

Sexual Harassment at Work

Equality Factsheet



Overview

From **30 October 2026**, workplace protections against sexual harassment and harassment by third parties will be strengthened under the **Employment Rights Act 2025**.

The changes place greater responsibility on employers to prevent harassment before it happens, rather than simply responding after an incident has taken place

What is Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is **unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature** that either:

- Violates someone's dignity; or
- Creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

It can be a **one-off incident** or an **ongoing pattern of behaviour** and can happen both **in person and online**. Sexual harassment can affect anyone, regardless of their sex or sexual orientation.

Examples can include sexual comments or jokes, questions about someone's sex life, unwanted touching, comments about someone's body or appearance, or or sharing sexual images or content. Behaviour described as workplace **"banter"** can still amount to sexual harassment.

What is changing on 30th October 2026?

Stronger Duty on Employers

Currently, employers must take **"reasonable steps"** to prevent sexual harassment.

From **30 October 2026**, employers will instead be required to take **"all reasonable steps"**.

This means employers will be expected to take **all reasonable preventative measures for their organisation**, rather than choosing only some. What is reasonable will depend on factors such as the organisation's size, sector and the type of work employees carry out.

Preventing Harassment – Not Just Responding to It

The new duty places greater emphasis on **prevention**.

Employers should consider the risks of sexual harassment across their organisation and put measures in place before incidents occur. These protections should cover both **in-person and online harassment** and apply across the workplace, rather than only to individuals or teams where a previous incident has occurred.

Protection from Third-Party Harassment

From **30 October 2026**, employers can also be held liable when a worker is harassed by a **third party**, unless the employer has taken all reasonable steps to prevent it.

A third party could include:

- Customers or clients
- service users
- contractors or consultants
- people attending conferences or events
- other members of the public encountered through work.

Third-party harassment can take place **in person or online**.

What Should Employers Do?

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) aims to improve organisations and working life through better employment relations, working with employers and employees to solve problems and improve performance.

Acas recommends that employers start preparing for the changes before they come into force. Depending on the organisation, this could include reviewing and updating harassment policies, assessing risks, providing appropriate training, giving workers more than one way to report concerns, monitoring incidents and ensuring measures are in place to prevent harassment rather than simply responding when it occurs.

For third-party harassment specifically, employers should also consider **who their workers interact with**, review relevant customer, client, or supplier arrangements where appropriate, and make it clear that harassment of workers will not be tolerated.

What Does This Mean for Workers?

The changes mean workers should have stronger protection from harassment at work, including harassment from people outside their organisation.

Employers will have a greater responsibility to identify risks, take preventative action and create a workplace where sexual harassment and other forms of third-party harassment are not tolerated.

It is also worth mentioning that, since **6 April 2026**, disclosures about sexual harassment can qualify for protection under whistleblowing law. This can protect workers from detriment and, for employees, automatic unfair dismissal where the legal requirements for whistleblowing are met.

Key Date: 30 October 2026

Employers must take ALL reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment and harassment by third parties.

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