

# GEI 6: Prevention of and response to sexual harassment

## What is GEI 6?

This GEI measures employer policies, strategies and actions to prevent and respond to sex-based harassment, harassment on the ground of sex or discrimination in the workplace.

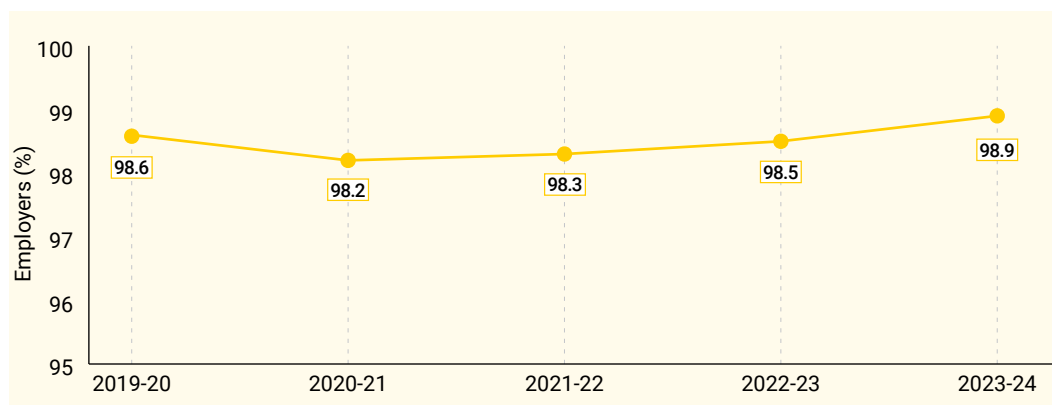
## Why is it important?

Workplace sexual harassment and discrimination is a gender equality issue that predominantly impacts women. To increase women's workforce participation and retention, it is essential employers take action to prioritise and protect all employees from sexual harassment, harassment on the ground of sex or discrimination and ensure that every employee feels safe in the workplace.

Following the *Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces* (the Respect@Work report), in 2023 the government expanded information WGEA could collect from employers about sexual harassment or discrimination. The following tables are the result of the first year of reporting, with the exception of Chart 1 (covering employers with a policy or strategy in place).

Almost all employers have a policy or strategy to prevent sexual harassment or discrimination. More than half (54%) of the 1.1% of employers that did not have a policy indicated that it was under development.

**CHART 1: Proportion of employers with a policy or strategy on the prevention of, and response to, sexual harassment, harassment on the ground of sex or discrimination (change over time, 2019-20 to 2023-24)**



The details of these policies and the inclusions can vary widely by employer.

**TABLE 2: Inclusions in employer policies or strategies on the prevention and response to sexual harassment**

Policy inclusion	Employers (%)
Process to disclose, investigate and manage any sexual harassment	95
A statement on the positive duty of the employer to provide a safe workplace free of sexual harassment	91
Leadership accountabilities and responsibilities for prevention and response to sexual harassment	87
Expectations of manager and non-manager training on respectful workplace conduct and sexual harassment	85
Expectations of safety, respect and inclusive conduct in recruitment materials, contracts and performance management	80
Guidelines for human resources or other designated responding staff on confidentiality and privacy	80
Inclusive and respectful behaviour is part of regular performance evaluation	73
A system for monitoring outcomes of sexual harassment and discrimination complaints, including employment outcomes for complainants and accused perpetrators	60
How risks will be identified and assessed, and how control measures will be monitored, implemented and reviewed	58
Process for development and review of the policy, including consultation with employees, unions or industry groups	51
Expectations and management of personal/intimate relationships	50
Processes relating to the use of non-disclosure or confidentiality agreements	49
The frequency and nature of reporting to the governing body and management on sexual harassment	45
Process for parties to agree on the investigator of an incident	41

Note: Percentage shown is of employers who have a policy or strategy on prevention and response to sexual harassment, harassment on the ground of sex or discrimination.

Most employers (85%) had their sexual harassment and discrimination policy reviewed by the CEO (or equivalent) in the last year. Slightly more than half (55%) had their policy reviewed by the Board.

Communication from these leaders is an important part of setting a respectful culture, with leadership one of the key standards in the Respect@Work framework for better prevention of and response to sexual harassment. WGEA's results show 62% of governing bodies and 91% of CEOs communicated their expectations on safety and respectful and inclusive workplace conduct.

**TABLE 3: Governing body communication about workplace expectations**

Timing of governing body communications	Employers (%)
At new staff induction	25
More than annually	13
Annually	11

Note: Percentage shown is of all employers. Employers could provide multiple responses.



**TABLE 4: CEO or equivalent communication about expectations on safety and respectful and inclusive workplace conduct**

Timing of CEO or equivalent communications	Employers (%)
At new staff induction	25
More than annually	17
CEO has made set expectations for line managers to communicate on respectful behaviour	14
Ahead of big events such as Christmas parties	9
Annually	8
When promoted	0

Note: Percentage shown is of all employers. A small number of employers reported that the CEO or equivalent communicates when staff are promoted. This is shown as zero due to rounding. Employers could provide multiple responses.

Nearly 9 in 10 employers (88%) provide training on the prevention of sexual harassment and discrimination. This training does not always occur at all levels of the organisation.

Almost all training programs cover respectful workplace conduct and different forms of inappropriate workplace behaviour.

**TABLE 5: Proportion of employers providing training to managers, non-managers and governing bodies (employers, %)**

	At induction	At promotion	Annually	Multiple times a year
All managers	76	6	59	7
All non-managers	76	3	57	6
Governing body	48	2	39	4

**TABLE 6: Training program inclusions**

Training program inclusions	Employers (%)
The respectful workplace conduct and behaviours expected of workers and leaders	99
Different forms of inappropriate workplace behaviour (e.g. sexual harassment, harassment on the grounds of sex and discrimination) and its impact	98
Options for reporting occurrences of sexual harassment as well as the risk of sexual harassment occurring	90
Information on worker rights, external authorities and relevant legislation relating to workplace sexual harassment	81
The drivers and contributing factors of sexual harassment	70
Bystander training	62
Diverse experiences and needs of different people, including women, LGBTIQ+ workers, CALD workers and workers with a disability	45
Trauma-informed management and response to disclosures	31
Self-care and vicarious trauma training for employees, witnesses and responding staff	29
Other	5

Note: Percentage shown is of employers who offered training programs.



Most employers (87%) include specific items related to sexual harassment in workplace health and safety risk planning and actions.

**TABLE 7: Inclusions in workplace health and safety risk management process**

Inclusions	Employers (%)
Control measures to eliminate or minimise the identified drivers and risks for sexual harassment so far as reasonably practicable	69
Identification and assessment of the specific workplace and industry risks of sexual harassment	68
Reporting to leadership on workplace sexual harassment risks, prevention and response, incident management effectiveness and outcomes, trend analysis and actions	64
Regular review of the effectiveness of control measures to eliminate or minimise the risks of sexual harassment	55
Consultation on sexual harassment risks and mitigation with staff and other relevant stakeholders (e.g. people you share a premises with)	45
Identification, assessment and control measures in place to manage the risk of vicarious trauma to responding staff	40
None of the above	13

**TABLE 8: Employer actions or responses as part of a workplace sexual harassment risk management process**

Actions/responses	Employers (%)
Train people managers in prevention of sexual harassment	74
Train staff on mitigation and control measures	50
Make workplace adjustments	46
Change or develop new control measures	42
Undertake and act on a culture audit of the relevant business or division	35
Train identified contact officers	30
Implement other changes	10
None of the above	12



Disclosing sexual harassment can be difficult. Employers are deploying multiple options to enable and support safe disclosure.

**TABLE 9: Options for employees who wish to disclose or raise concerns about incidents related to sexual harassment or similar misconduct**

Disclosure process	Employers (%)
Process for disclosure to human resources or other designated responding staff	98
Process to disclose anonymously	68
Process for disclosure to confidential/ethics hotline or similar	60
Process for workers to identify and disclose potential risks of sexual harassment, without a specific incident occurring	60
Process to disclose after their employment has concluded	50
Special procedures for disclosures about organisational leaders and board members	37
Process for disclosure to union/worker representative	29
None of the above	0

Note: A small number of employers reported they have none of the above. This is shown as zero due to rounding.

Employers also provide a range of supports for employees involved in and affected by sexual harassment.

**TABLE 10: Supports provided to workers involved in and affected by sexual harassment**

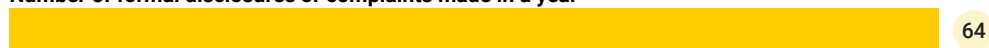
Type of support provided	Employers (%)
Confidential external counselling (e.g. EAP)	95
Reasonable adjustments to work conditions	83
Information provided to all workers on external support services available	71
Trained, trauma-informed support staff/contact officers	33
Union/worker representative support throughout the disclosure process and response	33
Other	6
None of the above	1



Close to 3 in 4 employers (72%) collect data on sexual harassment prevalence (disclosures and complaints) in their workplace.

**CHART 11: Data collected on sexual harassment in the workplace**

**Number of formal disclosures or complaints made in a year**



**Outcomes of investigations**



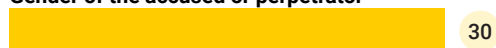
**Number of informal disclosures or complaints made in a year**



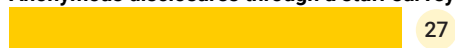
**Gender of the complainant/aggrieved or victim**



**Gender of the accused or perpetrator**



**Anonymous disclosures through a staff survey**



0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70  
(% of employers that collect this data)

Of all employers, 78% report on sexual harassment to the CEO and 67% to the governing body, at least annually.

**TABLE 12: How often reporting on sexual harassment to the governing body and management occurs (employers, %)**

	Regularly/at every meeting	Multiple times per year	Annually
Governing body	20	30	17
CEO, HOBs	27	38	13
KMPs	17	29	11
All managers	8	14	11

Note: Percentage shown is of all employers.

**TABLE 13: Inclusions in reports on sexual harassment to governing body and management**

Inclusion	Employers (%)
Outcome of reports of sexual harassment	61
Nature of workplace sexual harassment	56
Organisational action to prevent and respond to sexual harassment	55
Consequences for perpetrators of sexual harassment	53
Prevalence of workplace sexual harassment	43
Identified risks of workplace sexual harassment	39
Effectiveness of response to reports of sexual harassment	27
Analysis of sexual harassment trends	26
Use and context of non-disclosure agreements or confidentiality clauses	16

Note: Percentage shown is proportion of employers who report on sexual harassment to the governing body and management. Employers could provide multiple responses.

