

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination that violates [Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964](#). Title VII applies to employers with 15 or more employees, including state and local governments. It also applies to employment agencies and to labor organizations, as well as to the federal government.

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.

Sexual harassment can occur in a variety of circumstances, including but not limited to the following:

- The victim as well as the harasser may be a woman or a man. The victim does not have to be of the opposite sex.
- The harasser can be the victim's supervisor, an agent of the employer, a supervisor in another area, a co-worker, or a non-employee.
- The victim does not have to be the person harassed but could be anyone affected by the offensive conduct.
- Unlawful sexual harassment may occur without economic injury to or discharge of the victim.
- The harasser's conduct must be unwelcome.

It is helpful for the victim to inform the harasser directly that the conduct is unwelcome and must stop. The victim should use any employer complaint mechanism or grievance system available.

When investigating allegations of sexual harassment, EEOC looks at the whole record: the circumstances, such as the nature of the sexual advances, and the context in which the alleged incidents occurred. A determination on the allegations is made from the facts on a case-by-case basis.

Prevention is the best tool to eliminate sexual harassment in the workplace. Employers are encouraged to take steps necessary to prevent sexual harassment from occurring. They should clearly communicate to employees that sexual harassment will not be tolerated. They can do so by providing sexual harassment training to their employees and by establishing an effective complaint or grievance process and taking immediate and appropriate action when an employee complains.

It is also unlawful to retaliate against an individual for opposing employment practices that discriminate based on sex or for filing a discrimination charge, testifying, or participating in any way in an investigation, proceeding, or litigation under Title VII.

Statistics

Need more information?

The law:

- [Title VII of the Civil Rights Act](#)

The regulations:

- [29 C.F.R Part 1604.11](#)

Enforcement guidances and policy documents:

- [Policy Guidance on Current Issues of Sexual Harassment](#)
- [Enforcement Guidance: Vicarious Employer Liability for Unlawful Harassment by Supervisors](#)
- **See also:** [Questions & Answers for Small Employers on Employer Liability for Harassment by Supervisors](#)
- [Enforcement Guidance on Harris v. Forklift Sys., Inc.](#)
- [Policy Guidance on Employer Liability under Title VII for Sexual Favoritism](#)

You may also be interested in:

- [How to File a Charge of Employment Discrimination](#)
- [Mediation at EEOC](#)
- [Training and Outreach](#)
- [Information for Small Employers](#)

Have a Question?

In Fiscal Year 2007, EEOC received 12,510 charges of sexual harassment. 16.0% of those charges were filed by males. EEOC resolved 11,592 sexual harassment charges in FY 2007 and recovered \$49.9 million in monetary benefits for charging parties and other aggrieved individuals (not including monetary benefits obtained through litigation).

Ask us! Contact us by [phone \(toll free\) or email](#), or [check our FAQs](#).

- [Charge Statistics: Sexual Harassment](#)
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