



## Violence against women in the work place...Let's talk about it!

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

#### ***Introduction***

In recent years, national working conditions surveys have shown that an increasing incidence of work-related health problems develop as a result of psychological rather than physical causes<sup>1</sup>. Psychological violence can include different forms of violence such as sexual harassment, bullying or mobbing. Between 40 and 50 per cent of women in the European Union reported some form of sexual harassment in the workplace<sup>2</sup>.

33% of women employed by the Finnish Parliament state that they have experienced sexual harassment in their workplace. In half of the harassment cases, the perpetrator was a Member of Parliament<sup>3</sup>.

A research paper of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions<sup>4</sup> found that in the 31 European countries surveyed, female employees are significantly more exposed to workplace bullying than their male colleagues.

Violence against women is a structural phenomenon arising from patriarchal societies, where the domination of men over women has been naturalised in both public and private life. The *Beijing Platform for Action*, which has been endorsed by all EU Member States, states that "violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women's full advancement."

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<sup>1</sup> European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2007) "Women and Violence at Work", <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2007/110/en/1/ef07110en.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Factsheet, 2006

<sup>3</sup> Finnish Parliament, European Industrial Relations Observatory Online

<sup>4</sup> European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2007) "Women and Violence at Work", <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2007/110/en/1/ef07110en.pdf>

This persistent discrimination against women is very often compounded by a lack of opportunities in both training and education, contributing to lower incomes for women and higher levels of poverty<sup>5</sup>. Indeed violence against women is a reflection of societal gender roles.

In many countries women make up a growing proportion of the workforce. However, a substantial number of female workers are employed in precarious jobs, often with little job-security, unfavourable working conditions and remuneration. This situation is not limited to the industrialised world: many female workers in developing and industrialising countries experience mistreatment and sexual harassment at the workplace. Moreover, whilst a growing number of women are taking on managerial jobs, they are still faced with problems connected to exclusionary or undermining behaviour from men who may consider them a threat. In these cases sexual harassment is frequently used as a tool of control.

### ***Recommendations for the EU***

- To encourage EU Member States to commission research into the issue of violence against women at work and to map the situation
- To encourage and promote the development of family friendly policies in order to support women at work throughout the EU Member States
- To promote the compulsory introduction of an Anti-mobbing Commission in every company/workplace in all Member States
- To encourage EU Member States to revise their labour legislation to include the issue of violence against women
- To promote campaigns to reduce the taboo surrounding violence against women at work and its impact

### ***Recommendations for Member States***

- To organise training for GPs, Occupational Health staff, police departments, Labour Inspectors, Trade Unions, employers and employees, and support for women including self help groups
- To develop a network amongst the National Women's Councils and all the community groups (Churches, Women Organisations, Trade Unions, etc...)
- To support national anti-harassment/anti-mobbing campaigns
- To include the topic of violence against women in all anti-bullying and mental health education programmes

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<sup>5</sup> Report of the IV Conference on Women (1995), <http://www.un.org/esa/gopher-data/conf/fwcw/off/a--20.en>