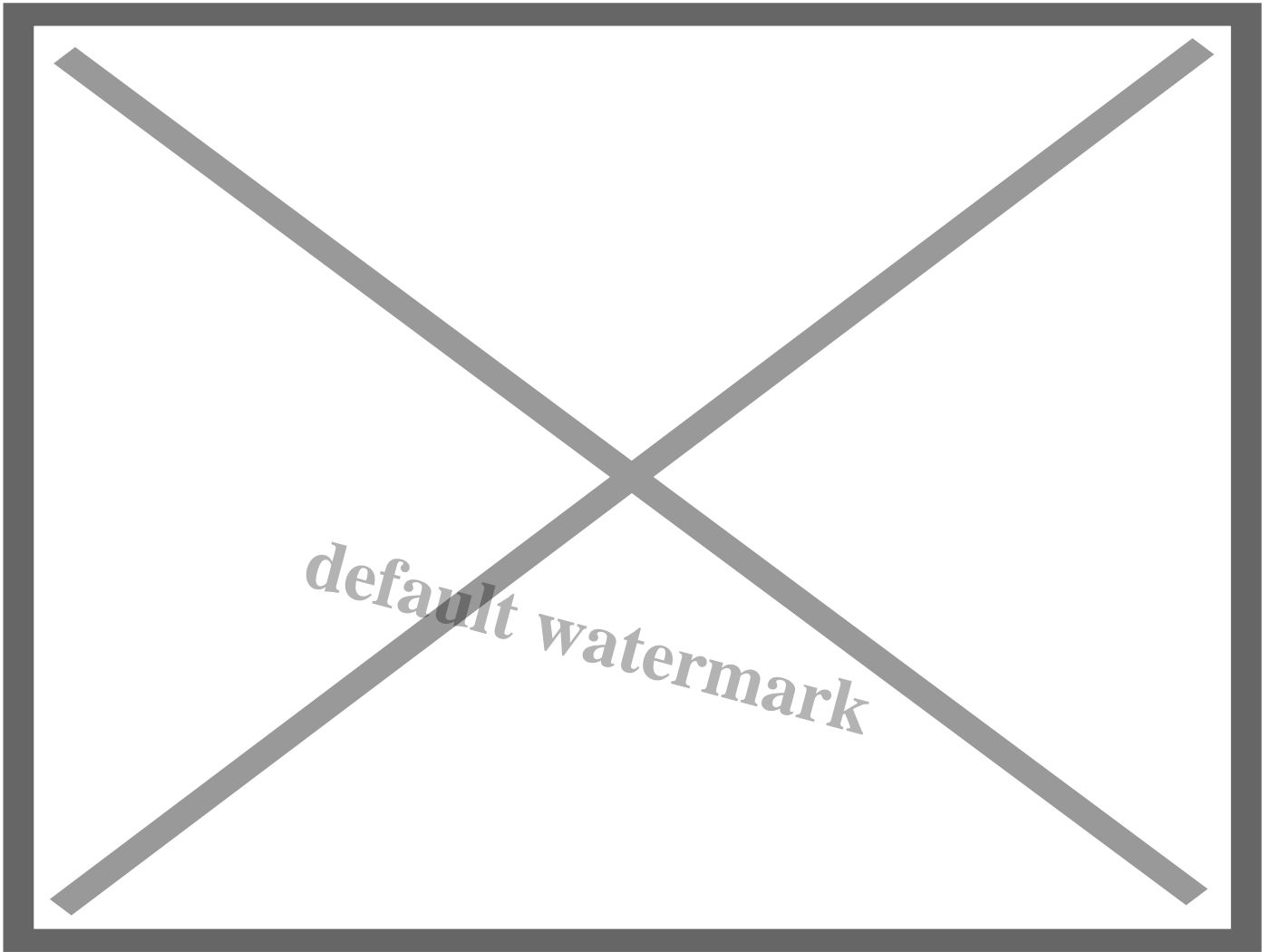




Union pushes to make workplace sexual harassment reportable as a safety risk

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The Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU) have been pushing forward with the [“End Not Defend”](#) campaign to make [sexual harassment](#) in the workplace a [reportable harm under health and safety regulations](#)

Responding to a recent consultation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) – which focused on necessary changes to the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR) – the union has called out the HSE’s failure to address this “critical and longstanding gap in the UK’s workplace safety framework”.

Highlighting that sexual harassment has been excluded in the HSE consultation, the BFAWU state:

This omission is not technical – it is structural.

If workplace harm is not recognised within RIDDOR, it is not systematically recorded, not prioritised, and not effectively prevented.

The Workers Policy Project launched the End Not Defend campaign to directly confront this widespread issue.

Justifying the crucial need for this campaign, they [state on their website](#)

2 in 5 (43%) women and 18% of men report having experienced sexual harassment at work. It also disproportionately affects workers in low paid, and insecure worker like young people, women, minoritised ethnicities, and those reporting a disability.

Most workers don't report sexual harassment due to fear of retaliation, damage to career prospects and weak reporting systems, or simply because they don't understand their experiences.

## What is RIDDOR?

RIDDOR is a piece of law that places a legal duty on employers to report certain harms in the workplace, which can impact staff's health and safety. The current list of harms reportable under this legislation are workplace deaths, diseases, and also any "near misses" to protect the wellbeing of staff members.

It also ensures that employers report any serious workplace harms to the regulator and record them nationally. Regulators can then use this data to identify where they need to implement inspections, enforcement action, or preventative measures to make sure bosses prioritise the health and safety of staff.

As BFAWU underscore in their proposal, seen by the *Canary*:

What is reported can be regulated. What is regulated can be prevented.

However, as the policy document outlines, sexual harassment is one of the most common issues in the workplace and causes great harm to those who experience it. Despite this, it is excluded from the RIDDOR framework and is not reportable at all.

Moreover, the law does not even recognise sexual harassment as a criminal offence, leaving victims with nowhere to turn and allowing perpetrators to intimidate them into silence. A feeling that far too many women will be able to relate to in a society where sexual abuse is only increasing in prevalence.

In practice, this means that HSE has no regulatory oversight of sexual harassment in the workplace with the oversight responsible to the employer. As a result of employers seeking to protect their public image and reputation, reports of sexual harassment "if they have felt confident enough to raise it with their boss" are subject to the views of the employer.

Therefore, this often makes victims worry about their job security and enables employers or colleagues to intimidate those affected into silence for fear of "rocking the boat".

## Sexual harassment *is* a safety risk

As many victims will recognise and undoubtedly relate to, sexual harassment causes significant harm to those who experience it. This includes the psychological and physical harm it inevitably causes, which can further [increase self-awareness of insecurity and unsafety](#) in the workplace.

Furthermore, because such behaviour is often repeated and systemic, [women are disproportionately affected](#) by this [offensive conduct](#)

Ian Hodson, President of the BFAWU, told us:

For too long employers have closed ranks to protect themselves while workers are left to carry the trauma, fear and consequences of workplace sexual harassment alone. Too often the system is designed to defend perpetrators and protect employers's reputations while silencing workers rather than delivering justice.

End Not Defend is about that balance of power. Work should never come at the cost of your dignity, safety or humanity. Employers have a duty to prevent harassment, not cover it up after the damage is done.

If they fail to protect workers, there must be real accountability and real consequences.

Every worker deserves the right to go to work without fear, intimidation or abuse. That should be the absolute minimum in any civilised society.

This blatant ignorance and lack of sufficient oversight expose employees to harm and leaves them vulnerable, and policymakers should have addressed it long ago. Ensuring that RIDDOR includes sexual harassment would go a long way towards shifting the burden away from individuals to businesses. In turn, this would help to highlight the structural risks for which employers themselves are responsible.

As a result, it would be a priority for employers to address, resolve and prevent sexual harassment in the workplace, as they already do with other potential hazards and injuries.

Labour MP John McDonnell has given his full support to the BFAWU's policy proposal and will champion this proposed change to RIDDOR in the House of Commons.

## Women deserve to feel safe at work

BFAWU are proposing that HSE introduce another category under RIDDOR framework which would allow reports of sexual harassment incidents at work, systemic or repeated patterns of behaviour and also incidents involving abuse of power. Going further, employers would have to report third-party harassment as a form of reportable harm, including sexual harassment committed by customers, clients, and contractors.

Prevention is also better than cure â?? and represents a significantly overlooked vacuum of policy in our society. BFAWU are making their intention clear that they want to prevent these harms in the workplace entirely. To do this, they argue that employers should also report near misses of attempted harassment.

After all, perpetrators often escalate these predatory behaviours, creating a foreseeable harm that employers can easily prevent in practice.

Featured image via [Workers Policy Project](#)

By [Maddison Wheeldon](#)

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