



Respecting Human Integrity

Sexual Harassment Guidelines of WSCF Europe

WSCF Europe should be an open and safe space where we meet each other in Christian community, respecting each other and free from intimidation. However sexual harassment is a reality in our lives and in our churches. Therefore these guidelines intend to raise awareness as the first step to preventing harassment from happening. They also provide a way of dealing with it if it does occur.

The sexual harassment guidelines are not aimed at controlling consensual behaviour between people - but *both* people must consent.

Cultural diversity

Created all in God's image, we are still different. This diversity is a great richness which we can learn from and celebrate together. In a cross-cultural context we have different ways of behaving and approaches to people, spiritual traditions and cultural backgrounds. Meeting together we cross the borders of difference, but we have to take care of each other and not impose our ways of being on others.

What is normal and friendly for one person can be a hurtful invasion of space for someone else. Relying on your culturally based common sense may not be enough, as words, phrases, signals and gestures may carry different meanings in different cultures. So be sensitive and aware of other peoples' feelings, so that everyone in the group can feel comfortable.

What is sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment is deliberate or repeated unwanted verbal comments, gestures or physical contact of a sexual nature that is considered to be unwelcome by the recipient. It can be verbal, from unnecessary comments on dress and appearance or "jokes" to offensive language, propositions or verbal abuse. It can be non-verbal, from unwelcome staring, gestures and touching to physical assault.

In the great majority of cases men harass women. So sexual harassment is more than an individual matter – it reflects a wider pattern in society. However harassment can also occur between people of the same gender or women harassing men.

The experience of the person is what counts and this depends on each individual and the context. Harassment is not what someone intends to do, but their action and its impact on how the other person feels about it.

What to do in a case of sexual harassment?

Silence is the best friend of violence - any sexual harassment is a violation of the person.

If someone feels sexually harassed, do not remain silent. Ignoring sexual harassment does not make it go away but, indeed, it makes it worse as the harasser may misinterpret a lack of response as approval of the behaviour. There are several things that can be done to stop the sexual harassment:

- Do not blame yourself. Sexual harassment is not something you bring on yourself.
- Do not delay - this only increases the possibility that the behaviour will continue.
- Do not hesitate to seek help - it is probable you are not the only one being harassed, so speaking up can prevent others from being harmed.
- If it is possible, try and tell the harasser to stop yourself.
- If you feel unable to do this, no-one should blame you - talk to someone, anyone you feel you can trust.
- If you wish you can speak to a named responsible person, who will be at every conference. They will listen to you and help you to deal with the situation, confidentially.
- If the harasser does not stop, the named person in consultation with the prep.com. will ask the harasser to leave the event.

The whole community is responsible for one another - harassment damages our wider community as well. Everyone should look out for signs of someone being harassed, such as withdrawing from the group. If you see or hear obvious harassment, it is your business and your responsibility to tell the harasser to stop or tell other people. Don't walk past it.
