

Forum: United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)

Issue: Addressing the Sexualised Biases in the Work Environment

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1. Introduction

a. Definition of the Term "Sexualised Biases"

Systematic, cultural, social or individual-level iniquity, exclusion, discrimination and physical or mental abuse based on a person's gender or sexual identity in the workplace are referred to as *sexualised biases*. Sexualised bias is an umbrella term for all types of gender-based inequality or mistreatment towards women and LGBTQ+ related people based on certain stereotypes, tokenism, harassment and sexual objectification.

b. Importance

Sexualised biases are not only an issue concerning workplaces but also *a threat to basic human rights*. The right to be employed in a safe working environment is every individual's right. Yet, millions of women and LGBTQ+ related people all over the globe experience discrimination, harassment and violence in many forms because of their gender or sexual orientation. Moreover, *no community is immune to this growing issue* for sexualised biases are seen in both developing and developed countries. Women are being excluded from promotions, queer individuals are suppressed regardless of whether they have come out¹ or not, and trans individuals are often entirely rejected by employers. For example, statistics from UNWOMEN state that *for every dollar earned by men, women earn 77*

¹ "Come out" means to openly announce one's sexual orientation, a term used specifically for queer people.

cents – which contributes to the pay gap². All these imply the relevance of this issue on a global scale.

c. The Aim of the Study Guide

UNHRC is an international organ aiming to sustain equality among all. To uphold basic human rights, addressing the sexualised biases in the work environment is a significant step. Affecting millions of individuals' mental health, financial independence, safety and social status, sexualised biases need to be considered in order to establish equality between all sexes and sexual identities. This study guide aims to guide the delegates before and during the conference by providing all necessary information regarding the agenda.

2. Key Terms

- Gender Identity: A person's perception of their gender. A person's gender identity may or may not agree with the biological sex. Gender identity includes female, male, non-binary etc.
- Sexual Orientation/Identity: A person's repeating pattern of romance or sexual attraction towards individuals from the same and/or opposite gender.
- Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI): A term often used to refer to LGBTQ+ community within UN texts.
- CEDAW: Adopted by the UN in 1979, CEDAW addresses sex-based discrimination against women and aims to eliminate such issues.
- Glass Ceiling: A term used for the boundaries depriving women from having access to upper-level positions in organisations and companies in spite of their success and achievements.
- Tokenism: The act of making a subtle, ineffective effort to employ a very small number of people from minorities only to seem to care about sexual or racial equality.

² “Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value.” n.d. UN Women – Headquarters. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/csw61/equal-pay>.

- Pay Gap: Inequality of wages between two communities despite the same amounts of work. Throughout this study guide, the term “pay gap” will be used to address the difference in income between women and men.

3. History

a. Discrimination Against Women

Discrimination against women due to sexualised biases is centuries old. Women have always been subjected to *systematic barriers* all throughout their lives. Mainly in the 18th and 19th centuries, as the Industrial Revolution altered the society as a whole, women began entering the labour community and the barriers they were put under expanded to workplaces as well. Those barriers included *poor access to all levels of education, pay gaps and violence in the workplace*. Although women did equal shares of work compared to men, their labour was mostly *undervalued and underpaid*. Since women's labour was cheap, employers were prone to hire women for more demanding and exploitative jobs that took long hours and had poor work safety. In contrast, women were also sexually discriminated against as they were perceived weak and untalented compared to men. In the following years, this inadequate treatment towards women in workplaces based on sexualised biases spread to many areas and eventually gave rise to the “Women's Suffrage Movement” which aimed to enhance women's social, financial and political status³.

b. 20th Century Milestones

After the Women's Suffrage Movement gathered international attention, several legislative improvements were established aiming to handle workplace discrimination towards women based on sexualised biases. In particular, The Civil Rights Act of 1964 addressed employment discrimination originating from sexualised biases⁴. Similarly, in 1998, the

³ “Women's Suffrage.” n.d. National WWI Museum and Memorial. <https://www.theworldwar.org/learn/about-wwi/womens-suffrage>.

⁴ Wikipedia contributors. 2025. “LGBTQ Employment Discrimination in the United States.” Wikipedia. May 11, 2025. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBTQ_employment_discrimination_in_the_United_States.

United States (US) Supreme Court decided the extension of employment legislatures to include sexual harassment in workplaces⁵.

c. LGBTQ+ Rights Movement

LGBTQ+ community have been exposed to sexualised biases not only in workplaces but also in every area of life for decades. An example to this is the "Lavender Scare" taking place in the US in 1950s. During this discrimination process, *LGBTQ+ individuals were systematically dismissed* from high-ranking positions in companies and businesses⁶. A milestone was the Stonewall Riots taking place in New York in June 1969, when a group of *LGBTQ+ individuals resisted against police raid and sparked protests* that would last for days⁷. This event led to the inclusion of LGBTQ+ community rights in modern law.

d. Mentions at the UN

In the following decades, efforts to eliminate discrimination against LGBTQ+ community based on sexualised biases spread to UN. For instance, in July 2014, UN extended its labour laws to include the recognition of same-sex marriages between employees in workplaces so that parents would benefit from rights such as maternity leave⁸. This move was highly significant for it was the first time the UN recognised the legitimacy of homosexual marriage.

4. Understanding the Status Quo

a. Sexualised Biases and Their Impact

- Hiring: Several studies have shown that job applicants affiliated with LGBTQ+ community in any way were significantly less likely to be

⁵ "Detailed Timeline - National Women's History Alliance." 2023. National Women's History Alliance. October 9, 2023. <https://nationalwomenshistoryalliance.org/resources/womens-rights-movement/detailed-timeline/>.

⁶ Porter, Rob. 2022. "A Brief History of LGBTQ Equality in the Workplace." *Vault by Infobase* (blog). June 9, 2022. <https://vault.com/blogs/diversity/a-brief-history-of-lgbtq-equality-in-the-workplace>.

⁷ "June 28, 1969: Stonewall Riots." 2025. Zinn Education Project. May 2, 2025. <https://www.zinnproject.org/news/tdih/stonewall-riots/>.

⁸ Wikipedia contributors. 2025a. "LGBTQ+ Rights at the United Nations." Wikipedia. April 16, 2025. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBTQI%2B_rights_at_the_United_Nations.

employed. Furthermore, female applicants' resumes are found to be 30% less likely to receive a call back from the employer⁹.

- Pay Gap: Studies have shown that 1 in 5 LGBTQ+ individuals live in poor economic conditions. Within the transgender community, this statistic increases to 1 in 3 individuals, showing how deep economic disparities are due to sexualised biases in workplaces¹⁰.
- Sexual Harassment: Statistics show that nearly 78% of reports of sexual harassment in workplaces from 2018 to 2021 are filed by women, pointing that women are exposed to sexual violence more than men¹¹.

All these statistics above show just how real of an issue sexualised biases are. Although the fight against sexualised biases is global, the impact still seems to be very severe.

b. Regional Highlights

i. Europe

The European Union (EU) has long established several legislatures to tackle this issue. However, Hungarian government have very recently legislated an amendment prohibiting public events organised by LGBTQ+ communities¹². This directly indicates LGBTQ+ individuals are under political pressure.

ii. Middle East & Africa

Despite cultural boundaries that had rooted deep within the society, Saudi Arabia has achieved a successful increase in female

⁹ Mishel, Emma. "Discrimination Against Queer Women in the U.S. Workforce." *Socius Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*, vol. 2, Jan. 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023115621316>.

¹⁰ "Human Rights Campaign Foundation Releases New Data on the LGBTQ+ Wage...." *HRC*, 20 Jan. 2022, www.hrc.org/press-releases/human-rights-campaign-foundation-releases-new-data-on-the-lgbtq-wage-gap.

¹¹ "Violence Against Women: An EU-wide Survey. Main Results Report." *European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights*, 28 Nov. 2024, fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-main-results-report.

¹² Spike, Justin. "Hungary Passes Constitutional Amendment to Ban LGBTQ+ Public Events | AP News." *AP News*, 15 Apr. 2025. apnews.com/article/hungary-pride-ban-amendment-orban-gay-rights-lgbtq-155ec12cbbde7cc6be0f96adb323de77.

employment with a rate of 35.4% by the end of 2024¹³. On the other hand, criminalisation of LGBTQ+ identities is very common in African and Middle Eastern countries, since over 30 governments in the regions mentioned have declared homosexuality as an “unlawful” behaviour.

iii. Asia

Although Indian Supreme Court decided to decriminalise LGBTQ+ individuals and expanded legislative action to include SOGI conservation in workplace, social stigma is still deeply embedded within the Indian community and continues to repress homosexual individuals. Similarly in China, government-led censorship limits the visibility of women and LGBTQ+ community in companies and organisations.

iv. Latin & North America

In Latin America, machismo narrative which grows from toxic and excessive masculinity is the leading cause of sexualised biases towards women not only in workplaces but also in every aspect of life. Similarly, although many legislative actions are taken by federals to protect LGBTQ+ workers in Canada and the US, individuals still report discrimination in workplaces.

5. Major Issues

Many countries all over the world significantly lack legislative actions to combat sexualised biases that seriously affect women and LGBTQ+ communities. What is even more surprising is the fact that some do not even consider this to be an issue; in other words, women's and homosexual individuals' suffering is usually

¹³ “Experts of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women Praise Saudi Arabia’s Efforts to Promote Women’s Economic Empowerment, Ask About Progress in Abolishing the Male Guardianship System and Promoting Women’s Access to Justice | the United Nations Office at Geneva.” *The United Nations Office at Geneva*, 9 Oct. 2024, www.ungeneva.org/en/news-media/meeting-summary/2024/10/experts-committee-elimination-discrimination-against-women.

overlooked and under-prioritised. Türkiye can be considered as an example, since increasing annual femicide rates demonstrate that sexualised biases are threatening women not only in workplaces but also in schools, streets, hospitals and everywhere else¹⁴. Uganda is also no exception as homosexuality is considered illegal. This most naturally causes repression, violence and harassment in workplaces due to sexualised biases.

Unfortunately, legislative action does not suffice in the fight against sexualised biases in workplaces. The US -which has an independent organ only to address sexualised biases in workplaces named Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)- is an example. EEOC has recently decided to prioritise SOGI-related workplace discrimination files, assigning them “low significance”¹⁵. This indicates that even in countries which have taken initiative to fight against sexualised biases in workplaces, the issue is not addressed with adequate care and attention.

Furthermore, cultural or religious perceptions often counter the integration of women and LGBTQ+ individuals into the community as a whole. Countries following Islamic Rule -that is, Sharia- penalise homosexuality by death¹⁶. Therefore, employers usually avoid hiring homosexual individuals due to fear, and the cycle of discrimination and repression goes on.

6. Relevant UN Actions

a. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

The UDHR, proclaimed on 10 December 1948, is a key monument in the history of human rights¹⁷. It ensures that individuals from all nationalities, religions, languages, cultures and backgrounds are given the

¹⁴ Wikipedia contributors. “Femicide in Turkey.” *Wikipedia*, 7 Jan. 2025, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Femicide_in_Turkey#.

¹⁵ Savage, Claire. “EEOC Instructs Staff to Sideline All New Transgender Discrimination Cases, Employees Say | AP News.” *AP News*, 18 Apr. 2025, apnews.com/article/transgender-discrimination-gender-civil-rights-88def3b2a735f09cb79d37fc1125b095.

¹⁶ “Opposition to LGBTQ Rights.” *Wikipedia*, 9 May 2025, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opposition_to_LGBTQ_rights.

¹⁷ United Nations. “Universal Declaration of Human Rights | United Nations.” *United Nations*, www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights.

very essential freedoms. Having been translated into over 500 languages, the UDHR stands as a universal milestone.

Article 1 of the UDHR states that *all human beings are free and equal in dignity and rights from birth*, and *Article 2* declares *regardless of elements such as language, religion or sex, all humans are given the same freedoms*; therefore, it is declared that all freedoms and rights are entitled to every individual no matter the gender, sexual identity or any other distinction. Essentially, *Article 23* plays a key role in the efforts made to combat sexualised biases in workplaces. It states that every human being is entitled to the right to work in safe environments without being exposed to any sort of discrimination which would result in inequality of job opportunities or income. Bearing these articles in mind, it can be said that the UDHR is a very concrete legal and universal base for the fight against sexualised biases in workplaces.

b. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

Adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, CEDAW stands as a universal declaration of women's rights. Consisting of six parts, CEDAW aims to comprehensively address the discrimination, harassment, mistreatment and violence women face based on sexualised biases in daily life¹⁸. In particular, *Article 11* aims to regulate women's employment by creating workplaces free of discrimination. The article mandates signatory states to ensure equal job opportunities, create safe working conditions and also exhibit an inclusive attitude towards female workers in workplaces.

c. International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conventions

i. Convention 111

¹⁸ Wikipedia contributors. "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women." *Wikipedia*, 12 May 2025, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Convention_on_the_Elimination_of_All_Forms_of_Discrimination_Against_Women.

Adopted in 1958, Convention 111 -also known as Discrimination in Employment and Occupation Convention- aims to eliminate exclusion of women from workplaces and employment due to sexualised biases.

ii. Convention 190

Similar to Convention 111, Convention 190 named "Violence and Harassment Convention" was accepted in 2019, and is a universal legislative regulation that acknowledges the right of every individual to work in safe workplaces away from sexualised biases.

d. Past UNHRC Actions

i. Resolution 32-2

Established in 2016, Resolution 32-2 aims to "protect LGBTQ+ individuals against violence and discrimination based on SOGI"¹⁹. It mandates the assessment of the integration of universal human rights into the LGBTQ+ community.

ii. Resolution 29-14

Resolution 29-14 was accepted in 2015 and it aims to eliminate all kinds of violence against women²⁰. It underlines the importance of the recognition of the sexualised biases that repress women in workplaces, and calls all signatory countries to take adequate action.

7. Case Studies

a. Uganda: Criminalisation of LGBTQ+

The manifestation of sexualised biases in workplaces in Uganda is the "Anti-Homosexuality Act" established in 2023²¹. Sexual behaviour

¹⁹ "LGBTI Milestones at the United Nations - UN LGBTI CORE GROUP." *UN LGBTI CORE GROUP*, 27 Dec. 2022, unlgbticoregroup.org/home/lgbti-milestones-at-the-united-nations.

²⁰ *RES/29/14 Accelerating Efforts to Eliminate All Forms of Violence Against Women: Eliminating Domestic Violence / RightDocs - Where Human Rights Resolutions Count*. www.right-docs.org/doc/a-hrc-res-29-14.

²¹ Wikipedia contributors. "Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2023." *Wikipedia*, 12 May 2025, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-Homosexuality_Act%2C_2023.

between same-sex individuals are penalised by lifelong imprisonment or death. Furthermore, the act also outlaws any organisation affiliated with the LGBTQ+ community. For these reasons, LGBTQ+ individuals were exposed to high rates of unemployment which led to great financial disability. Moreover, international companies in Uganda have also re-designed their employment policies to align with the act, illegalising homosexuality.

b. Sweden: Gender Equality

Having legislated many regulations to eliminate the gender gap, Sweden is a very successful example of how equality between sexes can be established. Government officials have carefully considered the manifestation of sexualised biases in workplaces; hence, they have taken adequate actions to remove such exclusive norms. For instance, couples with children are offered a total of 480 days of leave each per child, aiming to encourage shared childcare responsibilities²². Similarly, the government has demonstrated great effort in order to expand affordable and accessible childcare services in order to encourage both parents to re-integrate in workplaces.

Although these major actions aiming to eradicate sexualised biases towards women have led to very positive results, the pay gap between sexes remains persistent. A study revealed that despite female employment having been significantly increased after adopting the aforementioned policies, women still earn an average monthly income that is equivalent to 90% of men's average monthly income²³. This shows that ongoing challenges based on sexualised biases need to be addressed further.

8. Questions To Be Answered

²² Regeringen och Regeringskansliet. "Three Important Welfare Reforms to Promote Gender Equality in Sweden." *Regeringskansliet*, 6 Nov. 2020, www.government.se/articles/2020/11/three-important-welfare-reforms-to-promote-gender-equality-in-sweden/.

²³ Si. "Gender Equality." *sweden.se*, 20 Nov. 2024, sweden.se/life/equality/gender-equality.

- In states where legal regulations for LGBTQ+ individuals are absent or illegalised, how can the protection of LGBTQ+ workers safety be ensured in workplaces?
- How can international companies operating across states that criminalise LGBTQ+ individuals or mistreat women ensure accountability and transparency for sexualised biases?
- How can labor unions encourage and support women and queer workers to eliminate sexualised biases?
- Should educational organisations adapt their curricula to address the elimination of sexualised biases by integrating SOGI-based social values in their programs?
- How can harassment and violence against women based on sexualised biases in workplaces be reported safely to authorities especially in conservative communities?
- In what ways can countries or international organs ensure that anti-discrimination laws are not only passed but instead, are effectively integrated into social life?
- By what means can employers refrain from SOGI-based biases while hiring for their companies? How can inclusion and equality be integrated in hiring and promotion?
- In what ways do sexualised biases in workplaces contribute to wage gap between sexes? How can women be given financial freedom under these circumstances?
- How do dress codes in workplaces, sex-limited areas (e.g. gender-segregated restrooms) or gender presentation policies exploit queer or non-binary individuals? In what ways can the exclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals due to aforementioned policies be eliminated?
- In conflict or post-conflict areas, are women more exposed to exploitation in workplaces more than men due to sexualised biases? How can the safety of women workers be ensured in such areas where international organs or government officials are out of reach?

9. Possible Solutions

It is advised that delegates consider *creating an international SOGI-inclusive workplace rights index* where the importance and urgency of the matter at hand is fully acknowledged and the further actions are taken in collaboration with governments, UN organs and NGOs. Delegates may use annual employment data such as wage gaps from independent or anonymous NGOs or organisations to support their index. It is advised that the index also includes legal frameworks to be integrated into workplaces.

Similarly, the delegates are advised to *establish a UN-provided Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) Certificate* for companies and organisations which value gender equality and make effort to eliminate sexualised biases. The DEI Certificate may be designed to recognise companies and employers who adopt inclusive hiring policies, entitle their workers the right of parental leave and provide social security for LGBTQ+ workers.

Furthermore, it is suggested that delegates *develop anonymous, independent platforms on which women or LGBTQ+ workers that face sexualised biases can freely file any act of violence, discrimination or harassment in workplaces*. This will not only ensure the security of sexualised bias victims especially in conservative areas but also provide a safe and reliable database for SOGI-based discrimination in workplaces.

Finally, it is advised that delegates are in *partnership with relevant UN bodies and local Human Rights Courts* to keep the steps taken relevant to international law.

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