigation, avoiding contact with him. The investigation included interviews with both parties and a survey for the team, considering members might hesitate to report due to fear. Another respondent praised informal networking groups for women at the company, providing a safe space to share experiences of sexual harassment and other issues (IDI08). Another interviewee reported that her empathetic manager promised to address the situation, leading to the perpetrator's departure, though she was unaware of the details (IDI01).

2.7 Awareness and attitudes to existing protection against SHW

The survey and interview findings show widespread dissatisfaction with attitudes towards sexual harassment, the acceptance of gender inequality, and discrimination. There are also significant concerns about the available protection mechanisms against sexual harassment. The lack of awareness regarding the existing mechanisms or policies, or their non-existence, is underscored by the SHWS results, where almost half of the respondents claimed that they do not know whether their current employer has any regulations in place to prevent, address, and penalise workplace sexual harassment. See Figure 6 for details of reported workplace policies. This shows that workplace policies either do not address sexual harassment or people are not adequately informed about them.

Figure 6: Workplace policies for preventing, addressing, and sanctioning SHW.

Note: Multiple response question, displayed in %, total number of respondents N=308.



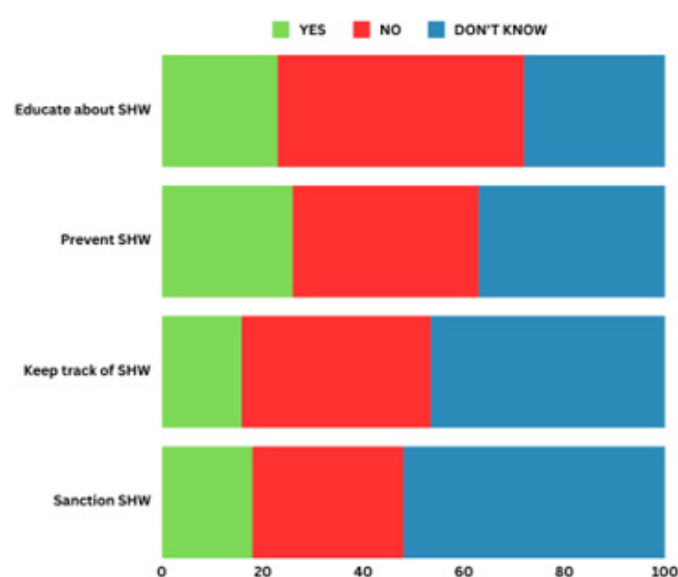
Two interviews revealed a gap in sexual harassment protection in healthcare and social services. A hospital nurse and a therapist from a residential facility reported a lack of procedures to protect them from sexual harassment by clients and no guidelines for addressing inappropriate behaviours, such as unsolicited touching or comments. The strain of caring for patients with limited staff prevents them from voicing their concerns due to fear of ridicule and dismissal of their complaints (IDI04, IDI07). Furthermore, a social services interviewee noted staff are instructed to permit clients' sexual behaviours, like masturbation, to prevent aggression, but their presence during these actions often makes staff uncomfortable (IDI07).

Nearly half of respondents feel their employer is insufficiently educating them about sexual harassment (SH) in the workplace, and about a third believe there's inadequate sanctioning for it. Overall, around 20% of respondents express satisfaction with employer actions concerning education, prevention, monitoring, and sanctioning of SH (N=372). Among those who experienced SHW, 72% feel their employer falls short in education, 67% are dissatisfied with prevention, and 63% are dissatisfied with sanctioning (N=114).

To highlight positive examples, one interview respondent mentioned her current employer's mechanism, which includes a full-time ombudsperson to whom all sorts of complaints or reports can be addressed. This respondent further mentioned that, for the very first time, zero tolerance of sexual harassment was discussed in a meeting with the company general manager, who encouraged her to come forward to him or the ombudsperson and assured her that all accusations would be taken seriously and investigated (IDI06).

Figure 7: Perception of the adequacy of employer's SHW policies.

Note: Proportions of respondents, displayed in %, each option answered by total N=372 respondents.



Similarly, general awareness of regulations to prevent, address, and penalise sexual harassment in the workplace on the national level is very low – 56% of respondents don't know any and 9% of respondents claim there are no regulations.

2.8 Role of trade unions and other institutions in SHW policies

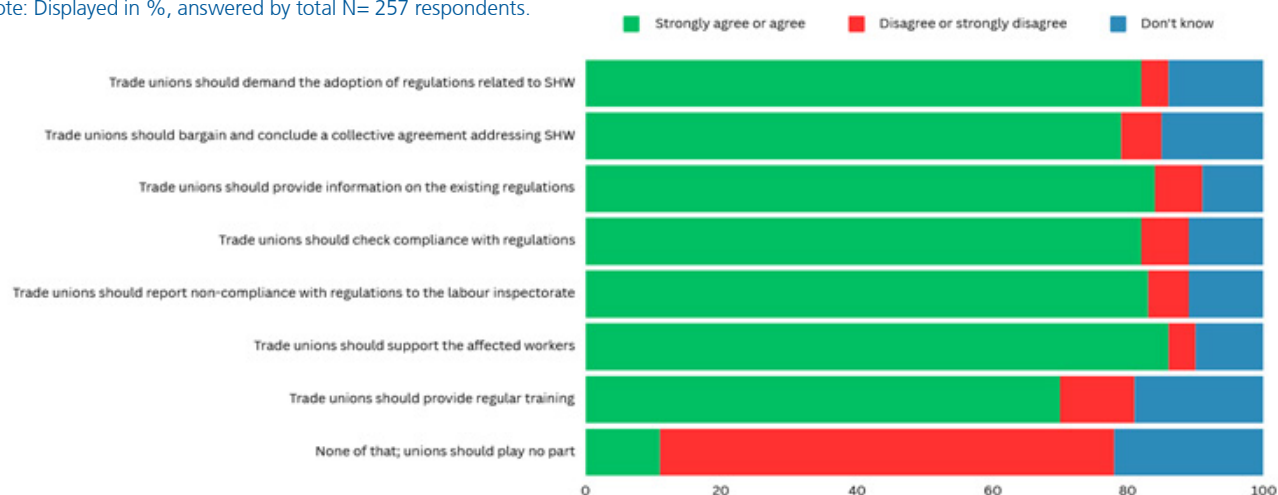
The Slovak legal system permits three approaches to SHW: treating it as gender discrimination under anti-discrimination law, filing a complaint with the Labour Inspectorate, or viewing it as a breach of occupational health and safety. Trade unions are vital in demanding SHW policies and can address SHW in collective agreements or appoint a trained representative to support and investigate SHW incidents.

The role of trade unions in SHW policies in Slovakia offers great potential. Based on the SHWS data, 64% of workplaces have a trade union or employee representative operating at the workplace, 27% of workplaces don't, and for 8% of workplaces, it is unknown. Furthermore, 4% of workplaces have a collective agreement which contains direct stipulation addressing SHW. At the same time, only 36% of respondents are currently trade union members, and 13% were trade union members at the time they experienced SHW, but only one person reported SHW incident to trade unions. This shows that currently, trade unions do not fulfil their potential role when it comes to providing support, information, and advocacy in SHW policies. However, based on the presence of trade unions at more than half of workplaces, they could play a major role. The limitations of the survey data do not indicate that the presence of trade unions in the workplaces has a significant impact on the presence of SHW or victims' responses.

The perception of the potential role of trade unions in designing, implementing, and safeguarding policies related to SHW is very favourable based on both the SHWS results and interviews, where a significant majority of respondents agree or strongly agree with trade unions' role in advocating for and demanding the adoption of SHW regulations, including regulations in collective agreements, informing about these, checking compliance, reporting non-compliance, offering support to affected workers, and providing regular training in matters related to SHW. Refer to Figure 8 for detailed information about perception of trade unions' future role. Following the findings from the focus group, national trade union representatives are aware of the unfulfilled potential and favour increasing the involvement and active role of trade unions in matters related to SHW.

Figure 8: Perception of the desired role of trade unions related to SHW policies.

Note: Displayed in %, answered by total N= 257 respondents.



2.9 Effectiveness of the current regulations and steps forward

The research highlights several weaknesses in current SHW regulations and procedures. Experts agree that while SHW's integration into Slovak law is generally satisfactory, problems persist due to a lack of awareness and understanding of these regulations among potential victims and insufficient resources for relevant institutions. Victims often mistakenly believe that the police handle SHW cases and that they are included under criminal law, unaware of the specific roles of the SNCHR and labour inspectors. Additionally, many employees do not know they can formally complain about discrimination directly to their employer, who is required to respond, regardless of whether formal reporting mechanisms exist at the workplace. Labour inspectors frequently advise people to first file formal complaints with the employer when seeking guidance.

Furthermore, there is a generally low reporting rate, especially to relevant institutions and authorities external to the employer (1 case reported to trade union from the survey and the interviews), but also at the level of the employer, where

only 2.61% of cases were officially reported via a complaint and 19.13% were reported to superiors or management. Based on the information from the in-depth interviews and open survey questions, this can be attributed to a lack of regulations or procedures or a lack of knowledge about them, as well as the often declaratory character of regulations or values of zero tolerance, but with a lack of implementation and follow-up at some workplaces.

Sexist and toxic behaviours are prevalent in many workplaces and are often accepted, leading to a lack of trust between employees and management. Many managers lack the knowledge and skills necessary to handle sexual harassment complaints properly, and those affected by SHW often have negative experiences when reporting issues to managers or HR. This research highlights that while unwanted sexual or sexist comments are recognised as sexual harassment, they are frequently dismissed as not serious enough to address, even by the victims themselves. This emphasises the urgent need to confront sexism in the workplace. For a deeper analysis of the link between sexism and sexual harassment, refer to EIGE's publication "Sexism at Work: How Can We Stop It?" (2020).

3

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This research confirmed that policies and activities aimed at the prevention, investigation, and sanctioning of SHW must be carried out repeatedly and at multiple levels in connection with wider awareness-raising and educational activities about gender equality, gender-based violence, or discrimination. The following recommendations are based on the SHWS results, in-depth interviews with SHW survivors, and stakeholder focus group discussion.

3.1 General Recommendations

- Develop and implement extensive campaigns across traditional media (like television and radio), social media, and public spaces, focusing on defining sexual harassment, its various forms, and informing individuals about the institutions and resources available for support and further information.⁷

3.2 Recommendations for employers

- Create, implement and inform about a procedure for reporting SHW. Offer a variety of ways to report, such as anonymous reporting system and at least one or ideally two people trained to receive and follow up on reports of SHW, to ensure impartiality when dealing with the reports and cases when the designated contact person is also the perpetrator of SHW. Persons of confidence can be selected and trained in cooperation with trade union representatives.
- Employers should also offer the option to consult informally about the SHW incident with a trained employee to inform the harassed person of possible steps they can take, the related procedures, possible sanctions, and the option to submit an informal complaint.
- Develop the reporting procedure and investigation in cooperation with qualified personnel (experts from aca-

demia or NGOs) in a trauma-informed manner, to minimise additional re-traumatisation of the person who experienced SHW and to ensure the anonymity of the person reporting SHW throughout the whole process.⁸

- Clearly outline the investigation process and steps for employees. This should involve separate conversations with the harassed individual, the perpetrator, witnesses, the wider team, and managers. It's especially important to address the situation carefully if the perpetrator holds a position of power, as this can lead to incomplete or false statements due to fear.
- After consulting the harassed individual and obtaining their consent, the investigation and follow-up procedures should be conducted. This approach helps to prevent negative consequences for the victim, and the entire process should be transparently documented.
- Provide the harassed individual with access to legal and psychological support at no charge as well as ensure access to information about possible steps to take and all available remedies.
- Ensure that all employees have knowledge of SHW policies and regulations before they experience SHW, and that the information is easily available to all employees (in onboarding documents, on intranet pages, or physical notice board).
- Practice a zero tolerance policy towards sexual harassment and include the prohibition of SHW and other unethical behaviours in the ethical code, as well as in other internal and external documents reflecting company values, such as the work regulations. Publicly declare and inform about them.
- Leadership and management should openly support SHW company policy, take an active part in upholding SHW policies, and serve as role models. Increase and promote support for SHW prevention and intervention

7 Campaigns can be organised in cooperation with national level stakeholders such as Ministries and between regions, cities or municipalities, transport companies, and NGOs. For inspiration see recent campaign in Czech Republic: <https://praha.eu/w/nemlcte-a-zasahne-te-vyzyva-cestujici-kampan-proti-sexualnimu-obtezovani-ve-verejne-doprave-1>

8 For detailed guidelines and checklist see Short handbook for employers: How to approach sexual harassment in the workplace? (Valkovičová, 2021).

from the leadership and executive management to ensure that proclaimed values and lived practices are aligned.

- When SHW is reported, organise a training or a workshop addressing SHW.
- Following an investigation, ensure that appropriate and effective sanctions are implemented against the perpetrator, and remedies are offered to the harassed person. (Beware that transferring the victim into another department or offering them a different position is not a good practice, as it indirectly places the consequences on the victim, unless it is their preference and the perpetrator has faced some sanctions.)
- Ensure that sanctions and consequences are applied universally, based on the severity of offences and irrespective of the perpetrator's position or personal relationships. Sanctions can include verbal reprimand, formal apology to the affected person, formal reprimand, and termination of work contract.⁹

3.3 Training provided by the employers

- Organise regular, in-person trainings for all employees, adjusted for the local cultural context. The training should include information on what sexual harassment is, what kinds of behaviours constitute it, the common consequences for victims, and information about the reporting procedure, investigation, and possible sanctions for the perpetrators.
- The trainings should include case reports for educational purposes or mediated experiences of people who have experienced SHW and train bystander intervention strategies to reflect common experiences of SHW in settings with witnesses.
- Managers and contact persons (be it HR representatives, persons of confidence, ombudsperson, or trade union representatives) should receive specific trauma-informed training aimed at developing managerial and communication skills and skills specific to dealing with conflicts in the workplace as well as how to deal with receiving formal or informal complaints and reports of SHW. The skills should be assessed during yearly anonymous performance surveys by employees.

3.4 Recommendations for stakeholders

- Labour inspectorates and NCHR should engage in more widespread awareness-raising activities about their role and mandate related to SHW policies (information about

services they provide, rights of employees, and how to report SHW to employers or institutions).

- Labour inspectorates should highlight their role and powers when it comes to investigating discrimination, as well as raise awareness about employees' rights to file a complaint to their employer and their right to be protected from any negative consequences stemming from filing a formal complaint. They should provide detailed information about the necessary contents of a formal complaint to labour inspectorates, along with instructions on how to fulfil the burden of proof on their websites..
- Labour inspectorates and SNCHR in cooperation should prepare a short online and printed handbook for employees about their rights and measures they can take in case of discrimination or specifically SHW to be easily accessible online and physically at workplaces or public spaces and include contacts for informal and free consultations with experts and psychological support.
- Protection from sexual harassment should be extended to freelancers and self-employed persons to protect them from SHW perpetrated by clients or receivers of their services.¹⁰ This could be done, for example, by extending the mandate of SNCHR to receive complaints, investigate them and take disciplinary actions or by legislative changes, such as by including and prosecuting sexual harassment under criminal law, in order to widen the applicability beyond labour relations or educational facilities.
- Improve access to protection from SHW for caring professionals, such as carers, social workers and nurses from SHW perpetrated by patients and clients. Develop methodological guidelines to ensure the safety of both the service providers and patients/clients.

3.5 Recommendations for trade unions

- Design an action and implementation plan supporting a more active involvement of trade union representatives in SHW policies, such as by establishing a person of confidence among trade union representatives at every workplace or for each trade union on a sectoral level or an ombudsperson on the national level.
- Develop mechanisms and procedures that would fulfil the mandate of the person of confidence/ombudsperson – consultation services about victim's rights and possible steps to take, services of accompaniment when

⁹ For more details, see Valkovičová et al. 2023a, p. 47.

¹⁰ Protection from discrimination has been extended to self-employed persons, provided there is a stable relationship to the client by the Court of Justice of the European Union ruling, but this doesn't cover self-employed persons offering services to multiple different clients. Read more at: <https://www.europeanlawblog.eu/pub/eu-law-protection-from-discrimination-extends-to-self-employed-workers-confirmed-the-cjeu-in-a-landmark-judgment-with-lgbt-rights-in-the-background/release/1>

submitting a complaint and during the investigation, support with submitting the complaint – gathering of proof or witness statements, etc.

- Design and implement a training for the persons of confidence/ombudsperson on how to handle formal or informal complaints of SHW on behalf of or in cooperation with affected employees.
- Design a communication campaign (online and in the workplaces) to ensure that all employees know who is the person of confidence, what their role is and how to reach them – ensure easy access to this information for all employees about the procedure, contact information, and possible steps to take.
- Trade unions should actively push for the inclusion of prohibition of SHW and implementation of regulations by employer in collective agreements, such as for example, the following clause:
- “Employers commit to implement measures to prevent the emergence of mobbing, bossing and sexual harassment in the workplace. For this purpose, they define in internal regulations issued after the prior consent of the relevant trade union body or in company collective agreements the behaviours which characterise mobbing, bossing and sexual harassment and lay down the procedures for dealing with such cases, including cases of suspected use.”¹¹
- Trade unions and their representatives should monitor the employer’s compliance with existing regulations and report any non-compliance to labour inspectorates – designated trade union members can collect information and complaints from witnesses and include questions about SHW in workplace questionnaires or surveys.
- Trade unions should organise regular trainings or workshops for employees on SHW (in addition to trainings of persons of confidence/ombudsperson), its definition and forms and available regulations and mechanisms.
- Trade unions should provide information and advice on existing measures and regulations on the level of employer and national level and offer assistance and support with reporting SHW to employers or other institutions and authorities (Labour Inspectorate, SNCHR).

3.6 Implications for the upcoming training

In light of the research findings, we want to highlight:

- In-person training is essential to address the normalization of sexist and toxic workplace behaviours, as well as forms of sexual harassment, within the broader framework of gender stereotypes and discrimination. This training should also cover bystander intervention tailored to the local geographic and cultural context.
- Training for individuals responsible for handling SHW complaints—such as management, HR personnel, trusted individuals, helpline staff, and trade union ombudspersons—on managing both formal and informal complaints. This includes guidance on conducting investigations, implementing short-term and long-term support for victims, addressing damages, and taking appropriate action against perpetrators.
- Offer supplementary strengthening training on self-defence in the context of stating boundaries, being able to stand up for oneself, expressing objection to what is being said or done, but only as additional training next to SHW training for all, in order to avoid shifting of the responsibility to prevent SHW on potential victims.
- Ensure active support and engagement with SHW policies from the employer management and leadership and encourage implementing policies and zero-tolerance values into internal and external company policies.

11 Taken from a collective agreement, available at: https://www.employment.gov.sk/files/slovensky/praca-zamestnanost/zamestnanec-zamestnavatel/kolektivne-pracovnopravne-vztahy/kolektivne-zmluvy/zoznam-kolektivnych-zmluv-vyssieho-stupna/kolektivna-zmluva-2014_2016-banky.pdf

3.7 Structure of the survey sample

Category	Number (N)	Percentage
Respondents	560	100%
Gender		
Female	393	71,45%
Male	144	25,7%
Other	2	0,36%
Age categories		
Under 30	83	14,87%
31 - 50	377	67,56%
51 and over	98	17,56%
Trade unions membership		
Member of trade union	171	35,92%
Member of the trade union in time of SHW experience	16	12,80%

3.8 List of the interviews

IDI code	Date of the IDI	Description of the communication partners			
		Gender (F/M/Other)	Age (if not known, assess)	Sector	Member of trade union (Y/N)
IDI1	30. 7. 2024	F	40	Administration, Mining	N
IDI2	31. 7. 2024	F	45	Postal services	N
IDI3	5. 8. 2024	F		Accommodation and food service, Manufacturing	N
IDI4	14. 8. 2024	F	26	Healthcare	N
IDI5	21. 8. 2024	M	21	Research	N
IDI6	23. 8. 2024	F	30s	Art, Marketing	N
IDI7	23. 8. 2024	F	50s	Healthcare/Social services	N
IDI8	26. 8. 2024	F	36	Media, Information Technology	N
IDI9	27. 8. 2024	F	30s	Education	N
IDI10	27. 8. 2024	F	Early 30s	Information Technology	N
ID11	27. 8. 2024	F	24	Event Management, Healthcare	N
ID12	5. 9. 2024	F	25	Information Technology	N
ID13	12. 9. 2024	F	29	Administration, Public sector	N

3.9 Description of the focus group(s) participants

Date of the FG: 12.9.2024

N.	The type of organisation that the participant represents	Female	Male
1	Labour Inspectorate	x	
2	Trade Union at the national level	x	
3	Trade Union at the national level	x	
4	National anti-discrimination organ	x	
5	Non-profit foundation	x	
6	Higher education institution	x	
7	Initiative supporting good practices and responsible practices of business	x	

REFERENCES

- European Council. (2004).** Council Directive 2004/113/EC of 13 December 2004 implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services. Official Journal of the European Union, L373, pp. 37-43. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32004L0113>
- The European Institute for Gender Equality. (2020).** Sexism at work: How can we stop it? European Institute for Gender Equality Handbook for the EU institutions and agencies. https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/mh0220657enn_002_0.pdf
- European Parliament & Council of the European Union. (2024).** Directive (EU) 2024/1385 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 May 2024 on combating violence against women and domestic violence. Official Journal of the European Union, L138, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32024L1385>
- European Parliament & Council of the European Union. (2010).** Directive 2010/41/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2010 on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity and repealing Council Directive 86/613/EEC. Official Journal of the European Union, L180, pp. 1-6. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32010L0041>
- European Parliament & Council of the European Union. (2006).** Directive 2006/54/EC of the European 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 (recast). Official Journal of the European Union, L204, pp. 23-36. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32006L0054>
- Fitzgerald, L.F., Shullman, S.L., Bailey, N., Richards, M., Swecker, J., Gold, Y., Ormerod, M., and Weitzman, L. (1988).** The incidence and dimensions of sexual harassment in academia and the workplace. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 32(2), 152–175. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0001-8791\(88\)90012-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0001-8791(88)90012-7)
- Gerbery, D. (2023).** Výskum rodovo podmieneného násilia na ženách 2023: základné zistenia. Inštitút pre výskum práce a rodiny. https://ivpr.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Vyskum_rodovo_podm_nasilia_2023_zakl_zistenia_akt_feb_2024.pdf
- Holubová, B. (2008).** Representative Research on Prevalence and Experience of Women with Violence against Women (VaW) in Slovakia. Inštitút pre výskum práce a rodiny. [https://www.ceit.sk/IVPR/images/IVPR/vyskum/2008/Holubova/Reprezentativny_vyskum_vyskytu_a_skusenosti_zien_s_nasilim_pachanom_na_zenach_\(2008\).pdf](https://www.ceit.sk/IVPR/images/IVPR/vyskum/2008/Holubova/Reprezentativny_vyskum_vyskytu_a_skusenosti_zien_s_nasilim_pachanom_na_zenach_(2008).pdf)
- ILO Convention on Violence and Harassment (C190):** International Labour Organization. (2019a). Convention concerning the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work (No. C190). https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:12100::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C190
- ILO Recommendation on Violence and Harassment (R206):** International Labour Organization. (2019b). Recommendation concerning the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work (No. R206). https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:12100::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:R206
- Istanbul Convention: Council of Europe. (2011).** Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/rms/0900001680008482e>

European Council. (2004). Council Directive 2004/113/EC of 13 December 2004 implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services. Official Journal of the European Union, L373, pp. 37-43. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32004L0113>

The European Institute for Gender Equality. (2020).

Sexism at work:

How can we stop it? European Institute for Gender Equality Handbook for the EU institutions and agencies. https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/mh0220657enn_002_0.pdf

European Parliament & Council of the European Union. (2024). Directive (EU) 2024/1385 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 May 2024 on combating violence against women and domestic violence. Official Journal of the European Union, L138, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32024L1385>

European Parliament & Council of the European Union. (2010). Directive 2010/41/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2010 on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity and repealing Council Directive 86/613/EEC. Official Journal of the European Union, L180, pp. 1-6. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32010L0041>

European Parliament & Council of the European Union. (2006). Directive 2006/54/EC of the European 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 (recast). Official Journal of the European Union, L204, pp. 23-36. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32006L0054>

Fitzgerald, L.F., Shullman, S.L., Bailey, N., Richards, M., Swecker, J., Gold, Y., Ormerod, M., and Weitzman, L. (1988). The incidence and dimensions of sexual harassment in academia and the workplace. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 32(2), 152–175. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0001-8791\(88\)90012-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0001-8791(88)90012-7)

Gerbery, D. (2023). Výskum rodovo podmieneného násilia na ženách 2023: základné zistenia. Inštitút pre výskum práce a rodiny. https://ivpr.gov.sk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Vyskum_rodovo_podm_nasilia_2023_zakl_zistenia_akt_feb_2024.pdf

Holubová, B. (2008). Representative Research on Prevalence and Experience of Women with Violence against Women (VaW) in Slovakia. Inštitút pre výskum práce a rodiny. [https://www.ceit.sk/IVPR/images/IVPR/vyskum/2008/Holubova/Reprezentativny_vyskum_vyskytu_a_skusenosti_zien_s_nasilim_pachanom_na_zenach_\(2008\).pdf](https://www.ceit.sk/IVPR/images/IVPR/vyskum/2008/Holubova/Reprezentativny_vyskum_vyskytu_a_skusenosti_zien_s_nasilim_pachanom_na_zenach_(2008).pdf)

ILO Convention on Violence and Harassment (C190): International Labour Organization. (2019a). Convention concerning the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work (No. C190). https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:12100::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C190

ILO Recommendation on Violence and Harassment (R206): International Labour Organization. (2019b). Recommendation concerning the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work (No. R206). https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:12100::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:R206

Istanbul Convention: Council of Europe. (2011). Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/rms/090000168008482e>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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 a Chamber of Commerce as a policy officer for digitalisation and diversity and inclusion.

IMPRINT

**Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung e.V.,
zastúpenie v Slovenskej republike**
Maróthyho 6 | 811 06 Bratislava

<https://slowakei.fes.de>

Responsible for the publication:
JUDr. et Mgr. Zuzana Homer, PhD., LL.M.
Design: pressitech

Orders: slovakia@fes.de

The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

Commercial use of media published by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is not permitted without the written consent of the FES.

ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is the oldest political foundation in Germany. It is named after Friedrich Ebert, the first democratically elected President of Germany. As a foundation with close ties to a political party, we focus our work on the values of social democracy, freedom, justice and solidarity. As a non-profit institution, we operate on an independent basis and have a stake in promoting pluralistic social dialogue on the political challenges of the present.

For more information on our activities as well as current projects, visit our website

<https://slowakei.fes.de>

ISBN
978-80-8264-016-1
(online)

NATIONAL REPORT ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT THE WORKPLACE SLOVAKIA

The focus on sexual harassment in the workplace enables us to consider worker vulnerability factors as well as to gather examples of good and bad practices when it comes to SHW policies on the national or employer levels. The project puts an emphasis on the current and potential roles of trade unions and their representatives in advocacy and policy processes related to the prevention, reporting, investigation and sanctioning of sexual harassment.

The outcomes of the project are tailored recommendations for the relevant stakeholders including trade unions, employers, labour inspectorates and others in order to improve the existing processes and policies or implement new ones.

Further information on the topic can be found here:
<http://slowakei.fes.de>