



Preventing violence and harassment in the workplace

info sheet

'The European Parliament ... urges the Commission, the Dublin Foundation and the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work to initiate in-depth studies into bullying'

European Parliament Resolution, 20 September 2001



WHAT is the project about?

There is increasing concern at the growing problem of violence and harassment in the workplace throughout the European Union. The Foundation's Working Conditions Surveys identify violence and harassment in the workplace as a rising trend. Up to 10% of the European Union's working population claim to have experienced harassment in the workplace and about 10% are aware of the existence of physical violence in their workplace during the last year. The project seeks to examine the issues and implications related to this phenomenon and to assess the situation regarding violence and harassment throughout the different Member States.

WHY this research?

The European Parliament adopted a Resolution on harassment in the workplace on 20 September 2001. It stressed the need to further investigate this growing phenomenon and to propose effective measures for combating the problem throughout the European Union. The diversity of definitions of harassment in the workplace as well as the cultural factors surrounding this issue are complex and need to be evaluated in any real attempt to tackle the problem. The research findings aim to stimulate a more comprehensive debate on the issue at a European level.

WHAT are the findings?

Preventing violence and harassment in the workplace, the Foundation's research report published in February 2003, highlights a series of findings concerning the extent, focus and implications of this problem. Most notably the findings underline the overall rising trend of harassment on racial, gender, age and sexual orientation grounds. They also reveal the vulnerability of women in the workplace and the costs to employers and productivity as a consequence of this phenomenon.

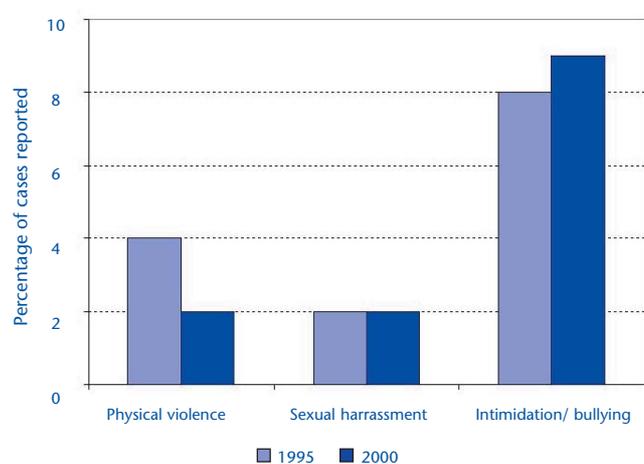
Rising trend

- Nearly one worker in ten claims to have been subjected to intimidation at their workplace.
- Over 7% of EU workers are aware of the existence of physical violence in their workplace while 2% report having experienced physical violence at work.
- Both sexual and racial harassment are increasingly recognised as forms of violence in their own right.
- Harassment at work on the grounds of sexual orientation remains largely taboo in most European countries.
- Racial harassment at work is shown to be a substantial problem.

Women at work

- Women are more vulnerable to violence and harassment in the workplace than men.
- Women are often concentrated in 'high-risk' sectors such as education, health, hotels and restaurants and social public services.
- Sexual offences at work, particularly against women, are commonplace in all European countries but often still go unreported.

TRENDS IN VIOLENCE AT WORK IN EU COUNTRIES



Cost and productivity implications

- Worker productivity can be reduced by about 2% as a result of psychological violence alone.
- Signs of negative financial and productivity implications of harassment at work are increasingly common, with higher absenteeism rates, ill-health and early retirement, high staff turnover and increased insurance premiums.
- Cost estimates reveal considerable financial gains in reducing workplace violence.
- Evidence shows that both physical and psychological violence has serious implications for health and well-being.
- The impact on third parties is increasingly visible, causing job resignations and negatively impacting on relationships with family and friends.

Diversity
as an
Opportunity
for Europe

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Looking to legislation

- Belgium, Finland, France, the Netherlands and Sweden have introduced specific new legislation to tackle the problem.
- Countries such as Ireland, Germany and the UK continue to use existing criminal and civil legislation.
- Denmark and Luxembourg have opted for non-legislative measures such as codes of practice, regulations and collective agreements.
- In Italy and Spain the problem has only recently received any real attention.
- New EU Directives on related areas have recently been introduced.

WHERE to now?

The project completed the first phase of review and research with the publication of the report on *Preventing Violence and Harassment in the Workplace* in early 2003.

- Its findings are to be the subject of further debate and discussion at EU level at a proposed international conference.
- Further research targeting specific sectors, occupations and types of violence at work is necessary to assist policymaking and legislative initiatives at EU and national levels.
- Further European guidelines, training manuals and information material are required to promote a common understanding on the issues between EU Member States.
- There is an urgent need for research and other initiatives in this domain to be carried out in the candidate countries.

Full text:

<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/EF02109.htm> (report)

Further information:

John Hurley at joh@eurofound.eu.int.

Foundation work on related issues:

<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/working/harass.htm>

Violence at work in the European Union: Recent findings

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/violence/eusurvey/eusurvey.htm>

Preventing racism in the workplace: a report of 16 European countries

<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/EF9623.htm> (report)
<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/EF9624.htm> (summary free to download)

European compendium of good practice for the prevention of racism at the workplace

<http://www.eurofound.eu.int/publications/files/EF9751EN.pdf> (summary)