

PREVENTING AND COMBATING WORKPLACE HARASSMENT – A PREREQUISITE FOR SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY AND HUMAN DIGNITY IN EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIPS

Alexandra TIGHINEANU

PhD, Associate professor,

Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova

E-mail: alexandra.tighineanu@ase.md

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-3770-5501

Abstract: Preventing and combating workplace harassment from a labor law perspective is a highly relevant topic for both employees and employers. The argument for this claim is based on the fact that ensuring a safe and respectful work environment is an essential prerequisite for social sustainability and the protection of human dignity. In the context of global systemic transformations - digitalization, the flexibilization of labor relations, and the expansion of remote work - the risks associated with abusive behavior are taking on new forms, including subtle or virtual manifestations, which affect organizational balance and social cohesion. Based on the international standards regarding violence and workplace harassment promoted by the International Labor Organization, as well as on the European legal framework on equal treatment and non-discrimination, the study highlights the employer's obligation to establish effective mechanisms for prevention, intervention, and protection. Harassment is not merely an individual violation of an employee's rights, but a phenomenon with systemic impact, leading to professional exclusion, social vulnerability, and economic losses. In this regard, labor law is analyzed as a tool for balancing economic efficiency and the protection of human dignity, contributing to the strengthening of organizational and community resilience. The integration of proactive policies to prevent harassment does not constitute an additional burden for employers, but rather an investment in sustainable social development and the long-term stability of labor relations.

Keywords: workplace harassment, human dignity, human rights, organizational efficiency, safe working environment.

Classification: JEL: K1, K2, J7, J8.

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1. Introduction

Workplace harassment is a phenomenon that affects labor relations in contemporary society, regardless of a society's level of development, a company's reputation, an employee's qualifications, his education, or gender. Although this phenomenon is often abstract and concealed, it affects the atmosphere within the legal employment relationship, the health and the dignity of the person involved, the quality of the work performed, and, as a result, organizational efficiency.

In the context of globalization and the growing emphasis on social sustainability, ensuring a safe working environment, fair and free from abusive behavior has become a priority for both employers and lawmakers. Although most countries have aligned their domestic labor laws with international standards prohibiting workplace harassment, and companies have developed specific policies and guidelines to prevent and address the workplace harassment, the phenomenon persists and manifests itself in various forms.

Studying this topic is essential, both to protect employees' fundamental rights and to provide a theoretical framework for employers, especially for the Republic of Moldova, where on January 1, 2026, new provisions of the Labor Code came into force regulating "workplace

violence” and “workplace harassment”, providing a firm legal framework in accordance with the international standards of the International Labour Organization [2019].

This article aims to analyze the characteristics of workplace harassment, its various forms, its underlying causes, as well as the shortcomings in the system for implementing legal provisions that prohibit workplace harassment.

The main objectives of the research are:

- to analyze the concept of workplace harassment;
- to examine the relevant legal regulations;
- to formulate proposals for improving mechanisms to prevent and combat workplace harassment in the Republic of Moldova, based on existing best practices.

These objectives aim to answer the question: to what extent can the prevention and combating of workplace harassment influence social sustainability and respect for dignity in labor relations.

2. Literature Review

The phenomenon of workplace harassment has always existed within the legal framework of employment, even long before employment relationships were formalized by law. However, from the very beginning, these actions were not treated as harassment, but rather as discrimination within the legal framework of employment: women found it harder to advance to management positions and climb the career ladder; subordinates were forced to perform tasks outside their job descriptions; people with disabilities lacked adequate working conditions or were not accepted into the workforce, leading them to quit their jobs or accept substandard working conditions, etc.

According to the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language, the concept of “harassment” is defined in three ways, and namely: causing someone distress through all sorts of annoyances, problems, or questions, as well as nagging or pestering a person; engaging in repeated and contradictory discussions with someone, picking a fight, a brawl, or a scuffle; a short and repeated attack on an enemy, with the aim of causing panic, preventing them from moving, as well as preparing for combat actions. In all cases, “harassment” involves intentional, persistent behavior that threatens and/or disturbs.

The Employee Guide on Preventing Discrimination in Employment Relationships defines harassment as degrading treatment that undermines a person’s dignity by creating a hostile work environment, whether perpetrated by the employer or by colleagues, in cases where the employer fails to take measures to stop the harassment [2015].

The ILO Convention No. 190/2019 stipulates that (a) “violence and harassment” in the workplace refers to a range of unacceptable behaviors and practices, or threats related to their occurrence, whether a single incident or a repeated event, that is intended to, or could result in, physical, psychological, sexual, or economic harm; (b) the term “violence and harassment based on gender” means violence and harassment directed against a person because of their sex or gender or that disproportionately affects persons of a particular sex or gender and includes sexual harassment.

The concept of sexual harassment in the workplace first appeared in the second half of the last century. More specifically, this occurred when, on March 18, 1972, in Toronto, a regular issue of *The Globe and Mail* published an article addressing gender discrimination against women in the performance of their job duties. A year later, the same concept was found in a report authored by M. Rowe and titled *Saturn's Rings* [2015]. At that time, M. Rowe was working at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where she was particularly concerned with how the institution's female employees were treated. Her work proved so effective that the institution in question was recognized as the first major organization in the U.S. to formulate and implement policies designed to prevent sexual harassment of women [2022].

At the end of the 1970s, a report was presented to the Human Rights Commission in New York City by L. Farley, an employee of Cornell University, who was impressed by the fact that a significant number of participants in the discussions mentioned that they had been fired or had been forced to quit their jobs because they had been humiliated or intimidated by male coworkers. Furthermore, firmly convinced that she was acting in the interest of society, L. Farley set out to write the book *Sexual Shakedown: The Sexual Harassment of Women on the Job*, which she published in 1978.

In this regard, we will mention the main international legal instruments adopted since 1948 that have emphasized the prohibition of discrimination in the workplace, indirectly including the prohibition of harassment, which is a form of discrimination.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948 provides, in the Article 23, that everyone has the right to work, to the free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work, and to protection against unemployment. The right to work also includes the opportunity, equal for all, to be promoted in their work to an appropriate higher category, taking into account the length of service and the abilities of each individual. Remuneration for work performed must be fair, free from any form of discrimination, and must ensure a decent standard of living for the worker and his or her family.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted in 1966 - The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to guarantee that the rights enunciated in it shall be exercised without discrimination of any kind on the grounds of race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination adopted in 1965: In this Convention, the term "racial discrimination" refers to any distinction, exclusion, restriction, or preference based on race, color, ancestry, or national or ethnic origin, which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, and cultural fields or in any other field of public life.

The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women [1979]: For the purposes of this Convention, the term "discrimination against women" means any distinction, exclusion, or restriction based on sex that has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality between men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in the political, economic, social, cultural, and civil spheres or in any other field.

Under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [2006], States Parties will protect and promote the right to work of persons with disabilities, including: protecting the rights of persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others, in terms of fair and favorable working conditions, including equal opportunities and equal pay for equal work, health and safety conditions at work, protection against harassment, and conflict resolution.

The Revised European Social Charter [2006], Article E, provides that the rights recognized in this Charter must be ensured without distinction as to race, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, health, membership of a national minority, birth, or any other status.

The ILO Convention No. 111 concerning Non-Discrimination [1958] (Employment and Occupation) of 1958 – which obliges the States Parties to pursue a national policy aimed at promoting, through methods adapted to national conditions and customs, equal opportunities and treatment in matters of employment and the exercise of a profession, regardless of a person's race, color, sex, religion, political beliefs, national descent, or social origin.

In this context, it is also worth mentioning *The Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000* implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, *The Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000* establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation, *The Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006* on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (reform).

The international regulatory framework on workplace harassment is dominated by the *ILO Convention No. 190/2019* on the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work, the first international treaty that obliges states to eliminate violence and harassment in the world of work, including gender-based violence and harassment, it protects workers regardless of their contractual status and extends beyond the physical workplace (communications, travel), it is the first international instrument to establish specific, globally applicable standards on combating work-related harassment and violence and to clearly specify the roles of governments and social partners in preventing, addressing, and remedying harassment and violence, protecting workers in both the formal and informal economies. It defines harassment as unacceptable behavior and mandates measures for prevention, protection, and punishment.

On March 19, 2025, The International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 190/2019 [2019] on combating violence and harassment in the world of work entered into force in the Republic of Moldova.

The Convention 190 aims to ensure that every person has the right to a safe, dignified, and abuse-free workplace. It introduces clear rules to combat violence and harassment in the workplace, defining these phenomena in all their forms and establishing clear obligations for employers. Most importantly, it guarantees protection against retaliation for those who have the courage to speak out.

The ILO Recommendation No. 206 (2019) supplements the Convention by providing practical guidance to member states on the implementation of national policies.

The legal framework of the Republic of Moldova also contains provisions regarding the prohibition of discrimination and harassment in the workplace, in particular:

The article 43 of the *Constitution of the Republic of Moldova* [1994] stipulates that every person has the right to work, to freely choose their occupation, to fair and satisfactory working conditions, and to protection against unemployment.

Law No. 5-XVI of February 9, 2006, defines harassment as any form of physical, verbal, or nonverbal behavior of a sexual nature that violates a person's dignity or creates an unpleasant, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or insulting atmosphere.

The Law on Ensuring Equality No 121 of May 25, 2012 [2012], defines the concept of harassment as: any unwanted conduct that creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment, with the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity based on the criteria stipulated by this law.

The article 55 of the Administrative Offenses Code of the Republic of Moldova No. 218 of October 24, 2008 [2008], provides for penalties for violations of labor law, manifested by: i) the employer's failure to implement measures to prevent and combat cases of discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace; j) preventing, in any form, the reporting of cases of discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace, shall be punished by a fine of 30 to 60 conventional units imposed on a natural person, a fine of 70 to 120 conventional units imposed on a person in a position of responsibility, and a fine of 150 to 240 conventional units imposed on a legal entity.

The Labor Code of the Republic of Moldova [2003] has been supplemented with a series of provisions prohibiting workplace harassment, which took effect on January 1, 2026.

The updated legal framework includes new articles (8/1) and (8/2), titled "The Prohibition of Violence and Harassment in the Workplace," which specify the expanded scope of application, including auxiliary spaces, time spent on work-related assignments, and digital environments. Additionally, the article 8/2, "Detailed Regulation of the Internal Reporting and Investigation Procedure," also regulates the mandatory internal procedure for employers, ensuring the confidentiality and accessibility of reports, the appointment of independent individuals or committees for investigation, guaranteeing a maximum period of 45 days for resolving cases, and the application of temporary protective measures for victims.

In light of the recent amendments, employees enjoy enhanced rights, while employers benefit from increased obligations, including clear disciplinary liabilities: violence and harassment are recognized as serious disciplinary offenses, which may lead, where appropriate, to termination of employment.

Additionally, the Law No. 194/2025 introduces the employer's financial liability for damages caused by failure to fulfill the obligation to prevent and combat such acts, as well as the financial liability of employees who commit acts of violence or harassment in a professional context, particularly in cases of damage caused to the employer.

To ensure a balance between the level of protection afforded to employees and the actual capacity to implement the obligations imposed on employers, the Law No. 194/2025 [2025] introduces a differentiated regime. Thus, the obligations regarding the development and formal implementation of internal policies, the establishment of structured reporting and investigation procedures, as well as the designation of trained individuals or committees to handle cases of violence and harassment apply specifically to employers with at least 50 employees.

In case of employers with fewer than 50 employees, they are not exempt from the obligation to prevent violence and harassment, but they are required to adopt reasonable and appropriate measures, proportionate to the size, structure, and nature of their operations.

A review of the literature reveals that the issue of workplace harassment -including its prevention and combating - has not been sufficiently studied in the Republic of Moldova, particularly in light of the new regulations that have recently come into effect.

The person who introduced and established the concept of workplace bullying in professional circles was the Swedish researcher Heinz Leymann, who used the term “mobbing” to describe a range of aggressive psychological actions, including injustice, denigration, psychological harassment, vexation, professional discrediting, and mockery in the workplace. The Swedish researcher proposes two definitions: a) the milder one: mobbing is described as a form of “harassment” in the workplace; b) the more radical one: which he calls “psychological terror in the workplace” [1996].

The Romanian author Alexandru Țiclea defines workplace bullying as “the isolation of the victim and the prevention of their ability to perform their job duties, creating a hostile, unfavorable environment that makes it impossible to continue working” [2015].

Another group of Romanian authors defines workplace bullying as behavior that is exclusively linked to the workplace and primarily refers to acts of psychological pressure exerted on an employee by an employer or a group of colleagues to compel that employee to leave their position, “in circumstances where their dismissal is not possible, lacks valid grounds from the perspective of the employee’s professional conduct, and/or would result in legal issues for the employer.” [2010]

In most cases, the topic is addressed in various guides or studies on the subject, or as presentations at scientific conferences. Tatiana Macovei, an author from the Republic of Moldova, addresses the topic of workplace bullying. She argues that workplace bullying refers to a chronic emotional conflict involving an employee who is attacked, stigmatized by colleagues or supervisors in any way - whether through jokes and rumors, intimidated, humiliated, discredited, or isolated, he is given more tasks than they can handle, or is ridiculed or unjustly accused. And through one or more of these actions, their emotional state and professional life are endangered, leading to a heightened state of stress, decreased self-esteem, anxiety, reduced work capacity, behavioral disorders, or an alteration of psychophysiological balance.[2021]

Dumitru Stoica argues that the problem with preventing workplace harassment lies in the fact that Moldovan legislation does not explicitly define the responsibilities of the institutions legally empowered to prevent sexual harassment and provide assistance to victims, and that the shortcomings of the legal framework are sometimes addressed only through institutional practices.[2021]

In the scientific article “Harassment in the Workplace: Impact, Causes, and Solutions for a Healthy Professional Environment,” Dița Maria and Groza Angela argue that “Preventing this phenomenon is essential, and the organizations must adopt clear anti-harassment policies and train employees and leaders to recognize and address such behaviors.” [2024]

Mihai Şleahţîchi addresses the topic of sexual harassment in the workplace by developing course notes for public servants [2022]. Romanian authors Aninoşanu, L., Martiş, D., and Sorescu, I. address the topic of sexual harassment in the workplace in the Practical Guide

for Managers, Human Resources Managers, and Union Representatives: How to Manage Situations of Sexual Harassment. [2007]

Another group of authors - Ivaşcu, R., Covrig, N., Vieru, V., Țurcan, A., and Buzu, A. - addresses the issue of sexual harassment in the workplace from a psychological perspective within the context of policy recommendations: How to Prevent and Reduce Sexual Harassment in the Workplace and related studies [2026].

The phenomenon of workplace harassment has been extensively analyzed in the specialized literature, being addressed from psychological, sociological, and legal perspectives. In the legal doctrine, harassment is defined as repetitive, abusive behavior intended to, or having the effect of, undermining the dignity, mental, or physical integrity of the employee. Numerous authors emphasize the systematic nature of this phenomenon, which is often associated with the concept of “mobbing” in the professional environment.

From a theoretical perspective, studies frequently draw on organizational climate theory and models of occupational stress, which explain how the work environment and interpersonal relationships can generate abusive behaviors. Furthermore, legal approaches emphasize the protection of employees’ fundamental rights, particularly the right to dignity at work and to a safe working environment.

Empirical research highlights the significant impact of harassment on employees’ mental health, including the onset of anxiety, depression, and a decline in work performance. At the same time, the literature indicates that many cases go unreported, either due to fear of retaliation or the lack of effective protection mechanisms. In this context, the employer’s role in preventing and combating harassment is considered essential.

However, the specialized literature reveals certain gaps. First, there is a limited number of studies analyzing the phenomenon of harassment in the specific context of the Republic of Moldova. Secondly, the relationship between harassment prevention and the concept of social sustainability has been insufficiently explored. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the existing regulatory framework and its practical application remain issues that require further analysis. In this context, the present study aims to contribute to the existing literature through an integrated analysis of workplace harassment from both legal and social perspectives.

3. Methodology

This study is primarily theoretical and applied in nature and falls within the realm of qualitative research, focusing on the analysis of workplace harassment from legal and social perspectives. The structure of the study is built around an examination of the legal framework, the relevant literature, and a critical interpretation of both.

The methods used in conducting the study include doctrinal analysis, through the examination of relevant scholarly works in the fields of labor law and the social sciences, as well as normative analysis, which focuses on studying the legislative acts applicable to the prevention and combating of workplace harassment. Furthermore, the method of logical-legal analysis was employed to interpret legal provisions and assess their effectiveness.

The choice of these methods is justified by the nature of the subject under analysis, which requires a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach. The methods used allow for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of harassment, as well as an assessment of

the existing legal framework, contributing to the formulation of well-reasoned conclusions and proposals for improvement.

The research took into account the forms of harassment, the consequences for both employees and employers, and the effectiveness of prevention and response mechanisms, all of which were analyzed through the lens of the regulatory framework and the specialized literature.

The data sources utilized in the research consist of national and international legislative acts, specialized literature (books, scientific articles), as well as relevant documents and reports prepared by international organizations.

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The study examined the various forms of harassment, its consequences for both employees and employers, and the effectiveness of prevention and response mechanisms, analyzing these issues through the lens of the regulatory framework and the relevant academic literature.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis conducted highlights the fact that the workplace harassment is recognized at the regulatory level and is governed by legal provisions aimed at protecting the dignity of employees. However, the research findings indicate that there are gaps in the effective enforcement of these regulations. In particular, it was found that mechanisms for preventing and sanctioning harassment are not always sufficiently clear or accessible to employees.

Moreover, these regulations are relatively new for the Republic of Moldova. According to data provided by the International Labor Organization (ILO), more than one in five people (nearly 23%) who work have been subjected to violence and harassment in the workplace, whether physical, psychological, or sexual [2022].

The violence and the harassment in the workplace are difficult to measure. The ILO report found that only half of victims worldwide disclosed their experiences to someone else, and often only after suffering more than one form of violence and harassment. The most common reasons cited for not disclosing were “wasting time” and “fear for their reputation.” Women were more likely to share their experiences than men (60.7% compared to 50.1%).

Globally, 17.9% of employed men and women reported experiencing psychological violence and harassment in their working lives, and 8.5% experienced physical violence and harassment, with more men than women experiencing this. Of those surveyed, 6.3% reported experiencing sexual violence and harassment, with women particularly at risk.

The groups most likely to be affected by different types of violence and harassment include young people, migrant workers, and women and men in employment. Young women were twice as likely as young men to have experienced sexual violence and harassment, and migrant women were almost twice as likely as non-migrant women to report sexual violence and harassment. More than three in five victims reported experiencing workplace violence

and harassment more than once, and for the majority, the most recent incident occurred in the last five years [2022].

According to Euro found data, of the total number of people reporting various forms of adverse social behavior at work, 5.1% of men and 6.8% of women experience bullying, harassment and violence at work, and 0.8% of men and 2.9% of women experience unwanted sexual attention [2023].

The same report states that people who experience adverse social behavior at work are around three times more likely to experience physical and emotional exhaustion (32% compared to 10%) and emotional exhaustion (40% compared to 14%), and almost twice as likely to suffer from anxiety (53% compared to 27%) or be at risk of depression (38% compared to 20%)

Adverse social behavior in the workplace poses a significant risk to the health and well-being of workers. It can have a long-term impact on individuals – some studies show that the effects can persist for years after the initial incident(s) – and can also affect their families, colleagues, employers and wider social circles in general.

Analyzing the situation of workplace harassment in the Republic of Moldova, we can mention that there is no updated data on this phenomenon, the most recent data being from 2020 and focusing in particular on sexual harassment of women in the workplace.

A survey conducted by the Partnership for Development Center, in collaboration with UN Women, reveals that almost 25% of female employees interviewed have faced some form of sexual harassment in work-related contexts. Of these, 22.4% were subjected to subtle and moderate forms of harassment such as obscene gestures, sexual jokes, inappropriate touching or hugging without permission. Another 2% of women said they had faced serious forms, including requests to have sexual relations in exchange for benefits or through threats [2020].

However, the phenomenon remains underreported. According to the study, only 14.5% of female employees who have faced cases of sexual harassment had the courage to report them. Most women, however, complained or sought help from family members, especially their husbands. Only a fifth of them turned to the competent authorities.

According to the Equality Council Report for 2025, the institution continues to be notified of situations of harassment in employment relationships, a phenomenon characterized by unwanted behaviors that generate an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment and that have the purpose or effect of harming the dignity of the person based on protected criteria [2025].

Among the most common grounds for harassment reported by employees include:

- harassment in the workplace based on gender;
- harassment in the workplace based on gender;
- harassment in the workplace based on the criteria of a person who has been rehabilitated and victimization;
- harassment in the workplace based on the criteria of political affiliation.

Thus, within the framework of labor relations, we distinguish the following categories of harassment:

- Physical harassment is the use of force or violence to intimidate, control or subdue a person in the workplace. This can include direct physical aggression, such as hitting, pushing or blocking a person's path. Other manifestations include the intentional damage to personal or work property, as well as threatening gestures that induce fear. This type of harassment has a severe impact on the victim, generating a feeling of insecurity, stress and even the risk of injury.
- Verbal harassment consists of the use of language as a means of humiliating, intimidating or discouraging a person. This can take the form of insults, ridicule or derogatory nicknames. Discriminatory comments related to race, gender, age, religion or other personal characteristics also constitute verbal harassment. Spreading defamatory rumors or unjustified criticism are other common forms.
- Psychological harassment, also known as mobbing, involves a series of hostile and systematic behaviors directed against a person. These behaviors include intentionally ignoring the employee, isolating him/her from the team, overloading him/her with excessive tasks or, conversely, excluding him/her from the main activities.
- Moral harassment aims to affect the dignity and moral integrity of a person. This can be manifested by direct or subtle threats to the victim's career or reputation. Some behaviors include creating a hostile or intimidating environment, constantly disregarding professional contributions, or deliberately hindering professional development by blocking promotions.
- Sexual harassment is a serious form of abuse, characterized by unsolicited advances, comments or gestures with sexual connotations. Examples include requesting sexual favors in exchange for professional benefits, obscene comments, jokes or displaying materials with explicit content.

The analysis of the specialized literature also reveals that many cases of harassment remain unreported, which limits the effectiveness of institutional interventions. This finding is supported by previous studies, which emphasize the existence of psychological and organizational barriers to reporting abusive behaviors.

Currently, as a result of the amendments made to the labor legislation of the Republic of Moldova regarding harassment in the workplace, employers with at least 50 employees are obliged to develop and implement internal policies to prevent and combat violence and harassment. They are also required to establish clear and confidential procedures for reporting and investigating complaints, ensuring the protection of persons who have reported acts of violence or harassment, as well as to periodically inform employees about their rights.

The provisions are less strict in the case of employers with less than 50 employees, who are required to adopt reasonable and appropriate measures to prevent and combat violence and harassment at work, depending on the number of employees, the nature of the activity and the organizational structure. This fact offers hope that the discrepancy between the existing regulatory framework and the practical reality in the professional environment regarding the prevention and combat of harassment at work will disappear.

A relevant example of good practice in preventing and combating harassment at work is the implementation of clear and coherent internal policies at the organizational level. Thus, some organizations adopt codes of conduct that explicitly define unacceptable behaviors, including forms of harassment, and establish transparent procedures for reporting and resolving

complaints. An effective practice consists of establishing confidential reporting mechanisms that allow employees to report cases of harassment without fear of retaliation. These mechanisms are complemented by the designation of persons or departments responsible for managing these situations, ensuring impartiality and protection of the parties involved.

At the European Union level, preventing and combating harassment at work is a priority, supported both by regulations and by institutional and organizational initiatives. A relevant example is the policies promoted by the European Commission, which has developed guides and strategies on combating harassment and promoting a safe working environment. The European institutions apply "zero tolerance" policies towards harassment, including clear reporting, investigation and sanctioning procedures.

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work also actively promotes good practices in the field of preventing psychosocial risks, including harassment. It recommends regular assessment of workplace risks and the involvement of employees in the development of effective internal policies.

At the national level, a notable example is France, where labor law provides clear obligations for employers to prevent moral harassment ("harcèlement moral"). Employers are obliged to adopt preventive measures, and failure to comply with them may result in legal liability. Another example is Sweden, where the approach is proactive, based on prevention. Employers must identify and manage psychosocial risks, including harassment, through internal policies, training and constant monitoring of the organizational climate.

These examples demonstrate that, in the European space, combating workplace harassment is based on a combination of strict legal regulations and proactive organizational measures. Implementing such practices contributes not only to protecting the dignity of employees, but also to strengthening social sustainability and a healthy working environment.

Also, the periodic organization of training and awareness programs for employees and managers is another essential measure. They contribute to the early identification of abusive behavior and to the promotion of an organizational culture based on respect and equality.

In addition, some organizations implement regular assessments of the organizational climate, through anonymous questionnaires, in order to identify the risks of harassment and adopt appropriate preventive measures. These good practices demonstrate that the prevention of harassment does not depend exclusively on the legal framework, but also on the active involvement of employers in creating a safe and dignified working environment, thus contributing to the social sustainability of organizations.

5. Conclusions

In the current context of the professional environment, investigating and understanding the phenomenon of the harassment in the workplace has become topics of vital importance. This issue is complex and has serious repercussions both on the harassed individual and on the organization as a whole. Harassment in the workplace can lead to a toxic culture in the organization. When harassment is tolerated or ignored, it can create an environment in which employees feel insecure and unappreciated. This can lead to a decrease in commitment and loyalty to the organization and can hinder collaboration and innovation within the team.

The absence of an inclusive and tolerant work climate within organizations favors the maintenance and amplification of the phenomenon of harassment. Leaders who do not attach adequate importance to diversity and the principle of equal opportunities can contribute, even indirectly, to tolerating discriminatory behaviors, which leads to their institutionalization at the organizational level.

Workplace harassment not only has negative effects on victims, but also significantly affects the functioning of the organization as a whole, influencing its performance and reputation. From a financial perspective, studies highlight the fact that organizations that do not effectively manage harassment cases incur considerable costs, both direct and indirect. Direct costs include expenses related to litigation, compensation for victims and legal sanctions applied [2020]. These can become particularly high, especially in situations where the organization is involved in lengthy processes, which involve a significant consumption of financial resources and can affect its ability to attract investment or sustain its development.

The indirect costs are also considerable. These include the decreased productivity of harassed employees, who become demoralized and desperate to perform in a hostile environment. Frequent absences due to stress or depression, as well as high staff turnover due to the departure of employees who do not feel supported or protected, can seriously affect the overall performance of the company [2021].

Workplace harassment significantly affects the reputation of the organization, both internally and externally. Public exposure of such cases can diminish the trust of customers and partners, generating financial losses and difficulties in attracting new human resources. At the same time, the perception of a toxic work environment reduces the competitiveness of the organization and contributes to decreased employee retention [2020].

Given the significant psychosocial and employment risks, it is imperative that public policies address the need to improve the quality of jobs. Both prevention and protection – including victim support – are essential [2023].

In light of recent legislative changes, the regulatory framework of the Republic of Moldova in the field of preventing and combating violence and harassment at work has been significantly strengthened, reflecting a clear orientation towards protecting dignity in employment relationships. The introduction of detailed regulations on the scope of application, internal reporting and investigation procedures, as well as the establishment of increased obligations on employers contribute to the creation of a more efficient and accessible legal mechanism for managing these situations.

At the same time, the express enshrinement of harassment and violence as serious disciplinary offenses, along with the establishment of material liability, highlights a firmer approach of the legislator in sanctioning these behaviors. The differentiated regime introduced depending on the size of the employer ensures a necessary balance between the protection of employees and the practical capacity to implement legal obligations.

However, the efficiency of these regulations depends essentially on their effective application and the assumption of responsibility at the organizational level. In this regard, it is necessary not only to formally comply with legal requirements, but also to develop an organizational culture based on respect, prevention and responsibility. Thus, the new legislative amendments constitute an important step towards strengthening social

sustainability and guaranteeing dignity at work, but their real impact will be determined by the way in which they are integrated and applied in practice.

Under these conditions, it is necessary to take measures to prevent and combat harassment in the workplace, so that it does not affect social sustainability and dignity in employment relationships. These can be mentioned:

- the need to strengthen managerial training in the field of effective management techniques and early identification of harassment situations. Developing communication and leadership skills can significantly contribute to preventing this phenomenon within organizations.
- promoting organizational culture and the real involvement of management in promoting a work environment based on respect and professionalism. Organizations that manage to maintain a healthy climate are those that consistently integrate and apply anti-harassment policies in their fundamental values and practices.
- strengthening institutional mechanisms for the protection of victims of harassment, in order to ensure a safe and fair work environment.
- systematically evaluating the effectiveness of implemented policies and procedures, in order to adapt them to the dynamics of the harassment phenomenon.

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