

THE STOCKHOLM FORUM ON GENDER EQUALITY

THE GLOBAL TRADE UNION MOVEMENT AGAINST SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

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OVERVIEW

Gender-based violence remains one of the most tolerated violations of workers' human rights. According to statistics, 35 per cent of women – 818 million women over the age of 15 globally – have experienced sexual or physical violence at home, in their communities or in their workplace. What is the role of the trade unions and civil society in respect of gender equality and non-discrimination? This panel discussion gave a global and a grass root perspective on the work against sexual harassment and gender-based violence in the workplace. Participants offered a range of solutions, from global policy change to workplace efforts and individual strategies. The seminar also presented a new report produced by Union to Union on global trade union work against gender-based violence.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Where are we?

Trade unions can create consolidated responses to #MeToo. These issues have been discussed and it's in the new International Labour Organisation (ILO) convention on gender-based violence to develop additional tools to meet the needs; however, so far it has only been supported by a few countries.

The report 'Stop gender-based violence at work' was presented:

Thirty-five per cent of women have experienced sexual harassment or physical violence at work. In South Africa the percentage is 77. LGBTI individuals are being bullied to a larger extent than CIS, both concerning discrimination and victimisation.

The global gender gap is around 23 per cent in the world. Issues such as workplace segregation and inequality in remuneration and status are clearly linked to violence. Other common challenges are short-term contracts, informal economies, and unsecure working conditions, especially in sectors such as agriculture, hotels and domestic work. Common quotes: 'They look at your face before they give you a job'; 'In Africa, women have to defend why they need that job.'

In Sweden, women earn 75 per cent of what men earn. Women's work is still regarded less important – 'Still less important to work in the hospital than to make Volvo cars'. If salaries

reflected the level of education, women in Sweden should earn 5 per cent more than men. In Sweden, sexual harassment levels for women is three times higher than for men. More people report that a friend is being harassed at work, rather than reporting for themselves. Temporary employment workers are three times more likely to be exposed to harassment than individuals with full-time employment – and they are most often harassed by colleagues.

Men exposed to harassment often get isolated from discussions even when they too become victims of gender-based violence (GBV).

What are we doing?

Africa: We use roleplay and communication techniques to create a space for discussion and to make people talk about GBV experiences. Creating a song in a particular community has the power to break the status quo. Men stand with posters that say 'I will never commit or stay silent' about GBV. We work with Unilever and sometimes use their products in a campaign.

Unilever, IndustriALL and IUF (International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Association) are good examples of collective agreements. They all include mechanisms on how to deal with sexual harassment complaints.

In International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) unions in India, Nepal, Peru, Brazil, gender advocates were appointed in the workplaces which offered a structure where victims of harassment knew who to turn to and who to talk to about these violations.

Sweden: We worked on implementing a new ILO convention in workplaces, providing more tools. Sweden started a debate on gender equality in the workplace later than in other societal spheres. Today, the trade unions in Sweden, with a majority of male members, are strategically trying to change norms by organising discussions with members about women in the workplace, gender equality, diversity and equal rights.

Swedish trade unions signed the hashtag #Metoo.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Where do we go from here?

We should put pressure on governments to support ILO as soon as possible and create a new ILO convention in the next year. ILO should take a decision next summer which would be a signal for companies and transnational corporations regarding the importance of these issues.

We should call on governments and employers to help them see unions as someone that improves the industry.

There is a need to start the work from within, to contextualise these issues – also within trade unions. Trade unions have a resistance towards discussing GBV and harassment as their main focus and priority is to negotiate wages. This is one of the reasons why women start their own trade unions (for example in India).

There is a need for reporting mechanisms and support – not least from men who are engaged and committed to issues connected to gender equality and GBV. Collective agreements should include paragraphs on harassment and GBV – and these should also be part of global agreements.

There is a need to create safe spaces and give women a voice – and to open for opportunities to take control. We need to create an environment that can work now, regardless of the absence of sufficient laws and structures.

#MeToo was a powerful instrument that can be used in the future to speak out about sexual harassment in the workplace.

The presence of women in management positions within companies and organisations does not mean that issues concerning harassment and GBV automatically will be addressed. Sufficient mechanism and structures are always needed.

We need to transform research into action.

There is a need for programmes targeting men (and boys) to raise awareness of GBV, harassment, gender equality and diversity. ■

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