



Survey on respect in the workplace

Report of the results

May 2022

Introduction

This report presents the results of the ‘Respect in the workplace’ survey that was part of the first ever staff survey on “Diversity, inclusion and respect in the workplace”, carried out in 2021.

The survey covered all categories of staff at the Commission. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and we welcome the fact that 5784 staff members responded to the questions about conflict and harassment.

We want to thank all the participants. Your replies provide us with valuable information and input as we go forward with reviewing the Commission’s policy on preventing and tackling harassment in the world of work.

Executive summary

Executive summary 1/2

The survey on respect in the workplace was undertaken as part of the Commission's work to review its harassment prevention policy.

The Commission's current harassment prevention policy dates back to 2006, and the review is an opportunity to reflect developments since the #MeToo and related movements, changes in the working environment and in ways of working since the start of the pandemic, as well as developments in case-law and practice.

The survey has been part of a broader initiative to highlight issues around diversity and inclusion in the workplace, which are reported in a separate survey.

The survey was sent to staff in the Commission, the executive agencies and the European External Action Service in March 2021. This report sets out the findings for the Commission only, where was a response rate of 14% (5784 respondents). Respondents are broadly representative of the wider staff population. However, a larger proportion of respondents were women and staff with people management responsibilities, than in the wider staff population. The relatively low response rate does not allow us to draw conclusions for all staff. However, the survey responses give a good overview of the experiences that many staff members have had in the workplace. We thank all those who took part, and who took the time to reflect back on experiences that may have been difficult and painful.

In terms of overall perception, over 53% of respondents consider that the Commission tackles sexual harassment effectively, compared with 18% who do not think the Commission tackles this issue effectively.

Responses were more divided on psychological harassment. 40% of respondents agree that the Commission addresses psychological harassment effectively, but the same proportion consider that it does not.

45% of the survey respondents know where to find information on measures and procedures to deal with harassment, while 37% of respondents do not.

Executive summary 2/2

We asked respondents to tell us whether they had experienced a conflict situation in the workplace in the last 5 years. 43% of respondents told us that they had never or almost never experienced a conflict situation at work. 34.5% said that they experienced conflict either often or from time to time. 21.6% reported that conflicts occurred rarely.

We asked whether people had experienced any of the behaviours set out in the 2006 Commission decision on the prevention of, and fight against harassment, which could potentially qualify as psychological harassment if these behaviours were intentional, repetitive or systematic. The overwhelming majority of respondents stated that they had neither experienced nor witnessed any of these behaviours. We also asked a similar question on sexual harassment, which also focused on the behaviours set out in the 2006 decision. Again, an overwhelming majority of respondents had neither experienced nor witnessed any of these behaviours.

Of those respondents who had reported having experienced behaviours that could potentially qualify as psychological or sexual harassment, 26% reported that they had sought assistance, but 59.4% said that they had not.

Respondents were broadly positive about the support provided by confidential counsellors, the Medical Service, and staff representatives. Many respondents indicated they were not aware of some of the other support services offered by the Commission. Views about the support provided by managers were more divided: 28.5% were satisfied with this support, while 45% were less satisfied.

27.7% of respondents who had experienced those behaviours stated that they were either satisfied, or that the situation had been partly addressed, or that the behaviour had stopped. 19% moved to another team. 10.3% stated that they felt they were being punished for reporting a problem.

Looking ahead to future actions, the top five actions seen by respondents as being “very effective” in tackling harassment were: 1) managers taking swift action; 2) effective disciplinary procedures; 3) raising awareness of what harassment is, and where to find information; 4) making clear the types of behaviour that are not acceptable; 5) encouraging early, informal ways of solving conflicts.

Presentation of the report

Representativeness of the survey

The 5784 participants from the Commission who took part in the survey account for 14% of the Commission's current staff numbers.

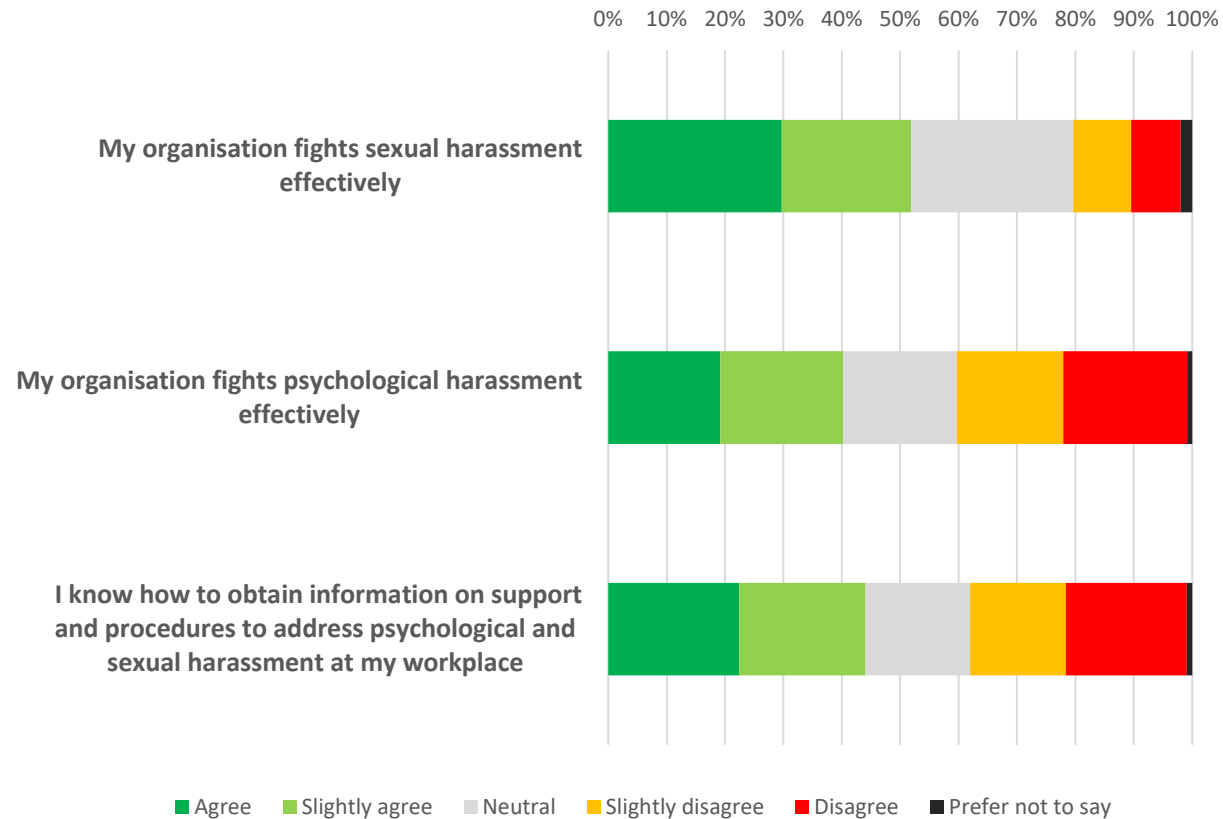
The demographics of the survey respondents are broadly aligned with those of the wider staff population (e.g. in terms of age, employment status and seniority), although a larger proportion of respondents were women, permanent officials, and staff with people management responsibilities than in the general staff population. Very few non-statutory staff responded to the survey.

Category	Respondent population	Commission population
Women	57%	50.1%
Officials	70%	48.7%
External staff	3.8%	26%
Managers & staff with team coord. responsibilities	22%	11%

Because of the relatively low participation rate and a few significant differences between the survey population and the broader staff population, the survey results cannot be extrapolated to draw conclusions about the whole Commission.

Nevertheless, the results provide very useful insights into respondents' perceptions of behaviours that are associated with psychological and sexual harassment, and their subjective views on the support and services that the Commission provides. The Commission will act on the findings of this survey, in particular with the Commission's new human resources strategy, in line with its zero-tolerance policy towards all types of behaviour that run counter to a respectful and inclusive workplace.

Overall perception

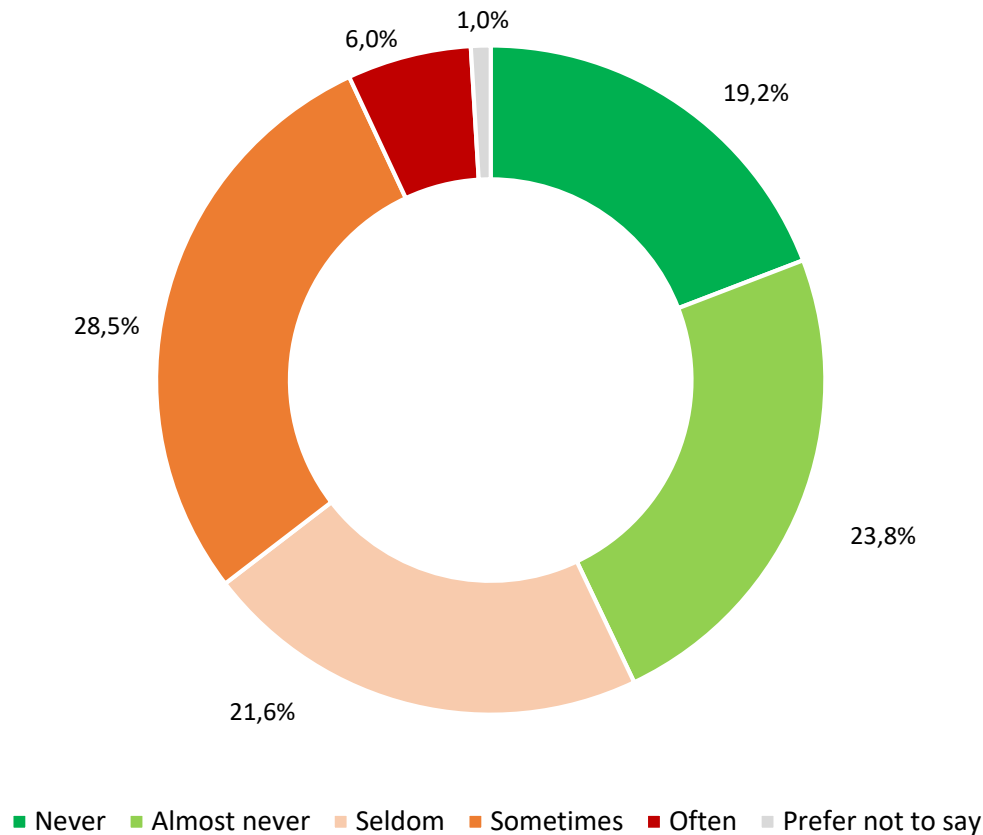


Over 53% of respondents consider that the Commission tackles sexual harassment effectively. 18% do not consider this to be the case.

The overall perception of the way in which the Commission fights psychological harassment is more polarised. 40% of respondents agree that the Commission deals with psychological harassment effectively. However, the same proportion of respondents have the opposite view.

45% of respondents know where to find information on measures and procedures to address harassment. 37% of respondents do not.

Conflicts at work

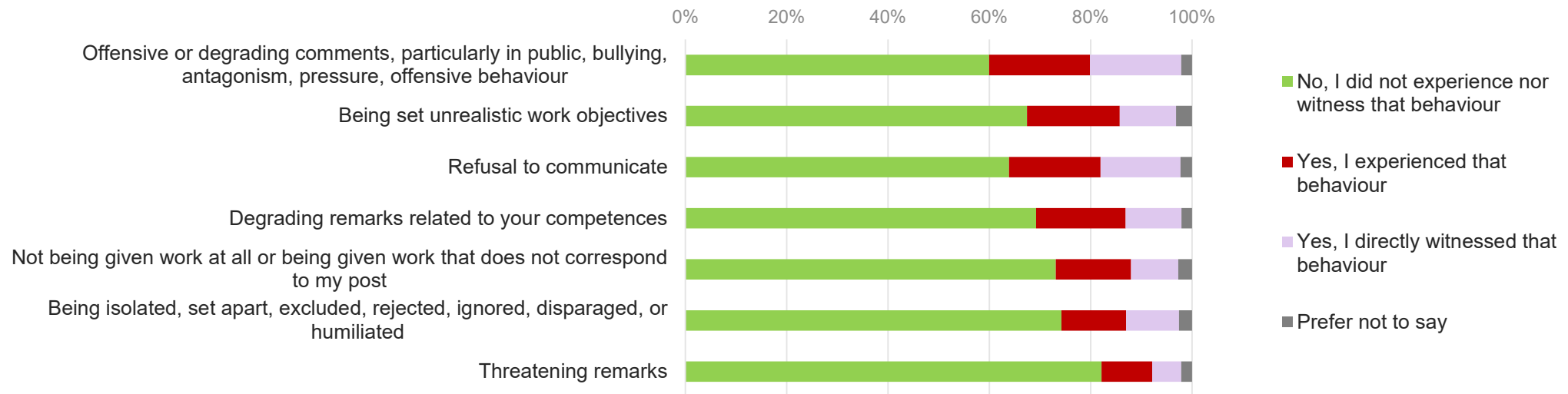


We asked respondents to give their thoughts on whether they had experienced a conflict situation during the last 5 years in active service. The question aimed to raise awareness of the difference between harassment and diverging opinions or disagreements.

43% of respondents reported that they had never or almost never experienced a conflict situation at work.

34.5% said they experienced conflict either often or from time to time. 21.6% reported that conflicts occurred rarely.

Perceptions of psychological harassment 1/2

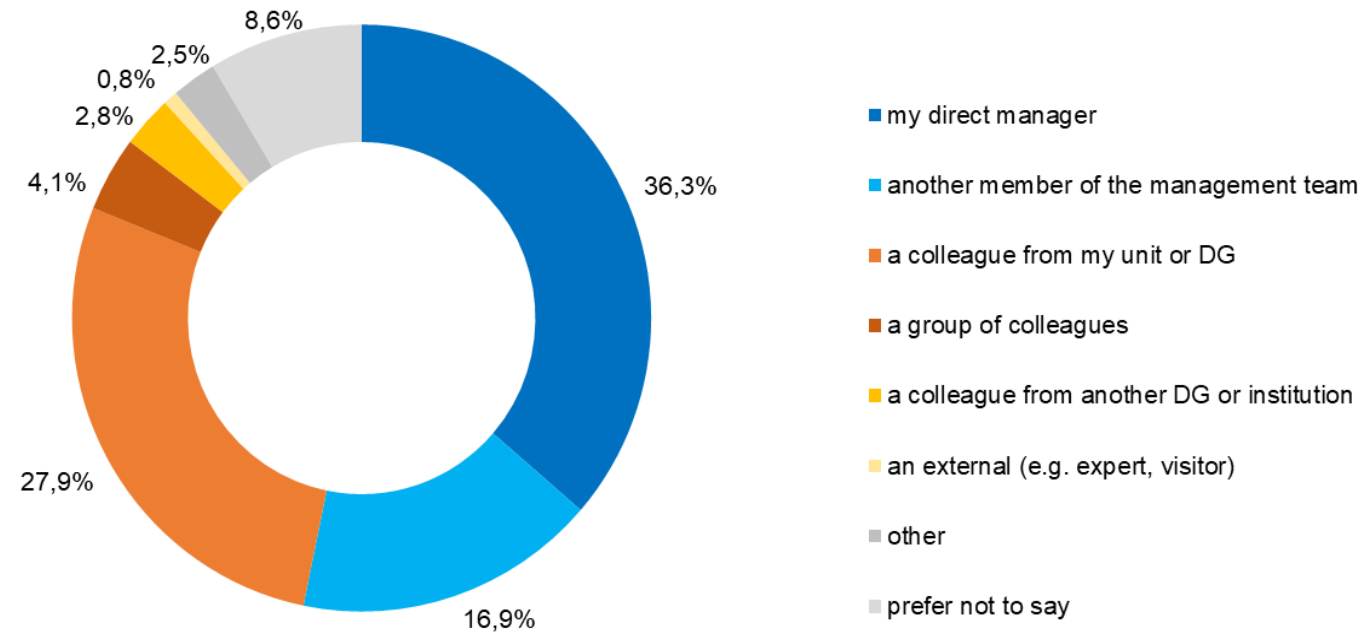


Respondents were asked whether, in the last 5 years, they have personally experienced or witnessed any of the above behaviours that occurred in the course of, were linked with, or arose at work, over a period, were **intentional, repetitive, or systematic**, according to the 2006 Commission decision on the prevention of and fight against harassment.

Overwhelming majority of respondents said they had neither experienced nor witnessed any of those behaviours that could potentially qualify as psychological harassment.

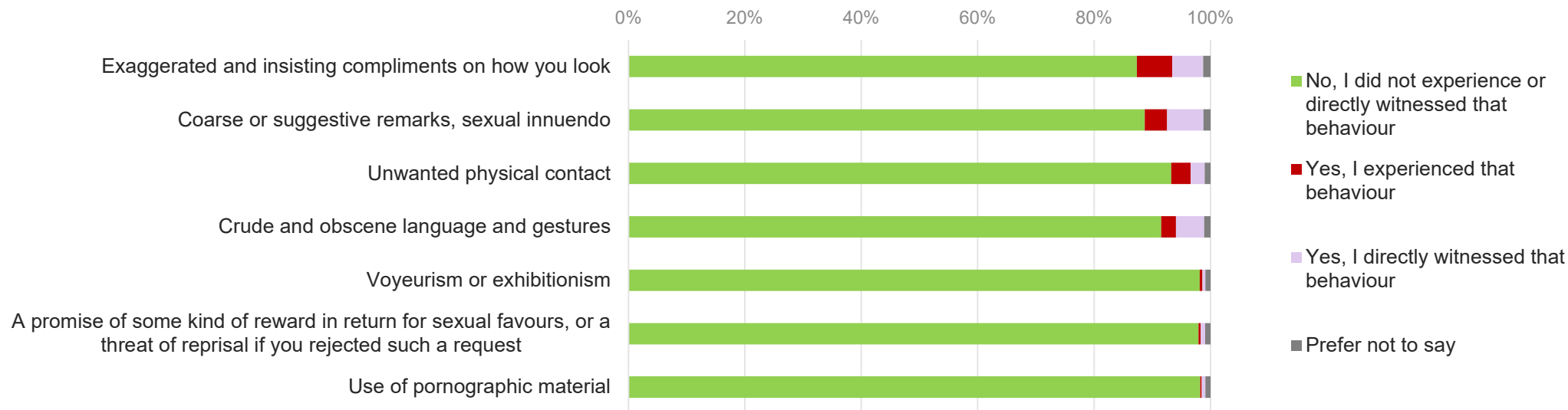
Those who had experienced or witnessed those **intentional, repetitive or systematic behaviours** reported 4 out of 7 behaviours were most common. Almost 20% of respondents (i.e. 1156 individuals) reported that they had experienced offensive or degrading comments or bullying over the last 5 years. 18% of respondents (i.e. 1041 individuals) said that they were set unrealistic work objectives. The same proportion felt that they had experienced a refusal to communicate. Almost 18% of respondents reported receiving degrading remarks related to their competencies.

Perceptions of psychological harassment 2/2



According to respondents, those who carried out behaviours, which could potentially qualify as psychological harassment, often work directly with their victims: 36.3% are line managers and 27.9% are colleagues from the same unit or DG.

Perceptions of sexual harassment 1/2



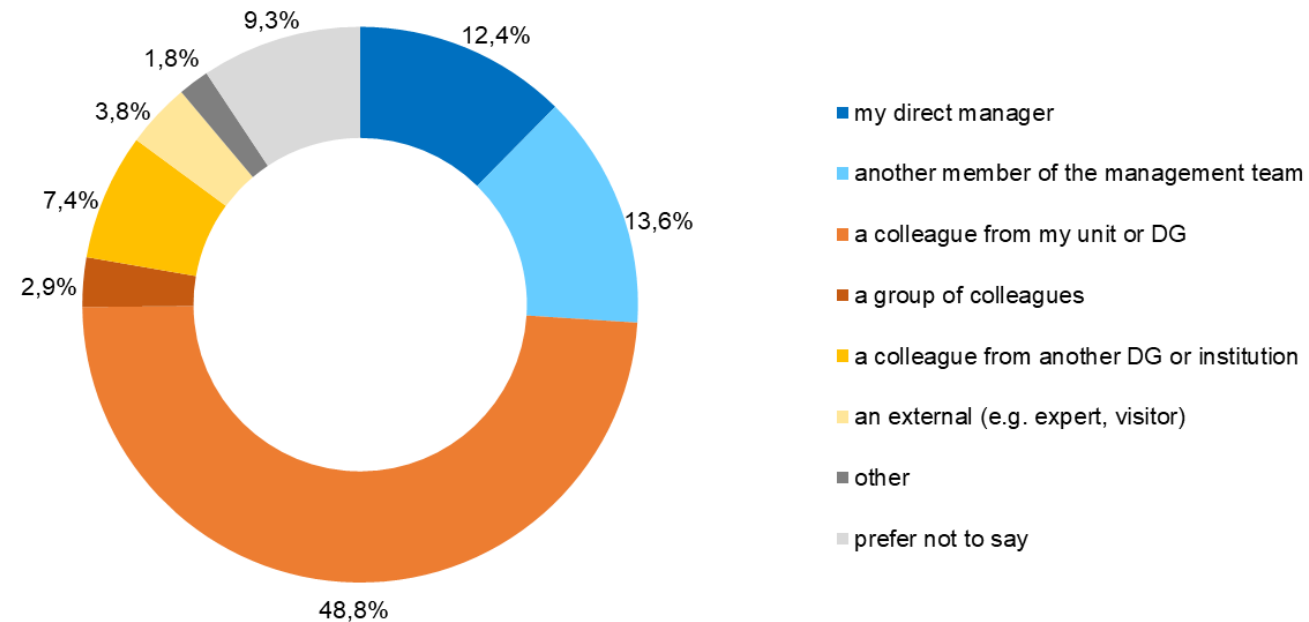
An overwhelming majority of respondents had neither experienced nor witnessed any of the behaviours that could potentially qualify as sexual harassment, according to the 2006 Commission decision on the prevention of and fight against harassment.

Those who had experienced or witnessed those behaviours reported that 4 out of 7 behaviours associated with sexual harassment were most common. 6% of respondents (i.e. 347 people) said they had experienced exaggerated and insistent compliments about how they look, followed by almost 4% (i.e. 231 people) who said they had experienced coarse or suggestive remarks over the last 5 years. 3.3% of respondents (i.e. 190 people) experienced unwanted physical contact. 2.5% of respondents (i.e. 144 people) reported crude and obscene language over the last 5 years.

Two types of behaviour were more frequently observed by witnesses than were reported as directly experienced: coarse or suggestive remarks, and crude and obscene language and gestures.

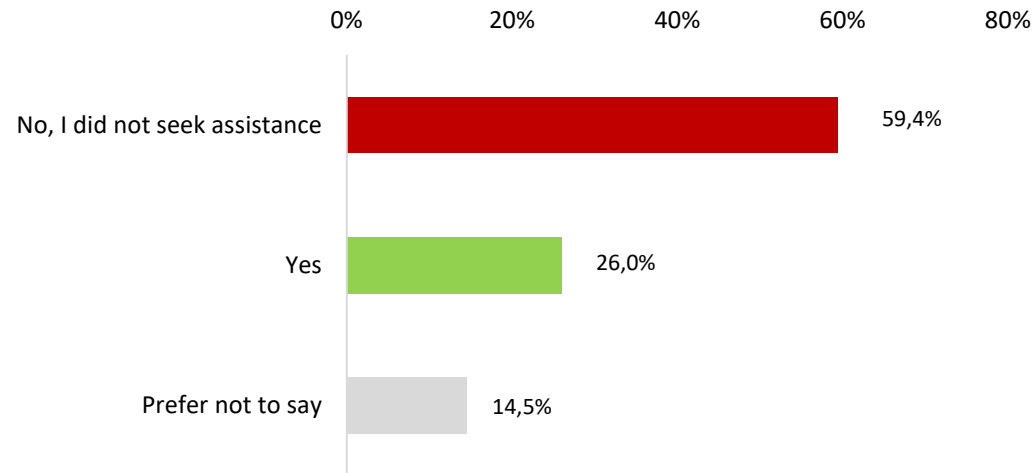
In free text comments, some respondents stated that remarks about a person were made in his or her absence.

Perceptions of sexual harassment 2/2



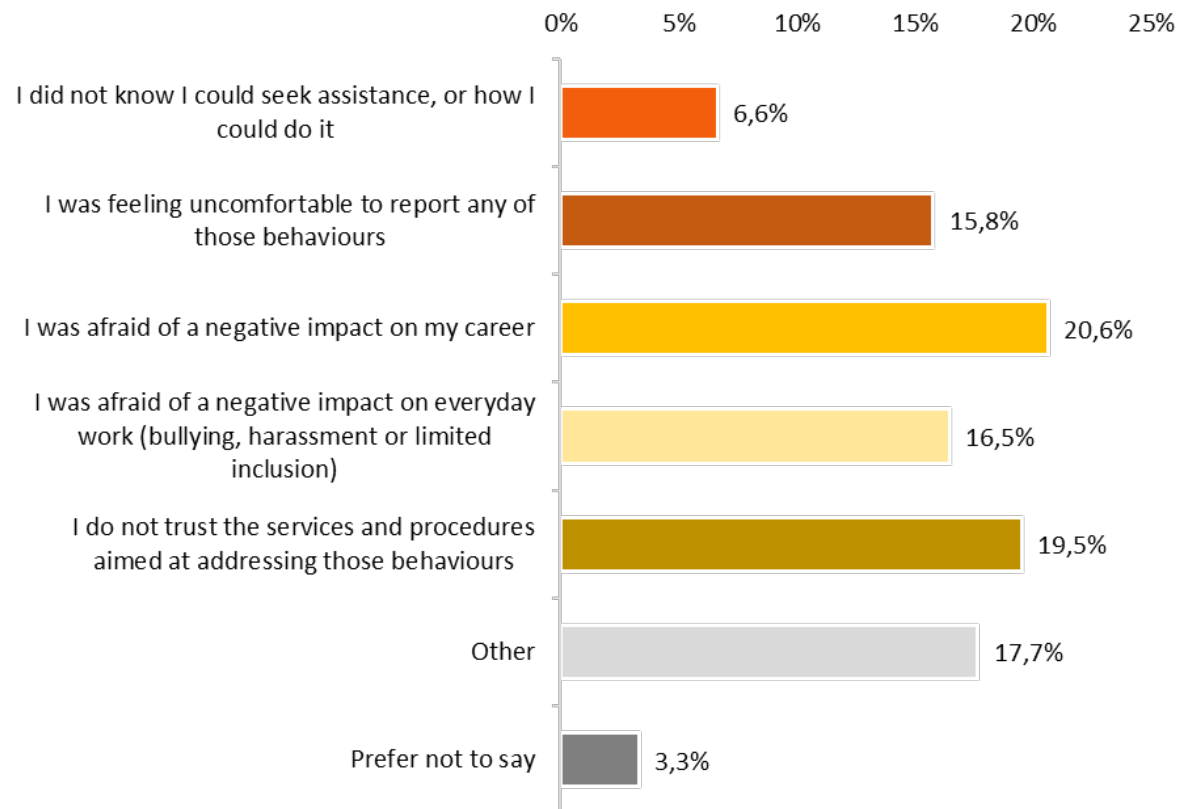
According to the respondents, who reported having experienced behaviours that could be associated with sexual harassment, almost 49% of authors of those behaviours work in the same unit or the DG. Respondents noted that direct managers accounted for 13.6% of alleged perpetrators.

Assistance in addressing harassment



26% of respondents who reported experiencing behaviours that could potentially qualify as psychological or sexual harassment said that they had sought assistance, but 59.4% said that they had not.

Reasons for not seeking assistance



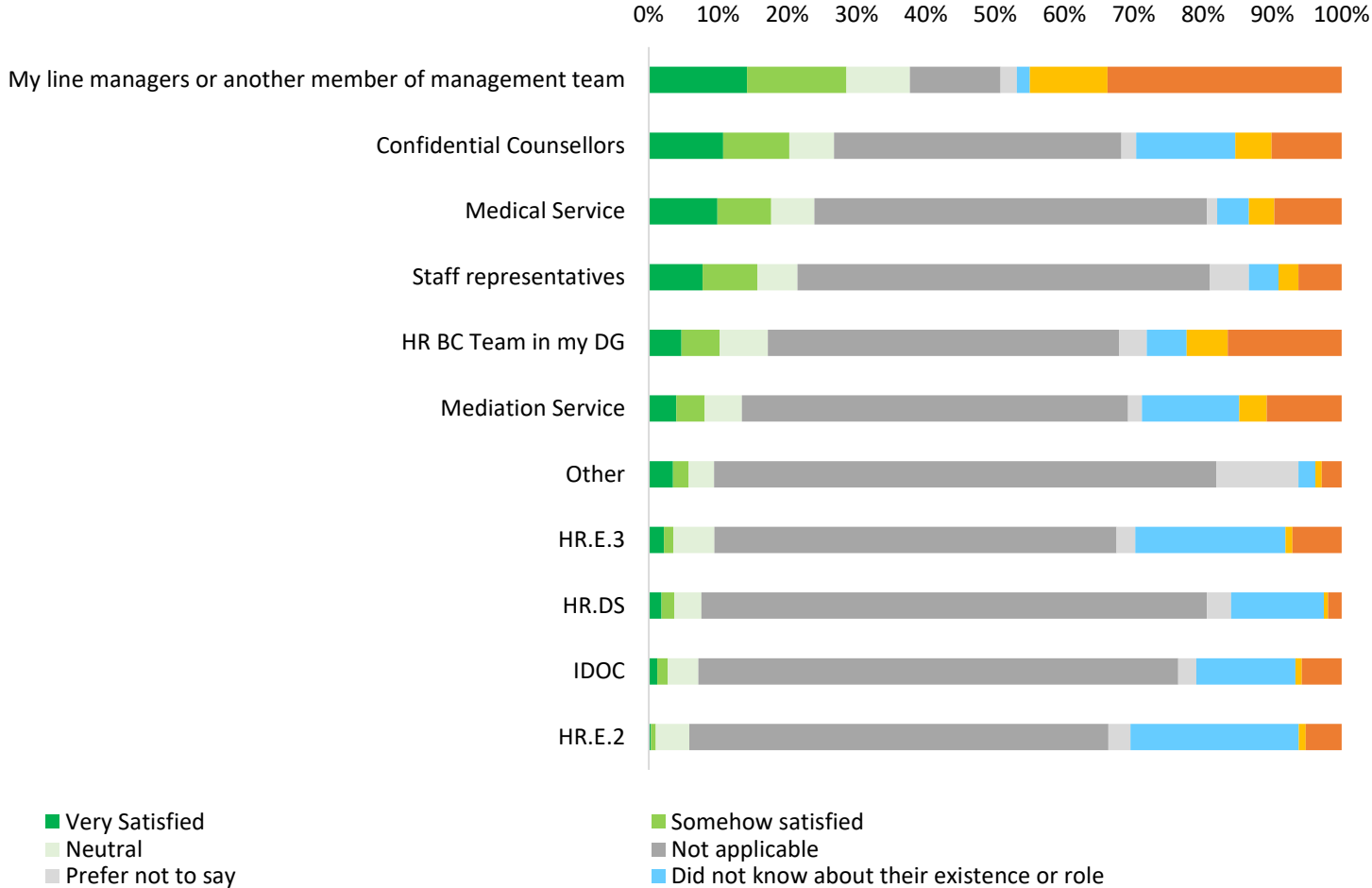
The respondents who did not seek support gave their reasons for not doing so.

37.1% said that they were afraid of a negative impact either on their longer-term career or on their everyday work.

19.5% said that they did not trust the services and procedures to tackle these behaviours.

17.7% gave other reasons. Free text comments included reasons such as: the incident was perceived as minor, or it might have been difficult to prove what happened. Some respondents said they solved the situation themselves; others did not seek assistance because of a hierarchical link with the alleged perpetrators.

Satisfaction with help by various actors



657 respondents to the survey replied to the question about their satisfaction with the help provided by the different support services.

Satisfaction with the support given by managers is polarised: 28.5% of respondents were positive about this support, but 45% were less satisfied.

In free text comments, respondents often underlined that managers could make a real difference.

Respondents were broadly positive about the support provided by confidential counsellors, the Medical Service, and staff representatives.

Respondents did not appear to be well informed about some of the other support services offered by the Commission.

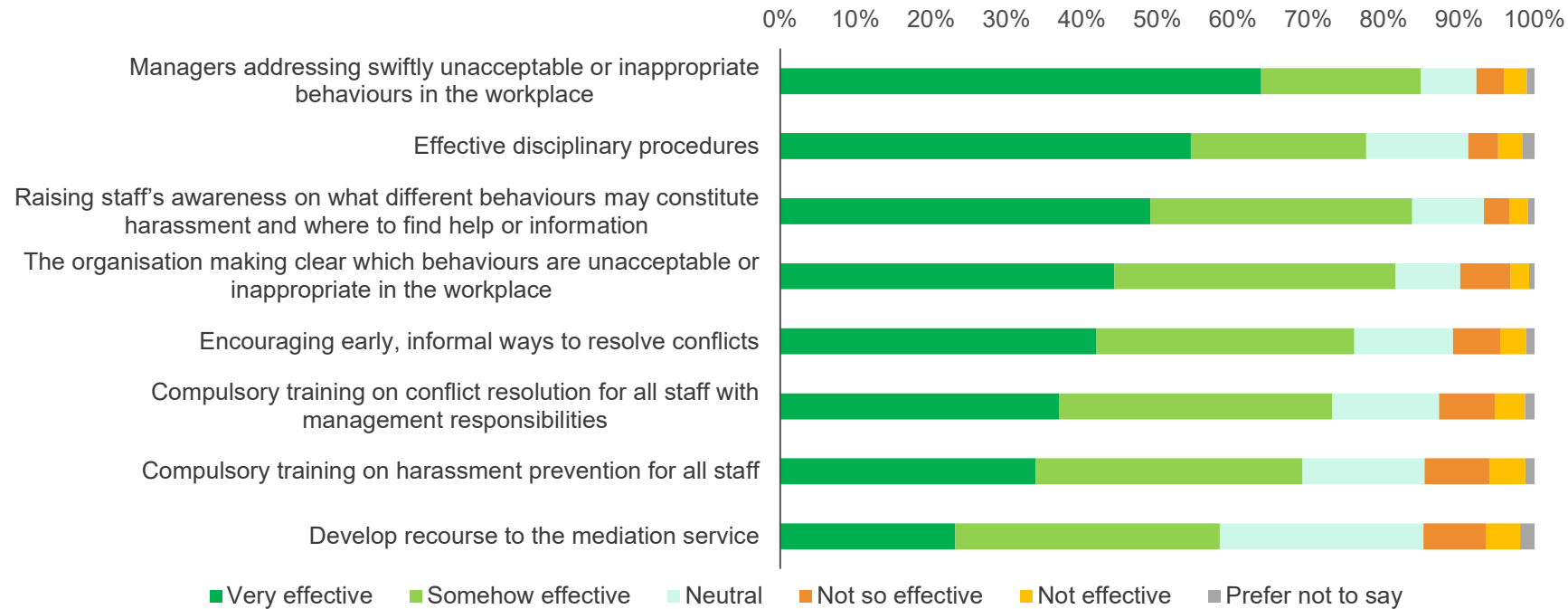
Satisfaction with follow-up



Of the 657 respondents who answered the question about their current situation, 27.7% stated that they were either satisfied, or that the situation had been partly addressed, or that the behaviour had stopped. 19% moved to another team.

10.3% of respondents stated that they felt they were being punished for reporting a problem. This contrasts with the previous statement, where 37.1% said that they did not seek assistance because they were afraid of a negative impact either on their longer-term career or on their everyday work.

Views on possible actions



With regard to future actions, the top five actions seen by respondents as being “very effective” in tackling harassment were: 1) managers taking swift action; 2) effective disciplinary procedures; 3) raising awareness of what harassment is, and where to find information; 4) making clear the types of behaviours that are not acceptable; 5) encouraging early, informal ways of solving conflicts. These results are based on the answers from the 5784 respondents.

