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Sexual harassment

For many years we have had legislation, policies and complaints processes to deal with sexual harassment and harassment more broadly. But it isn't working and now is the time to recognise the very specific nature of sexual harassment and deal with it properly

HR leading the way

For many years, we have had legislation, policies and complaints processes to deal with sexual harassment and harassment. In Ireland this is covered in the Employment Equality Acts and the relevant Codes of Practice.

In 2019 the Worldwide Independent Network of Market Research (WIN) published the results of an [annual survey](#) focused on gender equality and sexual harassment. Conducted across 40 countries and over 30,000 people, the survey found Ireland has the highest level of claimed sexual harassment in Europe and is among the worst globally

These results and recent media attention highlight the continuing issue of sexual harassment in the workplace, reinforcing that employees do not have adequate protection.

Below we outline actions to take to drive the culture and behavioural change needed to address this unacceptable situation.

Actions

1. Call out inappropriate behaviour when you see it happen in the workplace, especially at a senior level. This is about principled behaviour, conviction and integrity. Yours.
2. Build a culture that champions dignity and respect, a culture that is not in conflict with your policy and Dignity at Work charter. Remember, this is not an overnight phenomenon, it will take investment and commitment from the top down.
3. Put supports in place for staff and possible victims. For example, implement Designated Contact person roles to provide an avenue for people to informally raise and share their concerns and understand how they can take actions and be

supported. A Designated Contact or Support person is usually an employee trained to be a first point of contact for other employees who feel uncomfortable at work and who may be a victim of bullying or harassment/sexual harassment. They are an informal resource to listen to the details and concerns, explain the policy and procedures, and talk through the options available.

4. Train leaders and managers and hold them accountable, both to prevent and call out inappropriate behaviour in their work area and among their colleagues. Use tools such as unconscious bias training to help people see the risks inherent their behaviour patterns
5. Brief in and communicate your policy and procedure and commitment to all staff (again).
6. Generate and report on metrics to show that equality for every individual is taken seriously, has been benchmarked and is being tracked
7. Investigate and take appropriate action around complaints. Revisit your bullying, harassment and sexual harassment policy to ensure the consequences of such behaviours are clear and serious. No exceptions

The current research and level of revelations demonstrate that we have not adequately protected employees in the past. It is critical that sexual harassment is recognised as a different and very specific form of abusive. The time has come to deal with it, to turn over a new leaf and demonstrate the profession's positive impact.