Sexual harassment in the EU and MeToo evaluation

2022/2138(INI) - 01/06/2023 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted with 468 votes to 17, with 125 abstentions, a resolution on sexual harassment in the European Union and MeToo evaluation.

Gender-based violence in all its forms, including sexual harassment, is both a cause and a consequence of gender inequality, discrimination and the violation of human rights. It is a serious obstacle to the participation of women, girls and other victims in all areas of private and public life, preventing them from fully enjoying their rights and fundamental freedoms. In the European Union, one woman in two (55%) has been a victim of sexual harassment at least once since the age of 15.

Strongly condemning all forms of gender-based violence, including sexual violence, and all forms of harassment, in particular sexual harassment, Parliament once again called on the Commission to submit, under Article 83(1) TFEU, a proposal for a Council decision **identifying gender-based violence as a new area of crime**. It also called for swift ratification by the EU and all Member States of the **Istanbul Convention** on preventing and combating violence against women. Sexual harassment must be included as an offence in the field of employment, in accordance with the EU's existing anti-discrimination directives.

Members also stressed the importance of combating **cyber-violence** in the workplace and paying particular attention to women and girls fleeing war, especially those from Ukraine.

Sexual harassment and the MeToo movement in Member States

Members strongly support the international MeToo movement. Since 2017, the MeToo movement has taken hold in some Member States and that, subsequently, changes have been made by governments and organisations to tackle sexual violence, help victims and address the negative consequences for society. Members noted, however, that in some Member States, there has been **little or no progress** in this regard and called on Member States to pro-actively design and implement legislation and policies that tackle sexual violence and harassment in our society.

The Commission and the Member States are invited, *inter alia*, to:

- establish a comprehensive set of **minimum rules** which tackle the persistent problem of sexual harassment and psychological harassment in a holistic manner;

- put in place effective systems and procedures for reporting cases of violence and harassment in the workplace, and develop measures to ensure protection against retaliation or reprisals against complainants, victims, witnesses and whistleblowers;

- make available the necessary resources to encourage the **creation and maintenance of safe spaces in the workplace**, both online and offline, where women, in all their intersectional diversity, can go to exchange information and get help from their peers;

- ensure that laws against sexual harassment in the workplace are **updated** to protect women working remotely from online abuse;

- take into account women's and girls' needs for **safety and security** when commuting to and from work by ensuring a safe public transport service as well as adequate and sustainable street lighting;

- ensure **evidence-based research** on practices and the systematic collection of relevant, anonymised, sex- and age-disaggregated and comparable data on cases of sexual harassment. Members recall that EU law requires Member States and EU institutions and agencies to ensure the existence of an equal treatment body, which provides independent assistance to victims of harassment.

With regard to **harassment in the workplace**, Parliament recommended that external counselling services providing advice on the proper handling of harassment in the workplace should be consulted by employers in order to ensure a safe working environment, to inform them about the remedies available to them, including disciplinary measures, and about the possibility of early conciliation, and to offer legal support and assistance to victims. All workers should be provided with information on anti-harassment procedures and policies at the beginning of their contract.

As sexual harassment affects **people of all genders**, Members stressed the central role of men and boys in ending all forms of harassment and sexual harassment. Men and boys should make a positive contribution to ending all forms of harassment, including sexual harassment, and should be involved in awareness-raising and prevention campaigns.

Member States, in consultation with the social partners, should ensure that employers take action to provide a safe working environment and support for victims, as well as to prevent and deal with cases of sexual harassment, cyber-violence and third-party violence at work.

Harassment in EU institutions

Parliament is convinced that the European institutions should behave as **exemplary employers**, establishing **zero-tolerance** standards towards any type of harassment, working actively on harassment prevention, adequate victim protection and holistic supporting mechanism, countering all forms of discrimination, implementing its rules strictly and enforcing effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions.

Members noted that cases of sexual and psychological harassment are still **under-reported in Parliament** . They called for the existing formal and informal structures within the European Parliament for dealing with harassment to be more visible and professional to ensure that all victims can report in confidence and security.

The resolution recalled that all European institutions have an obligation to put in place all necessary policies and standardised gender sensitive action protocols to prevent and address all forms of harassment and violence. It urged them to ensure that all of the rules in place guarantee a zero-tolerance approach to any forms of misconduct and full support and protection for all victims. Members stressed that **improvements can be made** in all institutions to better protect and assist victims and punish perpetrators.

Parliament welcomed the fact that the current parliamentary term is the first in which Members have had to sign a declaration confirming their commitment to comply with the code of appropriate behaviour, some points of which specifically address harassment. It welcomed the measures implemented under the 'updated roadmap for the adaptation of preventive and early support measures to deal with conflict and harassment between Members and accredited parliamentary assistants (APAs), trainees and other staff'.

While welcoming the harassment prevention training offered to Members, managers in Parliament's Secretariat and staff, Members called for the introduction of **mandatory harassment prevention training**

for all Members at the very beginning of each mandate and for all staff. They also called for all staff working on Parliament's premises to receive regular training on the **‘zero harassment’** policy, so as to give them the means to recognise and report all forms of harassment.