

From Insight to Impact: New Directions in Sexual Harassment Research

Bratislava, 16. – 17. September 2025

Seminar report with recommendations

SNCHR invited international experts to share latest available results of their research and discuss about the challenges of international research of sexual harassment. The event launched the work of expert group of the international project „*VIOLET – Towards workplaces without sexual harassment and violence*“ on development of the methodological guideline for research activities of the project.

One of the aims of the seminar was to collect recommendations for researchers including both – legal and social-science specialists. This report summarizes main lessons learned, conclusions and recommendations which may be useful for research on sexual harassment not only within the VIOLET project.

1. Research (legal and empirical) needs to take into consideration the latest research findings, available administrative data, EU legislation, advocacy needs.

Information about available data from EU-GBV and planned administrative data collections (EIGE – VAW) and research reports (FRA) were presented by Eva-Esther Sobotka from FRA and Alexandrina Santonai from EIGE. Apart from sharing resources, discussion about identification of data gaps and potential added value of research within project followed:

- EU-GBV survey focused mainly on women based on the definition of sexual harassment according to Istanbul Convention (only few countries collected data on all population). Including experience of men with the sexually harassing behaviour might provide further data about gendered characteristic of sexual harassment (e.g. ability to compare prevalence, forms, intersectionality).
- Some aspects, such as the role of hierarchy structures or gender diversity at the workplace, might vary across industrial sectors. EU-GBV survey suggests that harassing behaviour by co-worker is more common (15.8 %) than by superior colleague (7,4 %). These results might be sector „sensitive“ but EU-GBV survey doesn't provide statistically relevant data disaggregated according to sector of industry.

EU legislation and in that context also the mandate of Equality Bodies was presented by Marta Pompili from EQUINET. Introduced examples of action taken by Equality Bodies, including research, regular monitoring mechanisms, legal analysis or awareness campaigns, illustrated various strategies of using EB mandate. For the research the following conclusions and recommendations were noted:

- Research should focus on duties of states and employers formulated in EU-legislation which will increase utilization of findings in advocacy and policy formation.



- Added value of sector specific empirical research might be more detailed focus on preventive measures and the role of sectoral institutions (e.g. trade unions, professional organisations);
- More accurate „profiles“ of victims and perpetrators are needed to formulate recommendations which address intersectionality, differences in vulnerability across sectors.

2. Theoretical construct for the research of sexual harassment

There are various sources of definitions of sexual harassment including not only legal (national and supranational norms) but also conceptual frameworks based on sociology or social psychology. Available legal definitions of sexual harassment in EU and CoE legal norms and ILO Convention 190 have been introduced and discussed. Another source for defining sexual harassment as a subject of research may be litigation practice – application of the above mentioned supranational norms. From this perspective, independent expert Margarita S. Ilieva guided participants through case studies heard before the European Court of Human Rights.

- Even definitions of SH from supranational legal norms allow consideration of „borderline“ cases – e.g. because they do not require intention, do not limit responsibility of employers on specific form of employment.
- In case that broader theoretical concepts of SH are used (which go beyond legal understanding), it is important that findings are interpreted in the context of legal framework.
- Definition of SH as a form of discrimination was considered as very limited for the research (e.g. excluding sexualized violence).
- Discussion about including or excluding forms of gender-based harassment without sexualized aspect has not been concluded.

3. Development of research tool to provide comparable data in all partner countries

Discussion panel focused on experiences and lessons learned from various international projects which developed surveys and collected data in several countries with an ambition to provide comparable findings, namely from projects [UNISafe](#), [Decent Work Questionnaire](#), [Sexual Harassment at the Workplace](#). Recommendations based on panel discussions are following:

- To eliminate intercultural and cross-national differences a wide peer-reviewed process is necessary – including peer-review of translations into national and minority languages. Translations should follow Guidelines for Translating Surveys in Cross-Cultural Research.
- To ensure intersectional approach a diverse pool of experts developing conceptual framework and survey should include diverse nationalities, professional background and representatives of vulnerable groups.

- Several rounds of piloting (in English and in national languages) is necessary to increase quality of the survey.
- Challenges which are common for international projects – variability in methods of data collection, structure of respondents, tense deadlines, different national legal frameworks, different culture context might impact sensitivity towards SH and therefore result in lower prevalence.

Reflection of recommendations and preparation of work of the VIOLET expert group

Recommendations above were summarized and discussed during the 2nd day of the programme. Participants were invited to comment and respond to more specific questions related to subject of the empirical research. Expert group concluded to focus attention of the research on:

- prevalence;
- preventive measures;
- action taken by employers after reporting;
- impact of SH;
- awareness.

Further inputs were collected by slido.com and discussion. Some of the raised questions included:

- the issue of self-identification for demographic data of quantitative research (sex, gender, ethnicity, disability, etc.);
- scope of behaviour which should be included into the theoretical construct of sexual harassment (e.g. discussion about gender-based harassment, gender-based discrimination, term „moral harassment“);
- combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to ensure reliable results in areas such as effectiveness of preventive measures or impact of sexual harassment on respondents personal and work life.

What should be the primary focus of sector-based research of SH prevalence?

 Anonymous

Understanding the nature of SH, its specific patterns and how its intertwined with institutional/ cultural setup of given sector.

 Anonymous

Only sexual harassment, not gender based discrimination

 Anonymous

Why the help is not accessible now and how to improve this situation

Open text ▾
5 votes

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How to measure accessibility and effectiveness of protective and preventive measures?

👤 Anonymous

Asking about culture within the organisation- how respondents feel in regard to organisations treatment of gender stereotypes and gender-specific experiences.

👤 Anonymous

If there are mechanisms/documents set up - ask whether the employee trusts making use of them would bring any result. Would they actually submit a complaint? Have they? What did the employer do?

👤 Anonymous

Protective - number of complaints, average length of the procedure, how it ended, satisfaction of people involved after the resolution, sanctions involved, whether victimisation happens, whether the sh occurs repetitively by the same person or type

👤 Anonymous

if there are Internal regulations?
How workers are informed?
If the HR department has been trained.
If there have been complaints on SH

👤 Anonymous

We should first ask if there actually are any mechanisms at the workplace

👤 Anonymous

Preventive - percentage of people aware of the internal policy, percentage of people attending trainings, etc, measure change in time

What should be our priority in monitoring the impact of sexual harassment.

👤 Anonymous

Activities taken by the employer for Prevention and Protection.

👤 Anonymous

Experiences, opinions and attitudes of the participants

👤 Anonymous

Career decisions/consequences, mental and physical health

👤 Anonymous

Mental health and long term effect

👤 Anonymous

Whether there were any negative consequences because of reporting SH

Recommendations as well as inputs from discussion served as starting point for expert group work on research design (last session of the programme).