

LABOUR AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT THE WORKPLACE

National Report Bulgaria

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Sexual harassment in the workplace affects 18.9% of surveyed employees, primarily women (80%) and leads to major personal and professional costs.



Low awareness and limited employer action (35% proactive) discourage victims from reporting.



Law enforcement, improvement of workplace protocols, union-led initiatives, and multi-level collaboration to promote supportive workplace cultures that prevent harassment.

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In cooperation with the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Bulgaria



КНСБ

The Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria - CITUB is a voluntary association of independent, autonomous and equal federations, industry and branch trade unions. The confederation is the largest non-governmental organization in Bulgaria, with more than 280,000 trade union members. CITUB is a continuation of the 140-year history of the trade union movement in Bulgaria and is a member of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC).

Content

	Executive summary	2
	Introduction	3
1.	METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS	4
2.	STATE OF THE ART OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE	5
2.1	Current knowledge about sexual harassment in the workplace in the country from the previous studies.....	5
2.2	Laws, policies and actors related to sexual harassment in the workplace.....	6
3.	LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE	8
3.1	Occurrence of sexual harassment in the workplace and its characteristics.....	8
3.2	Forms of sexual harassment observed.....	9
3.3	Victims and perpetrators.....	9
3.4	Consequences of exposure to sexual harassment.....	10
3.5	Victims' responses to sexual harassment.....	11
3.6	Victims' satisfaction with the case(s) outcomes and her/his needs.....	13
3.7	Awareness and attitudes to existing protection against SHW.....	13
3.8	Role of the trade unions and other institutions in SHW policies.....	13
3.9	Effectiveness of the current regulations and steps forward.....	14
4.	POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS	16
4.1	Recommendations for stakeholders.....	16
4.2	Recommendations for the trade unions.....	16
4.3	Recommendations for future research (academia, trade unions, applied research organisations).....	17
	References.....	18
	Annexes.....	19
	List of figures.....	20
	List of abbreviations.....	20

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report analyses the specific characteristics of sexual harassment at the workplace (SHW) in Bulgaria based on desk research and primary data collection through quantitative (online survey with 839 respondents) and qualitative methods (4 in-depth interviews with victims of SHW; expert focus group). With 18.9% of the survey respondents reporting a SHW experience, the results show that SHW is an occurring issue especially for women (accounting for more than 80% of the reported victims), but strongly suggest that the lack of awareness towards the topic make it hard for people to recognise its manifestations.

There is a high rate of dissatisfaction with how SHW cases are handled, with many reports resulting in no action taken by employers. This lack of response exacerbates distrust towards institutions and leads to high turnover costs for organisations and even higher personal and professional cost for SHW victims. Awareness of protections against SHW is notably low, with only 35% of respondents perceiving their employers as proactive in prevention, education, and sanctioning. This unawareness hinders preventative actions, as many workers only seek information on rights and reporting mechanisms after experiencing or witnessing harassment.

SHW is often downplayed and not perceived as a serious issue which in reverse discourages victims to report cases and seek protection. Younger women in the beginning of their career path are particularly vulnerable towards SHW. The data suggest that victims of SHW are often in a lower position in the workplace hierarchy than the perpetrators. Non-union members report more often cases of SHW than union members. Respondents look to unions to advocate for robust anti-SHW policies, awareness campaigns, and workplace equality coordinators, indicating a need for stronger union presence, especially in less unionized industries.

The report's findings indicate that current legislation against SHW, though in place, suffers from inconsistent enforcement and gaps in harmonization across workplace policies and legal frameworks. Survey and interview respondents call for a clearer and more comprehensive definition of SHW, as well as zero-tolerance policies underpinned by company-level protocols and training that foster a collective work culture against SHW. To address these needs, policy recommendations focus on engaging national authorities, employers, trade unions, and academia in a multi-level strategy, from legislative reforms to company-specific support systems.

INTRODUCTION

The present report is part of the transnational research project 'Sexual harassment and violence in the workplace' conducted in Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary and Slovakia. The research is coordinated by the Central European Labour Studies Institute (CELSI) in Slovakia and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

Sexual harassment at work means 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 (Directive 2024/1385).

In the case of unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature, the person feels insulted, humiliated and/or intimidated. It includes situations in which a person is

forced to engage in a sexual activity as a condition for maintaining their employment, as well as situations that create a hostile, intimidating or humiliating work environment for the victim. Sexual harassment may involve one or more incidents, and the acts constituting harassment may be physical, verbal or non-verbal. Although sexual harassment disproportionately affects women, anyone can be a victim of sexual harassment, LGBT people and young men are also at higher risk.

Overall project objectives

- Obtain information, verifying knowledge and experience on sexual harassment at work (including worker vulnerability factors)
- Provide a basis for trade unions for social dialogue, advocacy and awareness-raising activities and programmes to protect workers from violence and harassment in the labour world

1

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Two methodological approaches have been used to cover the SHW phenomenon from different perspectives and in its different directions and aspects of occurrence.

● **Quantitative part of the research.** Based on the design and the methodological approach with questionnaires the opinion of two target groups was captured - 1). Employed persons members of a trade union 2). Employed persons who are not members of a trade union. The research was conducted online on a random basis and the link was distributed through the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Bulgaria's (CITUB) structures at enterprise level and through the social media channels and networks of various NGOs.

● **Qualitative part of the research.** In order to obtain a more nuanced picture of the perspective of people who have experienced SHW at work, in-depth semi-structured interviews were integrated into the project methodology. The recruitment of respondents was conducted through different channels: we contacted the people who left a contact email when completing the online questionnaire and spread information about it in various social media groups whose content and topic are connected to the research topic: groups for information and mutual help in cases of gender-based violence, feminist debate groups, NGO communities, groups for HR-professionals, and groups for information about unfair employers. Despite the wide range of topics covered and the large number of people we reached by disseminating information about the research to the aforementioned groups, extremely few respondents accepted the invitation for an interview. Thus, in contrast to the number of persons who completed the SHWS, in-depth interviews were conducted with only four female respondents. Although the number of interviews does not allow us to speak of a representative sample, the profiles of the interviewees are diverse enough to consider different cases in terms of private/public sector, job title and position in the hierarchy, age, etc.: two of the respondents were working in the public administration at the time they experienced SHW and the other two - in the private sector. Their age at that time ranged from early 20s to mid-30s. In terms of their job position, one of them was a trainee, one worked as an expert in an administrative structure, one was a team leader in a large company, and the last one held a high management position in the company. All have a university degree. Following methodological approaches applied in other studies on SHW in which survivors were interviewed (Lundgren & Wieslander, 2024), we did not identify the cases of individual respondents nor the quotes from their interviews with individual codes as a further guarantee

of their anonymity. This approach makes it more difficult to trace the relationship between different parts of each victim's story and, therefore, their potential identification.

The different results we obtained with the two methodological approaches are indicative of the specific nature of the topic: SHW is an extremely difficult social problem to recognise and name, and the self-identification as a victim is coupled with feelings of guilt, shame, self-doubt and fear of lack of community and social support. This specificity explains the fact that although we encountered support and encouragement to conduct the research, we did not reach the expected number of respondents through the mentioned dissemination channels. The interviews we carried out were made possible through long-term contacts based on established trust. In this case, for qualitative research methodology to be successful, it takes time to build a relationship ensuring safety and security between the interviewee and the interviewer and, on the other hand, there is a need for a shared understanding of the problem. As previously mentioned, naming sexual harassment in the workplace is a painful process and referring to it directly when asking for an interview can have a traumatic and discouraging effect on people who experienced it.

In the last stage of the research, we organised a focus group composed of experts in different fields and from different organisations. In this way, we were able to present the point of view of NGO employees, people with law background, human resources specialists, trade union leaders and officers at the Commission for Protection against Discrimination. In the focus group, we discussed the current legislation, measures to combat SHW at different levels, examples of good practices, as well as practical problems in the implementation of current measures for protection against SHW.

Underlying hypotheses:

- Young women with lower income, lower level of education, work in the private sector and work with third parties are an especially targeted profile by sexual harassment perpetrators.
- Respondents are not aware of mechanisms to protect against sexual harassment.
- Respondents seek information on the mechanisms for protection in case of violation of their rights or a suspected violation.
- Respondents do not report violence, mainly due to fear of negative consequences and mistrust.
- Trade union members are more likely to report harassment and demand protection of their rights.

2

STATE OF THE ART OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

2.1 CURRENT KNOWLEDGE ABOUT SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE IN THE COUNTRY FROM THE PREVIOUS STUDIES.

The desk research on SHW shows that the topic is rarely on the research agenda. Projects with a research objective for the most part address violence at work in the broader context of violence against women, which also includes the topic of SHW.

The main sources of information on the state of art of SHW in the country, on recognising the forms of harassment, signs and consequences of SHW, are study reports from NGOs and experts from trade unions working on human rights.

The European initiative CombaT sExuAl harassment in the WORKplace – TEAMWORK carried out by the Center for Sustainable Communities Development (CSCD, 2020a) with the support of experts from IS-TURET at CITUB gives grounds to argue that the phenomenon of SHW in Bulgaria is a fact, but it is not understood by society as a form of violence at work. The data indicate a lack of awareness of the effects of SHW. SHW is not perceived as a current issue, it is not commented on, there is no awareness raising to make it easier to recognise the signs and the relevant institutional bodies to protect and support victims.

The lack of information on national statistics on the issue makes it difficult to assess the real dimensions of the problem. The research data show that one in four of the respondents has experienced a situation of SHW. And one in three has witnessed a colleague being sexually harassed at work. The most common forms of harassment are: sexual propositions or jokes that make them feel offended, discussions about a colleague's sex life, sexual comments about someone's appearance, body parts or clothing, unwanted sexual innuendos/ propositions and inappropriate touching, hugging or kissing. Along with this, the main barrier to reporting incidents of violence is the victim's fear. Most victims are afraid to expose the abuser because they are concerned about losing their jobs or being punished and/or subjected to further harassment.

The research data give grounds to argue that the consequences of SHW do not only affect the victims themselves, but also society as a whole, because the negative effects occur in different directions and their impact is not only immediate, but also long-lasting. For about 1/5 of the persons studied, being harassed leads to leaving the job, others work under stress and pressure, and still have distressing memories going back to the experience.

As part of the TEAMWORK project, a series of trainings for HR professionals and employers have been conducted in order for them to act to prevent and deal with sexual harassment, as well as to introduce measures to protect victims, regardless of their gender and position. The aim is to advance employers' interests in addressing these issues by implementing their own company policies as part of their corporate social responsibility. And combining, mutually influencing and complementing public and company policies to eliminate all forms of violence, including sexual harassment, is a promising strategy and a real opportunity to achieve synergistic effects in this policy area.

A similar project is implemented by Be Aware (2020), which offers a systematic approach by providing different tools and methods to improve the professional development of HR managers, trainers, teachers, mentors, workers' representatives. The outcomes of the project improve their ability to deal more effectively with the issue of sexual harassment at work, and to fulfil their role to protect workers' rights. This research is important for providing information on protection measures, support and prevention awareness.

During the COVID pandemic the victims of domestic violence against women increased dramatically, but alongside this there was a deficit of official statistics on the prevalence of violence against women. In response to the growing need for statistical data on the prevalence of violence against women, the National Statistical Institute has conducted a survey on gender-based violence (EU-GBV, 2021), joining a project initiated by the European Commission to conduct a survey and provide such information. The survey cov-

ered 5,800 women aged 18 to 74 and covered topics as domestic violence, violence by an intimate partner and sexual harassment at work. Regarding the latter, the survey shows that 12.2% of women aged 18-74 have experienced SHW by a man with whom they have a professional relationship. The relative share of women who have experienced sexual harassment by male colleagues is 5.3% and by a man in a managerial position - 1.4%. The highest share of women who experienced SHW by other men (10.7%) included cases where the exact professional relationship with the perpetrator was not specified.

2.2 LAWS, POLICIES AND ACTORS RELATED TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

Bulgaria has not yet ratified important international legislation acts such as ILO Convention 190, despite the insistence of trade unions, the Bulgarian Economic and Social Council, and civil society organisations. However, the EU definition of sexual harassment is fully recognised in the Protection against Discrimination Act (PADA, 2006). The Protection against Discrimination Act explicitly recognises sexual harassment as a form of discrimination and prohibits it. According to Bulgarian law, sexual harassment is defined as unwanted, inappropriate, humiliating or offensive sexual conduct in the workplace with the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile or degrading work environment for the harassed person. It is also defined as treating a person less favourably because that person rejects or accepts acts of sexual harassment. All types of actions, verbal and non-verbal as well as physical, can meet the criteria. Not only the physical but also the psychological integrity of individuals must be protected under these rules. According to the legislation, physical contact against the employee's will or repeated sexual actions, sexual jokes, pressure for sexual favours or insulting propositions may be considered sexual harassment.

Under PADA, an employer who has received a complaint from a worker or an employee who considers themselves subjected to harassment, including SHW, is obliged to immediately hold an inquiry, take measures to stop the harassment, as well as to hold disciplinarily liable another worker or an employee if they committed the harassment. In the event of failure to fulfil this obligation, the employer bears liability under PADA for acts of discrimination committed at work by their worker or employee.

The victim also has the right to lodge a complaint with the Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPAD), the body responsible for preventing discrimination, protecting against discrimination and ensuring equality of opportunity. The CPAD is a spe-

cialised government body that monitors the implementation of and compliance with the PADA or other laws regulating equality of treatment. The victim may also submit a report to the local directorate of the Labour Inspectorate, accompanied by detailed information on the case.

The PADA gives trade union organisations the right to initiate proceedings before the CPAD by submitting a written notice. The trade union organisation and its units, as well as non-profit legal entities pursuing activities for public benefit, may bring an action on behalf of the persons whose rights have been violated at their request. The law grants trade unions the right to make proposals to the CPAD in order to prevent or stop violations under this law or other laws regulating equality of treatment, as well as to prevent and remedy their harmful effects and take coercive administrative measures.

Examples of good practices

Nationally representative trade unions and employers' organisations¹ are working to prepare and conclude a national agreement between the social partners on joint action to implement the European Framework Agreement on Work-Related Stress (ETUC, 2004) and the European Framework Agreement on Harassment and Violence at Work (ETUC, 2007). In line with the two European framework agreements, the draft agreement proposes a number of initiatives to identify violence, harassment and stress, protect employees and take preventive actions. It also proposes awareness raising, training and annual information campaigns. The project foresees the joint organisation of annual national campaigns on stress, harassment and violence at work under the slogans "Healthy workplaces. Stress management. No harassment and violence at work" and "Gender equality and protection from violence at work". CITUB is the main driver for the preparation and conclusion of the National Agreement and they argue that the two European framework agreements have already been signed by employers at European level linked to employers' organisations in Bulgaria.

At this stage, said National Agreement has not yet been signed by the nationally representative employers' organisations, but it is the result of the efforts and desire of both CITUB and the Bulgarian Industrial Association to reduce all forms of harassment and violence at work. Expectations are to speed up this process, from which mechanisms should be sought to introduce measures into national practice in line with the implementation of the European Frame-

¹ Trade unions and employers' organisations that fulfil a set of criteria to take part in the National Council for Tripartite Cooperation are considered nationally representative in Bulgaria.

work Agreement on Harassment and Violence at Work. According to the unions, there are no specific measures for the prevention of sexual harassment in the collective labor agreements (CLAs) at a national, sectoral and company level and such should be developed and implemented. This is still a new topic that is not addressed in-detail in the CLAs. Because the CLA gives certain rights over the statutory ones set out in the Labour Code, while sexual harassment is only one element of a general provision for non-discrimination and harassment in establishing employment relationships (CSCD, 2020b).

Examples of good practice are the activities of trade union federations at CITUB - the Union of Bulgarian Teachers (UBT), the Federation of Transport Trade Unions in Bulgaria (FTTUB) and the Federation of Healthcare Trade Unions (FHTU), which have signed sectoral agreements against violence and harassment at work.

In the healthcare sector, there are specific provisions included in the sectoral CLAs as well as provisions for the establishment of committees for safe working conditions and health at work. The sectoral CLA stipulates that the employer, together with the trade unions in the health service, must take effective measures to prevent any form of discrimination (direct or indirect), physical or psychosocial harassment and must ensure working conditions that protect workers from chronic stress, physical and mental disabilities in the workplace. The sectoral agreements set the

framework for the collective agreements of health-care institutions, thus providing the initial impetus for negotiating more practical provisions at institutional level and imposing mandatory actions to be taken.

In the transport sector, as a result of a long-term campaign initiated by the FTTUB, specific agreements have been signed with employers on non-violence against women. Since 2012 the CLA in the transport sector has included a special chapter "Protection against workplace violence and gender equality", which contains provisions for joint actions by employers and trade unions to prevent violence and harassment in the framework of the zero tolerance to violence policy. One of the clauses states that the employer is obliged to pursue a zero tolerance policy to discrimination and violence at work in its various occurrences - physical, mental and sexual. At the municipal level, the FTTUB signed agreements with the mayors of the municipalities (Sofia Varna, Burgas, and Gabrovo) to launch a campaign to raise public awareness against violence. The campaign covers both public transport and passenger rail transport. One of the successes of the campaign is that stickers with the slogan "Stop Gender Based Violence at Work" have been placed on buses, trams, trolleys and trains.

Other sectoral agreements on violence and harassment have been signed in the metallurgical, mining, postal services, brewing and energy sectors and include provisions addressing violence and harassment at work.

3

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

3.1 OCCURRENCE OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS

The phenomenon of SHW is present in various parts of the economy and its spread corresponds to the existing national and corporate culture.

Data gathered through the conducted individual interviews (IDIs) demonstrated that company culture is a key factor: the attitudes of colleagues and supervisors can be decisive for the occurrence of sexual violence at work, fostering a sense of impunity for perpetrators and helplessness for victims. Common patterns include downplaying the issue, indifference, vague accountability, or the equally discouraging sympathy coupled with a refusal to address the problem. Respondents clearly identified the work environment's role in normalising gender inequalities and perpetuating discriminatory discourses and practices, which facilitated the perpetration of SHW in their cases.

Experts interviewed as part of the Teamwork project consider that against the background of high levels of inequality and poverty, most Bulgarians live with a sense of threat, insecurity, helplessness, so the issue of SHW remains in the background. What is worrying is that sexual harassment is not perceived as a current problem, it is not commented on, there are only occasional cases of awareness raising campaigns to make it easier to recognise the signs and to become familiar with the procedures to protect and support victims. (CSCD, 2020b)

A total of 839 individuals participated in the current survey, 663 (80.6%) women and 153 (18.6%) men. People over the age of 40 accounted for 82.5% of the respondents and 86% had a university degree. 84% of the surveyed persons are members of a trade union. 7.6% do not have a trade union membership and 8.4% do not wish to give an answer. With regard to the trade union membership of participants in the IDIs, one of the four interviewees states that she was a union member at the time she was subjected to SHW.

Survey data show that 139 respondents (18.9%) have experienced SHW at their current job. Of these, 124 individuals were women (89.3%) who share about at least one of the listed behaviours that may qualify as sexual harassment. Respectively, 15 males (10.7%) also share that they have experienced some of the listed behaviours constituting sexual harassment. These data provide a basis for arguing that all forms of unwanted behaviour occur in the work process and are classified as sexual harassment.

Of particular interest is the indicator of union affiliation of individuals experiencing SHW. Of the total number of union members (668 cases) who responded to the question of whether they had experienced any form of SHW, 101 respondents, or 15.1%, said they had experienced such conduct. This proportion was significantly higher for non-union members. 38 respondents or 53.5% without union affiliation said they had experienced some form of SHW, out of 71 who recorded a response to the question.

These data provide grounds to argue that having a union section at the workplace and being a member of a union has the potential to provide greater protection for workers. The CLA is an important instrument to negotiate effective measures to ensure working conditions that protect workers from violence and harassment at work. Moreover, under the PADA, trade unions and their affiliates are given the right to be able to sue on behalf of victims at their request and with their consent.

In addition, interviewees in the IDIs share that sexual harassment rarely occurs in a single instance and only in one form. Respondents outlined a chronology of their experiences in which harassment escalated gradually and/or was perpetrated against several people simultaneously or sequentially. It was also not limited to the physical workplace, and in two of the four cases occurred at company parties or gatherings with colleagues. Respondents said that in these cases, the abuser's strategy was to create an environment in which professional and personal relationships were seemingly blurred. In turn, this facilitated both the

act of violence itself and the subsequent attribution of responsibility and blame to the victims.

3.2 FORMS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT OBSERVED

All potential forms of sexual harassment occur in the work process, albeit with varying degrees of frequency and prevalence. Inappropriate staring or leering that made the person feel uncomfortable had the biggest weight at 45.3% of all the survey respondents who experienced unwanted behaviour (139). Individuals with lower and no education were more affected by this type of SHW. Data show that 20% of respondents with no education and 12% with primary education felt embarrassed by inappropriate staring or leering. This unwanted feeling is most prevalent among young persons aged 18-29 (22.6%) and 30-39 (13.9%). The prevalence rate is equal between the private and the public sector. Thus, it cannot be argued that there are more victims of SHW in the private sector.

Next are indecent sexual jokes or offensive remarks about the person's body or private life (16.5%) and unsolicited physical contact, e.g. close proximity, touching body parts, kisses/hugs or something else that the individual did not want (8.6%). It is in this last category of unwanted and abusive physical contact that the experiences shared by the four female respondents in the IDIs fall. Although not a representative sample, the fact that 100% of the people who wished to share their experiences in an interview have been subjected to SHW through direct assault on their bodies speaks to the downplaying and failure to recognise the "milder" forms of harassment. Respondents themselves said that it took them time to overcome barriers of shame, doubt and self-blame and to call the problem by its real name. In this line of thought, it is reasonable to expect that leering, inappropriate jokes and remarks are not recognised by victims as a form of sexual harassment because of their normalisation in society and/or as a strategy employed by victims to avoid being recognised as such.

Data from the SHWS show that 61% of those who have experienced SHW gave an answer about its prevalence. Of these, nearly half (47.1%) ranked inappropriate staring or leering that made the person feel uncomfortable as occurring rarely and sometimes. For 5.9%, this type of SHW happens all the time. Indecent sexual jokes or offensive remarks about the person's body or private life are experienced rarely (16.5%), as are inappropriate suggestions to go out on a date, which made the person feel offended, humiliated, or intimidated (15.3%).

During the IDIs, the interviewees shared a range of experiences: some, who held higher positions within

the company, reported a temporary cessation of the unwanted behaviour after pushing back. For others, the harassment was a one-time incident, but daily interactions with the aggressor and his repeated attempts to maintain communication had a retraumatising effect. In the case of the third respondent, after reporting the harassment it transformed into discreditation and mobbing by the perpetrator. In the final case, the interviewee, a trainee in the public administration at the time, experienced daily harassment throughout the duration of her traineeship.

81.1% of the respondents in the SHWS have never experienced unwanted behaviour at work. It should be noted, however, that this is a very sensitive topic and many avoid talking openly about it. When asked if they have experienced any unwanted behaviour, about 1/5 of the respondents refused to answer or preferred to state that they did not know. Determining whether behaviour constitutes sexual harassment depends on several factors, including the nature of the behaviour, how it is perceived (as either welcome or unwelcome), and its impact. Sexual harassment can occur even if the person responsible did not intend to offend, viewing their actions as a joke, harmless flirting, or flattery. Nevertheless, from a legal perspective, the behaviour must cause harm to be considered sexual harassment, and in the absence of clear legal regulations, there are limited options for addressing it.

Data from the study support the hypothesis that younger women, who have lower levels of education and therefore lower incomes, are more likely to be victims of sexual harassment. Victims of sexual harassment reported that in their perception gender (39,76%) age (28,92%) or disability (6,02%) were key factors that made them vulnerable.

Verbal sexual harassment is the most common form of sexual harassment for the age group 18-29: it's the case of 22,5 of the young respondents who have experienced any form of harassment. Interview data confirms that younger women, not necessarily less educated but at an earlier stage in their careers, are particularly vulnerable. On the other hand, a higher position and the gained professional prestige and respect are not an insurance against SHW either, but they provide the victim with some tools to temporarily push back or distance herself from the abuser.

3.3 VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS

Unwanted behaviour that violates someone's dignity is behaviour that puts the victim in a position that is incompatible with the self-perception of worth as a person with certain characteristics. When sexual harassment occurs in the workplace, it is shaped by the context of job roles and organisational hierarchy.

83 survey respondents who have experienced SHW share who the perpetrator was. For 33.7% of them, he was a male colleague. Of these, 92.9% are women who have experienced humiliating treatment by a male colleague. Respondents also experienced such behaviour from a female colleague (19.3%), with 87.5% of respondents being women. These data indicate that perpetrators of SHW can be persons of either sex, and it is common for the act to be directed at the same sex.

A further 32.5% were subjected to SHW by persons in higher positions in the hierarchy, and this was almost equally distributed between the sexes. For 18% or 15 respondents, of whom 11 were women, the act was committed by women in a managerial position. A further 14.5% or 12 respondents, 11 of whom were women, say that the act was committed by men in managerial positions. These data prove that sexual harassment is usually perpetrated by a person who, because of their authority or seniority, has the ability to unilaterally put subordinates in a humiliating situation and influence the harassed person's career advancement or work environment.

The data from the IDs are consistent with the findings of the survey: the perpetrator's job position is key. In three of the cases, the perpetrator of sexual harassment was in a more senior position than the victim, and in all four his professional expertise was used by colleagues and supervisors to excuse or downplay his behaviour and refuse to take action regarding the case. One respondent says that she did not tell colleagues about what had happened because the aggressor, although in a junior position, was a professional respected by the team. Her position as a student on an unpaid internship and without a contract would have put her at a disadvantage: "I thought about complaining, it was my word against his. An intern against a respected employee. I got on well with the team and I was afraid that if I said anything they would turn on me." This case illustrates that the lower levels of service hierarchies should not be underestimated.

Another important characteristic in the relationship dynamics between perpetrator and victim is the denial of responsibility and the absence of guilt on the part of the perpetrator as well as the attempts to transfer them (responsibility, guilt) to the target of violence. One respondent recounted how her direct supervisor justified his attempt to forcibly kiss her by saying, "It's not that I want anything from you, it's just to show you that you are a beautiful and desirable woman so you don't feel bad about your break-up." Another interviewee shared how the perpetrator of the violence, after she had unequivocally pushed him away, responded with the line "Don't pretend you didn't like it". In the previous sections, we have seen

how similar processes run parallel in the work environment and in societal attitudes in general.

Regardless of who the person committing SHW is - a supervisor, a colleague or a client/patient, the impact directly or indirectly affects everyone in the team and disrupts the work process.

Inappropriate staring or leering that made the person feel uncomfortable were provoked by a male colleague in 27% of the cases and by a female colleague in 19% of the cases. This type of harassment is more prevalent among women in leadership positions (19%) than among men with the same status (14%). Indecent sexual jokes or offensive remarks about the person's body or private life were made by a male colleague 52.1% of the time and by a male supervisor/manager 39.1% of the time. It is important to emphasise that, in many cases, different types of harassment occur simultaneously, which reinforces the victim's sense of helplessness while also normalising the behaviour and fostering impunity. As reported by another respondent:

"... when I finally got the courage to speak to HR, they told me that other colleagues had also complained, and the bosses were aware but didn't see it as a problem. Maybe I should have spoken to the manager as well to make sure that was the case. But he was an open misogynist, which discouraged me further [...] I left feeling like I was in a hostile environment. One male colleague said bluntly that there should be no women bosses and managers. A third colleague shared similar views, often making misogynistic comments, not directed at me specifically, so I brushed them off. I thought that a lot of people talk like that, not a big deal..."

3.4 CONSEQUENCES OF EXPOSURE TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The consequences of SHW are undoubtedly a problem, not only for the victims themselves, but also for society as a whole, because the negative effects occur in different directions and their impact is not only immediate but also long-lasting.

77 survey respondents out of all those who suffered some form of SHW shared the consequences. Of these, for 55.8% there were no consequences, with 90.6% being women who were considered to be persons of strong character and had managed to overcome the problem. The remaining respondents shared several elements of consequences of exposure to sexual harassment: feeling uncomfortable in the workplace (32.5%), difficulty concentrating or performing tasks (14.3%), avoiding socialising with people at work (14.3%), considering leaving work (14.3%), depression or adverse psychological consequences (14.3%), and fear of going to work (10.4%). All

these consequences affect the work process, individuals take sick leave, work unfocused, make mistakes. Furthermore, violence and sexual harassment at work cannot remain hidden, the phenomenon ruins the company's image, and this leads to turnover and to labour short-

ages, to lower labour productivity and, consequently, to loss of corporate clients and profit. Alongside this, social and healthcare funds are burdened in terms of benefit payments and social assistance. It can thus be argued that these effects occur on both a micro and macro level.



Again, the carried out IDIs enabled us to have a more in-depth conversation that reflected the subjectivity of the respondents' experiences. In addition to the responses mentioned in the survey, the interviewees identified self-blame as one of the consequences that had been weighing on them for a long time and that had stopped them from taking action. The sense of guilt in these cases does not stem from personal doubts about whether the right actions were taken, but rather from the normalisation of mechanisms of violence that uphold the patriarchal order. Public pressure and societal opinion play a crucial role in this process. As seen in earlier sections, victims face doubt not only when violence is committed against them, but again when they speak out and seek justice. These mechanisms are internalised by survivors of harassment: "The worst consequence is that you blame yourself. In 90% of the cases the victim is not to blame, I didn't put on that skirt for him. But that's how it feels." Feeling individual guilt leads, eventually, to taking individual responsibility for coping with the situation. By coping we mean both with the process of harassment itself and with its consequences. The tendency for interviewees is to push the problem to the background and prioritise other life situations

over which they have more control in the first place. After some attempts at sharing with colleagues, seeking support from HR and/or supervisors, and disappointment with the reactions received, leaving work as the final solution to the problem and seeking support from small circles of close people (partner, relatives, close friends) or talking to a therapist followed. Rethinking the situation and letting go of guilt takes time for all of them.

3.5 VICTIMS' RESPONSES TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Victims' responses to sexual harassment are a consequence of a number of factors related to their awareness of protection procedures and knowledge of the legal framework. Nearly one-third of victims did not confront the perpetrator, and 81% of them are union members. Most often, victims shared with a friend or family member (21.3%). Only 10,7% reported the issue to their superior or management. Rarely the case was reported to a trade union (1.3%) or to a professional, such as a psychologist, or to other relevant institutions, such as ombudsperson or labour inspectorate (1.3%).

Figure 2
Victim's response to SHW

What was your response to the sexual harassment?



The main reasons for under-reporting include a lack of awareness about the nature of sexual harassment, limited tools and methods to assess and address the issue, and poor prioritisation at both the national and company levels.

In many cases, sexual harassment goes unreported because of the belief that nothing can be done (45%). Worryingly, 45% of victims do not view sexual harassment at work as a serious issue. The reason for not reacting is the feeling that it is “not that serious”.

For other 15%, the reason comes down to not knowing who to approach and what to do. This is a consequence of a lack of awareness and knowledge of the problem and procedures for protection. It should be noted that a significant proportion of victims do not confront the perpetrator out of fear that the situation will get worse (20%) or out of fear that it may negatively affect their job, position and career development (10%). These cases are, among other things, difficult to prove as such incidents often occur without witnesses, and perpetrators rarely act aggressively in front of others, although this is not excluded.

The information shared in the in-depth interview gave us the opportunity to think about other types of strategies for reporting cases of SHW. All interviewees shared that the available formal channels for complaining were closed to them for one reason or another: lack of response and cover-up of the aggressor by superiors and colleagues, lack of authority from the HR department, or fear of being revictimized and having their own prestige undermined if the case became public. One of the respondents consulted a

lawyer about possible actions and was discouraged by the answer she received: the success of such cases in Bulgaria is a rare precedent. Apart from the purely legal aspect of the process, the lawyer advised her to think about the possible moral damage and the way the case would affect her career in the future.

These insights confirm both the need for more effective legal measures and the risks of relying exclusively on them as a restorative justice mechanism. As recent research in the field of SHW has demonstrated (Lundgren & Wieslander, 2024), filing a formal complaint is often made more difficult by victims’ (legitimate) concerns about further retaliation against them and a hostile work environment. The authors also emphasize that a complaint as a preferred tool individualizes the problem and helps to downplay its initial or more “mild” manifestations, as these are much less frequently reported.

However, interviewees shared alternative methods of reporting and support: alerting colleagues who may be at risk and connecting with other victims. One notable approach involved contacting HR at the aggressor’s new workplace to safeguard future victims: if someone files a complaint, there will be a record of previous incidents. Another respondent found support and empowerment through a union representative, who helped her compel the employer to conduct an investigation, albeit a largely formal one. The interviewee who experienced sexual harassment during her internship felt the least empowered to respond. She noted that she lacked sufficient information about her options, and the nature of her position added to her pressure: being in an unpaid

internship without an employment contract, along with the obligation to complete the internship on time as a condition for continuing her education.

3.6 VICTIMS' SATISFACTION WITH THE CASE(S) OUTCOMES AND HER/HIS NEEDS

The response of victims of sexual harassment against the perpetrator, although for a small number (30 persons) of survey respondents who shared their opinion, led to a relatively sustainable level of satisfaction after observing the cessation of harassment (26.7%), initiating a procedure to investigate the claim (13.3%), transferring the perpetrator to another department in another workplace (3.3%), or the perpetrator left (3.3%).

Alarming, victims of SHW most frequently report that no action was taken following their complaints and nothing happened (43.3%). This lack of response leaves victims feeling demotivated, increases distrust towards institutions, and fosters a hostile work environment. Consequently, many victims may consider leaving their jobs, resulting in additional costs for companies associated with hiring new employees. This explains the significant proportion of victims (80.7%) who did not file a formal or anonymous complaint. The correlation with union membership shows that 85.7% of union members refrained from filing a complaint, compared to 70% of non-members. The small number of recorded cases (31) does not provide a definitive answer to the hypothesis regarding the relationship between union membership and reporting violence.

The interviewees within the conducted IDIs did not show satisfaction with the way the SHW case was handled. Satisfaction is more on a personal level and is related to processes of overcoming the trauma with the help of a therapist and close people, achieving new professional and personal successes, but also realising the problem as structural and shaking off individual guilt. As one IDI respondent shared: "It's something that has helped me to begin to recognise this behaviour, even if it's covert. And to realise that in situations where a man [at work] deliberately makes you feel uncomfortable, it's not just because he finds you cute".

3.7 AWARENESS AND ATTITUDES TO EXISTING PROTECTION AGAINST SHW

There is a low level of awareness among the surveyed individuals regarding the procedures for protection if they become victims of sexual harassment. Only 35% believe that their employer is doing enough to prevent sexual harassment. The majority of respondents expresses uncertainty whether the employer is doing enough regarding education and training (37.9%),

prevention (40.9%), keeping track of incidents (46.8%), and sanctioning perpetrators of SHW (48.9%).

Under Bulgarian law, the employer is required to take preventive measures. The management of the company is obliged to develop rules and measures to protect against SHW. More than half of the persons surveyed (54.9%) did not know that there are provisions to prevent, address and sanction SHW. About one-third of union members are aware of the provisions for addressing SHW and this share is similar for non-union members.

Regarding the existence of company regulations to prevent, address and sanction SHW, 31.3% of the respondents say that the company/institution where they work has an ethical code/code of conduct. Of these, 95.7% are trade union members.

Respondents seek information on protection mechanisms after experiencing SHW (31.8%) or after witnessing it (37.9%). The implication here is that there is a lack of awareness about prevention and only when there is a rights violation or alleged violation people look for increasing their knowledge.

The IDIs data confirm the results of the survey: the majority of the respondents were not aware of existing provisions to prevent, address and sanction SHW. Their workplaces did not have their own protocols for action or prevention. In one case, a report was made to the employer and after an unsatisfactory response from them, the victim informed her manager of the existence of European directives and regulations in this regard and of their obligation to take measures. This action produced results and an investigation into the case was initiated, but it took place in an already hostile environment for the respondent and was not carried out in a neutral manner.

3.8 ROLE OF THE TRADE UNIONS AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS IN SHW POLICIES

Trade unions play a crucial role in protection procedures and raising awareness for the prevention of SHW. Respondents place significant responsibility on trade unions in this regard. According to them, trade unions should demand the adoption of regulations related to SHW (41.1%), trade unions should support affected workers (45.5%), trade unions should provide information on existing rules and regulations (38.2%), trade unions should bargain and conclude a collective agreement addressing sexual harassment (34.1%), trade unions should report non-compliance with regulations to the Labour Inspectorate (35.8%).

Data show that respondents place considerable trust in trade unions to develop jointly with the employer

preventive measures with which to familiarise workers. These measures should be enshrined in separate clauses in the sectoral and enterprise-level CLAs. Trade unions are expected to support the affected workers before the competent institutions.

Under the Protection against Discrimination Act (PADA), trade unions and their units, as well as non-profit legal entities pursuing activities for public benefit, may bring an action on behalf of the persons whose rights have been violated at their request. This suggests that the respondents' expectations of trade unions are well founded.

IDI results showed a divide between the public and private sectors in terms of awareness of the role of trade unions and expectations of them. This corresponds to the higher number of unionised workers in the public sector, but also to industry specificities. One interviewee said that in the IT sector "it's every person for themselves, people are not united as workers because the environment is also very competitive and job boundaries and types of work are quite blurred". The other respondent employed in the private sector, as well as some of the experts who participated in the focus group, pointed out that in private companies it is the HR professionals who take the role of guaranteeing workers' rights and compliance with professional ethics, and their role is better known than that of the union representative.

In turn, public sector employees are more informed about how trade unions work and the possibilities for their assistance. One respondent had approached the trade union she was a member of and received assistance in scheduling a meeting with the employer to bring the investigation to a conclusion. In another case, the respondent appreciated the potential of trade unions as a structure with support mechanisms in place, but was also critical of their functioning. In this sense, the risk of reproducing and/or neglecting injustice also needs to be taken into account within the institutions that, by definition, fight it.

3.9 EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CURRENT REGULATIONS AND STEPS FORWARD

Knowledge and awareness of how to recognise the signs of SHW is an important element in order to provide a reliable estimate of its prevalence. According to 58.8% of respondents, sexual harassment at work is not common at all. 18.8% of respondents consider the phenomenon to be common on a national level. Along with this, more than half answered that they were not able to assess the situation. These data support again the claim that there is a lack of awareness about the topic of sexual harassment. It is believed that there is sufficient legislation in place to protect

victims, but at the same time the awareness of the individuals themselves - the victims of sexual harassment - needs to be raised. Following the outcomes of recent studies (Nguyen et al., 2023), it is important to focus on combating workplace violence both by improving the complaint procedure and by promoting a collective work culture that does not tolerate such behaviour, taking into account local specificities. In the additional responses, where the respondents freely share their opinions and assessments of sexual harassment, a variety of perspectives are revealed and can be summarised in several key categories.

1. A large proportion of the SHWS respondents state that they have not experienced sexual harassment at work. Many say that this problem does not exist in their work environment or that they have not witnessed such behaviour. This can be interpreted in several ways: it is possible that they indeed work in an environment where there are no incidents of sexual harassment; it is also possible that some respondents do not recognise certain acts as harassment due to a lack of awareness; on the other hand, this may reflect a fear of reporting such incidents or a feeling of embarrassment to admit the existence of the problem. Adding the information from the interviews to this, we can also assume that SHW is downplayed or neglected as a problem in the work environment, which is reflected in the survey responses.
2. Other survey respondents demonstrate a high degree of knowledge on the topic. They emphasise the need for strict penalties and insist on effective measures to prevent SHW. These responses show awareness of the issue and a desire for change in workplace policies and culture. This group of responses reveals an understanding that harassment can have severe consequences and that a more serious approach to the problem is needed. Some respondents acknowledge the existence of harassment at work but specify that in their case it was not sexual. They mention cases of political pressure and psychological harassment, demonstrating that workplace harassment can take various forms. This underscores the broader range of issues that can arise in the workplace in Bulgaria and are not limited only to sexual harassment. In the cases of the interviewees, all of them have gone through a long process of making sense of sexual harassment at work from the level of their personal traumatic experience to the company level and national legislation. They point to the collective awareness of the dimensions of the problem and the need for innovative measures to ensure greater safety for victims and accountability on the part of perpetrators as crucial. The interviewees also highlight the need for a transformation of the working environment to make it

more supportive and participative. Some of the interviewees felt that involving the work collective in resolving cases of SHW would help to bring balance compared to cases where conflict is individualised, and accuser and accused are pitted against each other to judge whose word has more value.

3. The need for greater awareness and education on sexual harassment is apparent. SHWS respondents call for education programmes and legislative measures to help workers recognise and prevent such situations. This shows that lack of information and understanding can be a serious barrier to tackling the issue. In certain responses, there is a tendency to blame the victim or excuse the perpetrator's behaviour. Some respondents hint that women may provoke such situations, which is indicative of stereotypes and outdated understandings. These responses can make it more difficult to combat sexual harassment and make victims more vulnerable. The interviewees also highly appreciate the importance of preventive measures such as information campaigns and trainings. On the one hand, they link the prevention of SHW to their labour rights and, specifically, their right to work in safe conditions. On the other hand, they believe that greater awareness would help to create a "culture of reporting" that would help to overcome the shame and fear with which victims currently talk about the issue. In conclusion, they also reflect on the effectiveness of training and preventive measures against current or potential perpetrators. In this sense, they point out that it is important for trainings to contribute to a collective transformation of work culture and gender equality, as well as to be impactful on an individual level, nurturing emotional intelligence and empathy.

The overall findings from the respondents' opinions and assessment show that perceptions of sexual harassment at work in Bulgaria are varied and often depend on individual experiences and the work environment. While some respondents feel they are in a safe and supportive environment, others point to the need for more awareness, strong measures and a change in workplace culture. It is clear that in order to effectively address the issue, we need to work on raising awareness and implementing clear and strict rules that protect all workers. It is also relevant to reflect the different dynamics of work culture in different sectors, different types of companies and institutions, in order to adapt the corresponding prevention measures (Nielsen et al., 2017).

On the other hand, the focus group discussion also highlighted the need for greater awareness at different levels. Experts were unanimous on the need for a more precise and broader definition of SHW not

only in normative documents but also as a collective perception in the work environment. It is the downplaying of seemingly harmless conversations, jokes, and comments that leads to deepening frustration with the work environment as a whole and increases the risk of harassment to escalate. Participants in the discussion emphasised the need to build a collective perception that violence is unacceptable, which can be helped by internal workplace rules and norms as well as trainings conducted by HR specialists or external experts and the introduction of transparent and effective reporting systems to ensure the safety of the victim of violence and the possibility of their reintegration into the work environment. In this context, they also highlighted the potential for employers to prioritise the creation of a safe working environment. But, on the other hand, alongside the establishment of top-down workplace rules and protocols as a mechanism for creating a work culture that does not tolerate violence, it is important that bottom-up processes take place, as mentioned by the trade union leader participating in the group. Empowering workers and mainstreaming the prevention of SHW into collective bargaining as an additional tool to guarantee rights and improve working conditions, as well as keeping it high on the agenda, are part of the trade unions' priorities.

Regarding measures to combat SHW, focus group experts outlined a roadmap, including the need for progress at various levels: from transposing European directives to reforming national legislation, harmonisation between laws and internal workplace regulations, and ensuring compliance at the company level. The legislative specificities include the non-recognition of SHW as a type of discrimination, which reduces victims' chances of being informed and seeking help. Experts shared cases from their practice where the lack of coordination between different regulatory levels led to overturned dismissals related to SHW, as specific justifications were absent from the legislation. Moreover, administrative penalties in the form of fines under the PADA do not include mechanisms to restore a fair and safe working environment for victims.

The experts stressed the need for measures to reintegrate survivors of violence back into the work environment. On the other hand, they also stressed the importance of trainings that focus on two aspects: first, training in recognizing different types of SHW, expanding further on its definition, as one of the main identified issues is the under-recognition of its more common but more underestimated forms. Thus, they also considered that trainings that inform staff about their rights and the actions they can take in case of SHW are important. Finally, they stressed the need for different types of trainings for managers and for employees, the former including both information on how to react and handle the case and also on their own responsibility as individuals in a position of power not to abuse it.

4

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on the data gathered from the survey, interviews and focus group, as well as from previous project experiences and examples of good practice at company and sector level, we would like to make the following policy recommendations to improve the ways in which SHW is addressed

4.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

Research participants argued for the need to expand both punitive measures and different prevention strategies. Therefore, we would like to categorise a number of potential measures according to the type of stakeholders and the type of action they could take.

- National authorities
- Speeding up of the ratification process of International Labour Organisation Convention 190 and faster implementation in national legislation. The aim is to bring more safety to workplaces, to guarantee legal protection for one of our basic human rights, backed up by real measures and commitments: both from the state and from employers.
- Raising awareness about the phenomenon of SHW. Raising awareness to make it easier to recognise the signs and the relevant national authorities to protect and support victims.
- Creating effective prevention mechanisms based on an extended definition of the different types of occurrences of SHW and building a broad public consensus on said definition. A clear commitment to zero tolerance of SHW by employers and collective efforts by employers, workers, trade unions and other organisations to create and maintain a safe working environment.
- Systematised legal framework aimed solely at the prevention of various forms of violence and sexual harassment at work. Harmonisation between internal company regulations, administrative sanctions and criminal law to ensure that measures taken at one level are not overruled by another.

- Systematic state oversight and accountability to end impunity, ensuring that perpetrators are prosecuted and that survivors of violence receive appropriate support and recognition from the justice system.
- Coordinated work between state institutions, trade unions and civil society on initiatives aimed at reducing inequalities and disadvantages at the workplace, for which efforts are being made at the transnational level through various ILO conventions: reducing the gender pay gap, equal pay for equal work, eliminating violence and harassment in the workplace.
 - Employers
- Development of corporate policies and mechanisms to combat SHW, but also to prevent and collectively rethink the problem through training, effective reporting and support systems.
- Implementing a two-tiered SHW reporting systems/protocols at the workplace: victims can either alert HR (or a similar body) about the SHW to keep the case on file and to build up a “dossier” to substantiate a potential future complaint, or lodge an official complaint and request for an official investigation of the case.

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE TRADE UNIONS

- A national agreement on protection against violence and harassment at work signed by the social partners, in line with the European Framework Agreement on Harassment and Violence at Work.
- Introduction of texts on prevention of sexual harassment in the sectoral and company level CLAs, similar to sectors such as transport, healthcare, and education, where there are texts related to the elimination of violence and stress in the workplace, and sexual harassment issues are also included.
- Promotion of initiatives, including awareness-raising campaigns, for employers and workers and their organisations, as well as relevant authorities, with the aim of providing resources, training or other tools on violence and harassment at

work, in particular with regard to gender-based violence and harassment.

- Expanding the practice of having work place equality coordinator(s) on enterprise level as part of trade union structures.

4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH (ACADEMIA, TRADE UNIONS, APPLIED RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS)

- Conducting in-depth and long-term research on the topic, based on building trust with SHW victims to paint a more detailed and closer to their lived experiences picture of the issue.

The findings reveal a pressing need for stronger policies and cultural shifts in addressing Sexual Harassment at Work. Effective, holistic action requires collaboration across stakeholders to improve awareness, enhance complaint processes, and establish robust workplace norms that discourage SHW. Empowering both workers and employers to build safer, more supportive work environments is essential for meaningful change.

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ANNEXES

1. Structure of the survey sample

Category	Number (N)	Percentage
Respondents	839	100%
Gender		
Female	663	80.6%
Male	153	18.6%
Other	0	0.0%
Age categories		
Under 30	31	3.7%
31 - 50	371	44.27%
51 and over	436	52.03%
Trade unions membership		
Member of trade union	704	84%
Member of the trade union in time of SHW experience	44	53%

2. List of the interviews

IDI code ²	Date of the IDI	Description of the communication partners			
		Gender (F/M/Other)	Age (if not know, assess)	Sector	Member of trade union (Y/N)
IDI1	12/08/2024	F	30-40	Private, IT company	N
IDI2	19/08/2024	F	30-40	Public, local government	Y
IDI3	16/09/2024	F	20-30	Public, state institution	N
IDI4	02/10/2024	F	30-40	Private, online gambling company	N

3. Description of the focus group(s) participants

Date of the FG: 02/10/2024

N.	The type of organisation that the participant represents	Female	Male
1	Trade Union at the sectoral level	x	
2	HR in a big private corporation	x	
3	Non-governmental organisation	x	
4	Researcher in SHW (with law background)		x
5	Commission for protection against discrimination (state agency)	x	

² These codes were not used in the text body of the study to guarantee the respondents anonymity. See Methodology, p.

LIST OF TABLES

- 11 Figure 1
Identified consequences of SHW
- 12 Figure 2
Victim's response to SHW

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SHW	Sexual harassment at the workplace
IDI	Individual interview
SHWS	Sexual harassment in the workplace survey
CITUB	Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Bulgaria
PADA	Protection against Discrimination Act
CPAD	Commission for Protection against Discrimination
CLA	Collective Labour Agreement

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bulgaria.fes.de

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT THE WORKPLACE

National Report Bulgaria



Sexual harassment in the workplace affects 18.9% of surveyed employees, primarily women (80%) and leads to major personal and professional costs.



Low awareness and limited employer action (35% proactive) discourage victims from reporting.



Law enforcement, improvement of workplace protocols, union-led initiatives, and multi-level collaboration to promote supportive workplace cultures that prevent harassment.

Further information on the topic can be found here:

bulgaria.fes.de