

# SAFE



# AT

TO PREVENT  
AND COMBAT  
SEXUAL HARASSMENT  
AND VIOLENCE  
AT WORK

# WORK



TRAINING  
MANUAL  
FOR THE STAFF



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# WHY ARE WE DISCUSSING ABOUT SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE AT WORK?

Sexual harassment and violence at work is not a new phenomenon and, unfortunately, it is not rare either, even in modern times.

According to a [recent survey of ActionAid](#), 85% of women in Greece have been sexually harassed at work. The cost - moral, physical, mental, communicational and financial - is enormous.

Sometimes, either as individuals or as managers of businesses and organisations, we ignore it or downplay its importance, because we see it as inevitable, we do not know how to prevent or address it, we fear the impact it may have on our public image, or because we believe it should not be such a serious concern.

In practice, however, we know that sexual harassment and violence in the workplace has adverse effects, both on the victims and on those who witness such incidents, on their teams, on the companies they work for and on the wider society.

The consequences are health-related, emotional, social and economic.

Individuals who suffer sexual harassment and violence at work are more likely to experience physical and mental health problems due to the stress they endure. They are also [much more likely](#) to quit their job, especially when they are frustrated by the (non-)response to the incidents they have experienced. Even for those who stay, though, the implications for their productivity, engagement and job satisfaction are considerable.

People who have witnessed harassment incidents, often present with similar manifestations of anxiety and detachment. As a result, the groups in which the harassment incidents occur find it difficult to work together harmoniously and produce the best possible outcome. All these consequences affect the efficiency, profitability and image of a company and have a significant impact on the economy, the bonds of trust and the social cohesion of the wider community.

For all these reasons, preventing and addressing sexual harassment and violence at work is not just a women's cause, it is not just a legal matter, it is not just a task for leaders; it is the responsibility of each and every one of us, to the extent that we wish to work and grow in a safe professional environment.

**AS EMPLOYERS,**

we are called upon to ensure a safe environment and a culture of respect for our staff.

**AS TEAM LEADERS,**

we must act as role models for inclusive communication and put our commitment to zero tolerance into practice.

**AS COLLEAGUES AND CO-WORKERS,**

even as bystanders, it is possible to support people being harassed or even to re-examine our own behaviours.

By taking a stand and making sure that all of us are protected against sexual harassment, we are not admitting failure; on the contrary, we are demonstrating a sense of responsibility and concern for the most valuable part of our job: our people.

Taking the necessary measures to eradicate sexual harassment and create a framework of safety, respect and equality, we ensure a healthy working environment and contribute to the sustainability of each and every business.

## WHAT IS AND WHAT IS NOT SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

According to Greek and European legislation, sexual harassment is any form of **unwanted, verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, with the purpose or effect** of violating the dignity of a person, particularly when creating **an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.**

This definition gives us many tools to fully and thoroughly understand the concept of sexual harassment and its different manifestations in the world of work.



**«unwanted»**

No, consensual flirting or consensual sexual relations between adults are not sexual harassment!

**«verbal, non-verbal  
or physical  
conduct»**

Sexual harassment is not always a persistent sexual advance. It can take the form of unwanted physical touching, comments, jokes or questions of a sexual nature, provocative looks or gestures, offensive behaviour or online communication.

**«of a sexual  
nature»**

Derogatory comments about a woman's abilities or particularities are not sexual harassment if they are not related to sex (such behaviours are «gender-based harassment» and are, of course, also problematic!)

**«with the purpose  
or effect»**

Our behaviour may constitute sexual harassment even if that was not our intention or purpose. In other words, the criterion is not the opinion of the perpetrator but that of the recipient of the conduct.

**«intimidating,  
hostile, degrading,  
humiliating  
or offensive  
environment»**

Sexual harassment does not always have a coercive character, but it can involve behaviour of a sexual nature that creates a hostile environment - not only for the harassed individual, but also for other people working in the same environment.

## WHAT IS **NOT** SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

- **Consensual flirting** and **consensual sexual relations** between adults
- An **isolated unfortunate comment** that was **not repeated** when found to be unwelcome
- **Derogatory comments about a woman's abilities or particularities** and intimidating behaviour, such as threats, loud shouting, exclusion from work or unjustified offensive criticism, which are **not of a sexual nature** (such behaviour may constitute discrimination through gender-based harassment, intimidation or systematic stalking and should be reported, though it is not labelled as sexual harassment)





# THE CONTEXT OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

It is no coincidence that in 2019, the International Labour Organization used the term «world of work» in its official Convention to describe the many different contexts in which sexual harassment can occur.

## INDIVIDUALS

In most cases worldwide, the victims of sexual harassment are women and the perpetrators are men. This does not mean, however, that sexually harassing behaviour does not also occur from women to men, as well as between individuals of the same sex.

## RELATIONS

Furthermore, sexual harassment is not always committed by persons higher up in the hierarchy against their subordinates. It can also occur between colleagues or come from customers or suppliers. There is usually an unequal power dynamic between these individuals, but this is not always easy to detect at first sight, as it is not always based on the level of hierarchy.

## ENVIRONMENT

Finally, sexual harassment and violence incidents do not always occur in a specific workplace, such as an office or factory, but can occur in any place and at any time when a person is carrying out his or her work: on the street, at a business dinner, at a seminar, on a trip or while working remotely.

# HOW TO BEST BEHAVE AT WORK?

What do we mean when we say that combating sexual harassment is everyone's responsibility? Even if we do not believe that we have engaged in harassing behaviour, it is important that we often "see" and evaluate our attitudes, language and actions not only in the light of what we have thought was right up to now, but also in the light of how they may be perceived by and affect the people around us. This is important no matter what position or hierarchical level we are in, but it is even more important when we hold a position of responsibility, lead a small or large team, or have a high visibility role within our company or in our wider community.

At the same time, it is crucial to develop skills and practice how to intervene if we notice sexually abusive behaviour in our working environment and how we can support the person or persons suffering the consequences of such behaviour.

The above, of course, is not limited to the working environment of a company or organisation, but also applies to all persons in the labour market as employees, self-employed, entrepreneurs and even customers who interact with different product and service providers.

Below, we will outline some key points that can change (for the better) the way we relate to the people in our workplace, and also ways in which we have the potential, as witnesses, to help create a safer, fairer and more inclusive environment at work.



# SMALL (BUT IMPORTANT) BEHAVIOUR RULES

## Don't

**Avoid touching people in your work environment unless you are sure that they agree.** An uninvited hug, a “friendly” bump or grab, even a pat on the belly of a pregnant woman, can embarrass your colleagues and send the message that there is not enough respect for the personal boundaries of each and every person in your work environment.

**Avoid excessive or regular consumption of alcohol in the context of your work.** You may see it as a way to relax or even to connect with your colleagues in a more informal context, but there is always the risk of seeing your resistance give way and judging as acceptable behaviors that are not acceptable to those around you.

**Avoid questions, jokes, comments or conversations about your own sex life or the sex lives of people you work with.** Even if you have been working with someone for years or are in a difficult emotional situation and want to share personal details with someone, be careful how the experiences you describe or questions you ask people around you may be perceived –especially if they are in a hierarchically lower position than yours.

## Do

**Ask: «May I?» and make sure you're ready to accept any answer.** The answer may be verbal, but if the person in front of you does not have the ability or the courage to put their refusal into words, he/she may even express it with a grimace or a backward movement.

**Make sure that your colleagues can reach out and get in touch with you even in places that do not necessarily involve alcohol,** relaxed behaviour or a lot of outgoingness. If they need to come to the bar where you gather for drinks after work to talk to you about an important matter related to their development, then the ground is fertile for being faced with embarrassing behaviours.

**Apologise if you find out that one of your colleagues felt bad about something you said, asked or implied about their personal life.** Communication is not bounded by “right” or “wrong” signposts, so it is certain that all of us will make mistakes. Let's apologize for them.

**Don't**

**Don't bring into your work environment, whether online or offline, any material that may offend the people you work with,** especially if it contains sexual content. Even the way you decorate your office space can offend the people around you if it contains sexual images or phrases.

**Do**

**When communicating online, make sure your appearance, gestures and surroundings are neat and professional so as not to embarrass your peers.** You don't always have to be dressed in a suit, but you should certainly avoid overly revealing appearances, obscene gestures and innuendos, and sexually charged images in your physical or online environment.

**and also:**

**Avoid asking your colleagues and/or subordinates to cater for your personal needs that go beyond the scope of their work.** When you ask someone to give you a massage, buy a gift for your partner, make a personal phone call that you want to avoid, you are blurring the boundaries between the professional and personal relationship in a way that may encourage, in the future, some kind of abusive behaviour.

**Avoid addressing people in your professional environment by pet names or nicknames** - address them as you would any adult person who has undertaken an important task for you or with you. For the same reason, do not call women in your professional environment «girls», «dolls» or other labels that tend to demean or sexualize them.

**Practise reading the non-verbal signals of the people around you correctly:** you can tell, for example, from their posture, facial expression, movements and voice, whether they are comfortable or uncomfortable with something. In an ideal world, we would say exactly what we think or feel in the proper way, but the world is not ideal and it is the responsibility of each and every one of us to be able to connect with the people around us on levels above and beyond the obvious.

# WHAT TO DO IF YOU FIND YOURSELF IN A DIFFICULT POSITION

**If someone in your work environment is behaving in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable** or creates an offensive environment for you and/or your colleague(s), it is important to express your discontent early on, even if you fear that it may be considered «exaggerated» or that you will disturb the «harmony» of the group.

**Even if you do not feel secure enough to deal with the person alone**, or if the behaviour persists even after your intervention, there are most likely appropriate channels around you where you can talk about it safely and privately. You can check the policy of the company you work for or work with for more details on reporting mechanisms. If there is no such policy, you can report the incident to a person in a position of responsibility you trust, in the Human Resources or Compliance Department, or you can contact an external body such as the Labour Inspectorate, the Ombudsman or the Speak Out service.

Before reporting, make sure, as far as this is possible, to collect details of specific incidents and behaviours (what happened, when and where).



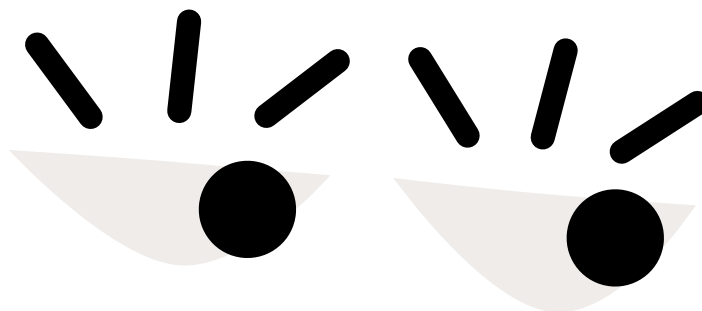
**Do not hesitate to report any problematic behaviour, even if it occurred in the past.** Each and every organisation must be aware of incidents involving individuals of its staff -also, a report from you may help others who are being harassed to report their problem. Keep in mind that the law prohibits retaliation and vindictive behaviours towards a person who files a report for sexual harassment at work.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU NOTICE ANY HARASSING BEHAVIOUR

Even if a sexually harassing behaviour is not directly addressed at you, your role is still critical in preventing and combating sexual harassment and violence in your workplace.

So, if you witness or become aware of such an incident:

- Offer moral and practical support and assistance to the victim, always respecting the confidentiality and discretion required in matters so sensitive and personal.
- As long as it is safe for you and the victim, and circumstances permit it, make it clear to the person who committed the harassment that such behaviour is not acceptable in the workplace. Defining the boundaries of problematic behaviours becomes much easier and more effective when done collectively by a whole team, rather than each and every individual person needing to defend their own dignity and safety.
- If you feel that you, as a witness, have also been harassed by such a behaviour, you can make a report through the above channels so that the incident can be investigated appropriately. Otherwise, you can inform the victim of the reporting mechanisms available and support them in any decision they make.
- If the direct victim of sexual harassment makes a formal report, actively show your support by corroborating their testimony.



# MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The following myths are often deep-rooted beliefs that need to be challenged if we are to make a meaningful contribution to tackling sexual harassment at work.

**ALL THESE RULES  
MEAN THAT  
WE CAN'T EVEN  
CRACK A JOKE  
ANYMORE.**

No, they just mean that we should pay more attention to the kind of humor we choose when we are with people who are doing their job. Humor is essential for building healthy and harmonious relationships with people we work with, but in fact jokes with sexual content or innuendos have no place in the workplace. When sharing such a 'joke', it is very easy to offend, even unintentionally, one or more people around you; instead, you could laugh and come closer in a whole host of other, safer and more inclusive ways.

**WOMEN ARE TOO TOUCHY,  
THIS IS WHY  
THEY CONSIDER  
HARASSMENT EVEN  
THE SLIGHTEST THING.**

This myth arises from the fact that, over the years, we do realise that certain behaviours that were once considered socially acceptable are no longer so. But this is not over-sensitivity, it is a social change that affects us all. How can we adapt to the new codes of communication? First of all, we need to practice recognising the 'signals' given by the people around us. We also need to be willing to listen to any feedback we may receive about our problematic behaviour. If we have doubts about what we are allowed or not allowed to say or do, it would be good to:

- a) ask,
- b) choose the safer version («your hairstyle is very nice» instead of «you're breaking hearts with this hairstyle») and/or
- c) reflect on how we would feel if somebody treated a person close to us in one way or another.

**THE WAY THINGS  
HAVE TURNED OUT,  
IT'S VERY LIKELY,  
AS A MAN, TO BE  
FALSELY ACCUSED  
OF SEXUAL  
HARASSMENT.**

**WITH THIS AND THAT,  
WE ARE NO LONGER  
ALLOWED TO FLIRT  
AT WORK.**

False allegations of sexual harassment are extremely rare (only 1.5% of the reports worldwide). It is very hard for any person, either a woman or a man, to embark on the process of making a complaint, which almost always involves risk and psychological costs, unless something has actually happened that has offended their dignity or makes their daily life and work difficult. In any case, this is why it is important for companies to design and implement effective mechanisms for handling and investigating any complaint, thus ensuring protection and fair treatment of any person involved.

Consensual flirting is not sexual harassment. However, in order to be able to flirt respectfully and safely, we have to make sure that the person we are flirting with is willingly participating in the process. If we meet resistance, verbal or non-verbal, at our first approach, we should immediately stop. Moreover, even before we make a compliment or a sexual advance to someone we are working with, it is important to make sure that they have the ability to say «no». If this person is in a far lower position than ours, or if their working conditions are precarious, or if they are particularly vulnerable because of age, disability or because they belong to a minority group, then we should be even more careful in our approach so that we do not, unintentionally, exert any pressure that may eventually turn our courtship into harassing behaviour.

**More myths and truths about sexual harassment & violence at work [here](#).**



# USEFUL LINKS

[Labour Inspectorate](#)

[Ombudsman](#)

[Speak Out Service](#)





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