

**ERASMUS+**  
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**TACKLING STREET HARASSMENT & GENDER  
STEREOTYPES IN YOUNGSTERS**

*Project EquAlley (2021-1-ES01-KA220-SCH-000032603)*

**BOOKLET.**  
**STREET HARASSMENT IN EUROPE**

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Street harassment (catcalling)[1] is a pervasive problem that affects people of all ages and genders, and it is particularly common in Poland, Spain, Italy, Portugal, and the Netherlands. While women and girls are most often targeted, members of the LGBTQIA+ community and boys are also vulnerable to this form of harassment. Street harassment can occur anywhere, from the street to the workplace and even within schools. Despite the prevalence of this issue, there is a lack of educational and behavioural action programs designed to address it. To better understand the reality of catcalling and develop effective strategies to combat it, a focus study was conducted in December.

This booklet aims to expand on the findings of that study, providing insights into the experiences and reflections of those affected by catcalling. By sharing these common experiences, the hope is to raise awareness of the issue and encourage more action to be taken. Catcalling is a form of harassment that can cause significant distress for those who experience it. It is important to recognize that this is not a harmless form of flirting, but rather a form of harassment that can have serious consequences for the mental health and well-being of those targeted. The prevalence of this issue highlights the need for greater education and awareness around the harms of catcalling, as well as for more effective strategies to address it. Overall, this booklet serves as a call to action for policymakers, educators, and the wider public to take a more proactive role in combating catcalling and creating safer environments for all. It is time for us to work together to create a world free from harassment and discrimination, where everyone can feel safe and respected.



[1] Catcalling is a behavior involving whistling, commenting on appearance, drawing attention, or making sexual remarks towards individuals in public places or on the street. It is often unwanted and humiliating, typically aiming to cause discomfort or distress to the victim. Street harassment refers to a broader range of behaviors that encompass not only catcalling but also any unwanted, humiliating, and inappropriate conduct that an individual may experience on the street or in other public places. This includes gestures, comments, molestation, verbal abuse, and other forms of harassment. Street harassment can have a sexual nature, but it doesn't have to—it can encompass any behavior that violates the privacy and comfort of those encountering it. In summary, catcalling is one form of street harassment, but street harassment is a much broader concept that includes all forms of inappropriate and improper behavior in public places or on the street that may cause discomfort or humiliation to those who experience it. In this booklet, the terms catcalling and street harassment will be used interchangeably to refer to the same phenomenon.

# 1. Definitions of street harassment

The term "street harassment" denotes the act of making vulgar comments or sexual taunts directed at women in public spaces, notably when a woman is traversing through a public thoroughfare. This definition was extracted from the Linguistic Observatory of the University of Warsaw in the year 2018. In some instances, the term "catcalling" is also employed.



The term "catcalling" has its origins in the English language, stemming from the fusion of the words "cat" and "calling." Historically, this expression dates back to the latter part of the eighteenth century, where it connoted a "cry" or "lament," often manifested in the form of whistling directed at theatrical performers. Its contemporary usage, signifying unwelcome and sexually suggestive remarks in public settings, emerged in 1956.

ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics) data, as of 2022, demonstrates that street harassment encompasses a spectrum of manifestations, including verbal harassment, stalking, non-consensual physical contact (such as groping, kissing, or hugging), exhibitionism, and the transmission of offensive messages or the initiation of obscene phone conversations. These diverse manifestations of street harassment were reported at rates of 24%, 20.3%, 15.9%, 15%, and 10.5%, respectively (Scalise, 2022).

This sentiment is further corroborated by the observations of Anna Kurecka, who elucidates the presence of "vulgar comments, no less vulgar gestures, whistling, clucking, grunting, and smacking, accompanied by pseudo-compliments." Additionally, the recurring expressions such as "nothing more can be said," "maintain some distance," and "provocation should be avoided" are prevalent manifestations of this phenomenon (Kurecka, 2021). Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that some individuals contend that the terminology employed to describe this issue may not be the most apt or comprehensive in capturing the multifaceted nature of the challenge at hand. Tomasz Sobierajski, a sociologist affiliated with the University of Warsaw, expounds upon this viewpoint in an interview conducted by Holistic.news.

The terminology "cat calling" presents inherent limitations, as it insinuates a substantive divergence from the concept of harassment. However, such a demarcation may not be substantiated by the facts. The definition of "cat calling" as "street hitching" arguably lacks the requisite precision to fully encapsulate the complexity of the issue. Furthermore, the utilization of the English nomenclature tends to attenuate the gravity of the problem while failing to capture its quintessence. The very term "cat/cat" is inherently problematic, and the expression "street hooking" exacerbates the tendency to underestimate the severity of the situation, thereby inadvertently associating it with a more innocuous connotation (Laskowska, 2019).

As we can see, an attempt to define this phenomenon is not so easy. It is certainly noticeable that "street harassment is one stage within the spectrum of violence committed against women" (Alonso, 2019). Apart from that "gender-based street harassment is a common form of intimidation and control of women in the patriarchal society" (Berenguer, Vaya i Bouchara, 2016).



Street harassment is an unfortunate reality that many people, particularly women, must face on a daily basis. However, it is important to consider the age of the person who may become a victim of this type of harassment. Enrico Scoccimarro, a legal expert, notes that the age of the victim can affect the perception of the words addressed. For example, a compliment that is not requested may be perceived differently by an adult woman than by a minor or very young girl. Similarly, a vulgar and offensive sexual phrase may have a far more damaging impact on a young person than on an adult. It is important to make these distinctions in order to avoid giving excessive importance to sporadic conduct and instead give due weight to more serious situations, in which the recipient is made to feel like a victim of a crime. Scoccimarro emphasizes that the author of catcalling is behaving rudely, irrespective of the age of the victim. The education that parents must impart is crucial in helping their children recognize and deal with abusive behavior. Ultimately, it is only by acknowledging and addressing the severity of street harassment that we can hope to create a safer and more respectful environment for all people. (Scoccimarro, 2021).



## Summary

Street harassment encompasses the act of men directing vulgar, sexually suggestive taunts or comments towards women in public spaces. This multifaceted phenomenon can manifest in various ways, spanning verbal, physical, and digital forms. Some argue that the term "catcalling" inadequately encapsulates the issue at hand. Street harassment represents a distressing reality that countless individuals, predominantly women, confront on a daily basis. It constitutes a form of violence perpetrated against women and serves as a prevalent means of exerting intimidation and control within patriarchal societies.

The age of the victim can influence the interpretation of the uttered words, underscoring the importance of distinguishing between isolated incidents and more severe instances. Irrespective of the victim's age, the individual engaging in catcalling exhibits discourteous behavior. Crucially, parental education plays a pivotal role in enabling children to identify and address abusive conduct.



## 2. The Shared Historical Roots of Street Harassment from the experiences of Europe

Is there a common historical feature discernible across our nations concerning the phenomenon of street harassment? Indeed, such a commonality can be identified. To commence this discourse, let us begin with a contemplation articulated by Iwona Chmura-Rutkowska, who posits that if we acknowledge that most of the attributes categorized as 'feminine' or 'masculine' are products of social construction, then the concept of 'male violence' also finds its roots in cultural perceptions of normative masculinity, as well as in the processes of upbringing and socialization that instruct boys to embody such a paradigm (Chmura-Rutkowska, 2012; cited in: Badinter, 1993; Biddulph, 2004; Goldberg, 2000; Duncan, 1999; Connell, 1995; Gilligan, 2001; Salisbury 1996). Street harassment, as a phenomenon, finds its foundation in patriarchal gender norms and the mechanisms by which boys are indoctrinated to enact and safeguard their masculinity. Consequently, even though the specific manifestations of street harassment may exhibit variation within each nation and cultural milieu, the shared patriarchal substratum that underpins our society implies that, across our respective countries, street harassment and other forms of gender-based violence operate in substantively analogous manners.



In the context of **Italy**, the historical narrative pertaining to sexual harassment underscores a paucity of legislative safeguards designed to shield women in the workplace. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the absence of appropriate lexicon to denote such transgressions resulted in the normalization of these behaviors within the daily lives of women. Employees, particularly women, were frequently subjected to instances of harassment in the absence of regulatory frameworks or statutory provisions to afford them protection. Moreover, female workers were susceptible to termination on various grounds, including but not limited to pregnancy or extended periods of absence necessitated by breastfeeding duties. Within the realm of gender history, the delineation between abuse, harassment, and human rights violations poses a formidable challenge (Tabicone, 2014, p. 17).





In **Spain** - Street harassment is a global problem that inflicts emotional and physical harm on individuals who experience it. Spain, unfortunately, is not an exception to cases of street harassment. The country has a complicated history of gender equality, which has led to societal issues that negatively impact women's safety and their rights to freedom. The Spanish Constitution of 1978 states that "men and women have equal rights and freedoms," which reflects the country's official stance on gender equality. However, despite such constitutional guarantees, Spanish women have long been subjected to street harassment. This behavior ranges from intrusive comments and catcalling to groping, stalking, and physical assault. Street harassment is something that affects women of all ages, and it doesn't just occur in public spaces. Spanish women can be harassed at school, work, and even at home. In some cases, the harassment is so severe that the victims suffer from anxiety, depression, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Historically, street harassment in Spain can be traced back to Franco's dictatorship. During this period, any behavior that deviated from the norms of conservative Catholicism was strictly punished. Women were expected to be modest, married, and obedient. Sexual harassment and assault were not even recognized as crimes, and women who dared to report such incidents were ridiculed and shamed. In the early 1980s, Spain transitioned to democracy, and there was an increase in the number of women's groups and feminist movements. These groups focused on raising awareness about gender inequality and fighting for women's rights. However, despite the progress made, street harassment remained a significant issue. Today, Spain's Penal Code identifies street harassment as a form of sexual assault or aggression and has imposed strict penalties against it. However, despite these changes, many Spanish women still experience street harassment frequently. According to a survey conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), 97% of Spanish women have experienced sexual harassment at some point in their lives. To address this issue further, there is a growing movement against street harassment in Spain. Women's groups and NGOs are working to raise awareness about the severity of the issue and lobby for more stringent legal action against perpetrators. Street harassment is a pervasive problem in Spain, and it highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to address gender inequality and harassment.

Until society recognizes the seriousness of the problem and takes appropriate measures to reduce and prevent street harassment, women will continue to suffer from this form of gender-based violence (Gallego Mena, 2019).



In **Portugal**, influenced by these events, the Commission for Equality in Work and Employment (CITE) carried out the first study on sexual harassment in the workplace between 1988-1989, which was published in 1994. In the survey, applied to employed women, sexual harassment was constituted as a form of discrimination based on sex that is constituted by unwanted behaviors that compromise women's freedom/dignity and lead to a reproduction of the image of women as emotionally unstable and unable to perform their work well. The study reveals that 46% of the women interviewed had suffered some type of harassment from colleagues, superiors, etc. (Oliveira).

In **Poland** women who, from childhood, are taught to be submissive - also in situations (and indeed especially when) our boundaries are crossed and our rights broken. A girl is supposed to be nice, polite and obedient. She should respond to taunts with a smile, because "anger harms beauty" and "after all, these are compliments". She must be prepared that a firm objection will be met with an equally firm condemnation ("girls don't behave like that"). Her domain is to become helplessness. At the same time, boys are taught that they cannot show weakness. They are allowed more violent behaviour, while at the same time rebuking or ridiculing those that would indicate their vulnerability (Kurecka, 2021). We teach women how to protect themselves from rape, instead of teaching men not to rape. We teach girls to be careful about how they dress, the way they dress and where they go, instead of teaching men that when a woman puts on a dress or walks alone through a park, it does not mean she is asking to be raped or sexually assaulted. Meanwhile, of the 'preventive ways' identified in our survey by those who believe that harassment can be controlled, 52% of women's responses and 49% of men's responses referred directly to the victim's dress, behaviour and manner. This result is disheartening, but at the same time hardly surprising, as many researchers of violence against women find evidence of rationalisation and justification of the perpetrator's behaviour and secondary victimisation of the victim (Gruszczyńska, 2007; Herzberger, 2002).

The historical responsibility for such a state of affairs can be sought in:

1.

2.

3.



### 3. Research on Street Harassment

This section will provide an overview of research on street harassment, examining it from distinct cultural and normative perspectives prevalent in different countries where this phenomenon is observed.

#### Poland



The question about experiences of harassment was asked to all male and female participants in the survey (N = 4284).

Other studies in Poland show that one in four employees or students (25%) had witnessed sexual harassment at their place of work or study. The most common form of sexual harassment was inappropriate, undignified statements with sexual overtones made by colleagues or school or university peers (24%). Less frequently, it took the form of physical harassment from colleagues (9%) or superiors/ lecturers (4%).



The fewest number of people (2%) report that someone at their place of work or study received some kind of benefit in exchange for having sexual relations with a supervisor or lecturer (KOMUNIKAT Z BADAŃ nr 98. Molestowanie seksualne, 2018).

Apart from this, the statements obtained show that 12% of adults have been the object of unwanted behaviour, propositions or jokes of a sexual nature - most often from strangers (10%), less often from colleagues at the place of study (6%), acquaintances or friends (4%), colleagues at the place of work (4%), superiors (3%) or lecturers and teachers (3%). A small number of adults (1%) have experienced sexual harassment from close or extended family members. The scale of sexual harassment captured in the survey should be regarded as the lower limit of the extent of the actual phenomenon (KOMUNIKAT Z BADAŃ nr 98. Molestowanie seksualne, 2018). From Niebieska linia data shows that although 80% of women and 54% of men believe that harassment in public space is an important problem, as many as 81% of victims have never reported harassment to the police, and behaviour falling under the category of harassment in public space is culturally condoned in Polish society.

Without changing attitudes towards violence and breaking the barrier of silence, we cannot hope to eradicate it from our public space. As many as 85% of women admitted to having been victims of harassment in public space (94% of them definitely more than once in their lifetime); for men, the figure is 44%. The first time this type of aggression is experienced is on average at the age of 12. The perpetrators of harassment in the case of women are exclusively, or mainly, men (98%). With regard to men, perpetrators are both men (44%) and women (41%). Harassment most often occurs in open public spaces (e.g. on the street), on public transport and at mass events (concerts, bars). This applies to 60% of all cases of harassment. The time of day is irrelevant.



### The Netherlands

The Dutch Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (CBS), which is the central office for statistics, has reported that in 2020 and 2021, 66% of women in the Netherlands have been harassed on the streets. A study has found that a similar proportion of women (84%) experienced sexual harassment in 2020 as they did in 2016. The proportion of women who reported experiencing sexual harassment because of the COVID-19 pandemic has also remained consistent. Therefore, it is not useful to base conclusions about sexual street harassment on absolute frequencies of experiences. The percentage of women who reported experiencing "sexual harassment" on the street, which is defined as "any utterances or behaviors of men or boys on the street by which they annoy, inconvenience, hurt, offend, insult, threaten, or limit your sense of personal freedom" (47%), does not differ from the 2016 numbers. The numbers have slightly decreased but still remain high, and this decrease appears to be primarily due to factors other than COVID-19 measures. A notable discovery is that women's reported experiences differ significantly. In 2020, women scored lower than in 2016 on the degree to which they felt positive or neutral towards sexual advances and reported much higher levels of negative feelings. Additionally, women in 2020 named a greater variety of negative emotions than those in 2016. In the qualitative responses, in 2020 as much in 2016, there was evidence of the fact that a large degree of habituation and normalisation of behaviour had occurred, but much more than in 2016 dissatisfaction about this was also described and respondents indicated that the behaviour was not acceptable.

No differences were found from the situation in 2016 in terms of diversity between social groups in the extent to which sexual street harassment is experienced.

Also in 2020, younger women, those with higher education and women without steady relationship report more experiences of sexual street harassment. Women who report having a sexual orientation toward women or both men and women, are also significantly more likely to experience sexual street harassment. The proportion of women who experience sexual street harassment in their own residential neighbourhood, as in 2016, is highest among women living in Delfshaven, Charlois and Center, areas in the city of Rotterdam. The urban areas where this proportion is lowest in 2020 are Prins-Alexander, Hilleegersberg-Schiebroek and the (for the analysis merged) urban areas Hoek van Holland, Pernis and Rozenburg.



The results described above show little change in the nature and extent of sexual street harassment over the past three years. From the direct questions to women about developments over the past three years, a slightly more positive picture emerges. The proportion of women who say they have experienced a decrease in nuisance, frequency and severity of and feelings of insecurity due to sexual street harassment is slightly larger than the proportion of women who report an increase.

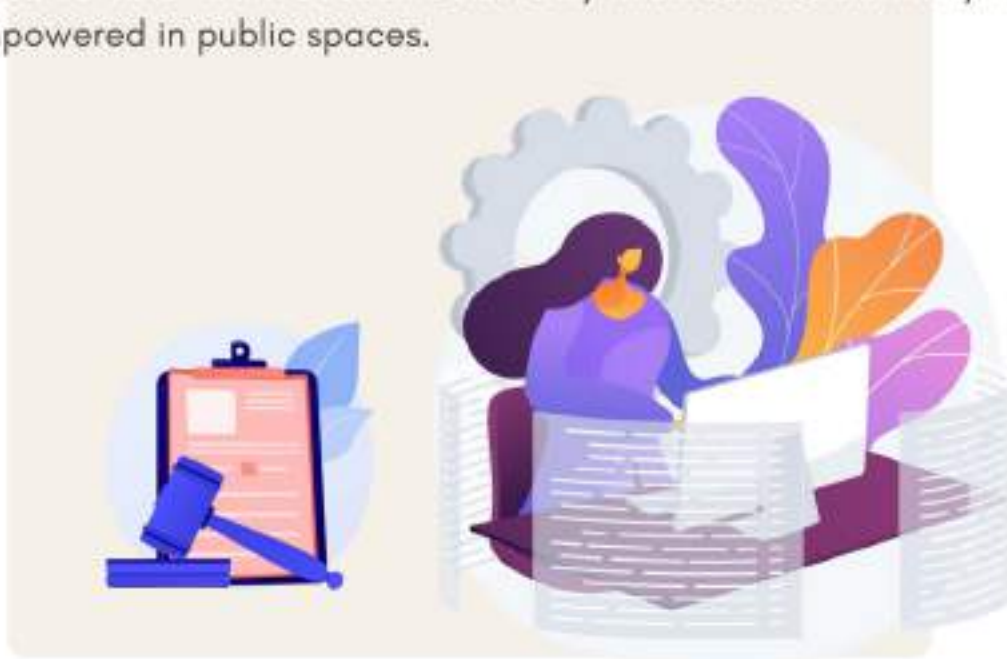
The differences are small, however, and the vast majority of women report that nothing has changed. Again, one development that stands out is the increased awareness of the phenomenon reported by a large proportion of the women.

In the Netherlands there seems to be a growing awareness the men are a part of the problem and thus also need to become part of the solution. Men and boys need to become allies and tell their friends their behaviour isn't appropriate. Negative feedback on street harassment can lead to a fast change in it happening. Engels P. says that men feel the societal pressure to prove their masculinity and this influences their behaviour on the streets. They have to prove that they are 'real men' all the time. To change the problem is to change men's perception around showing emotions and vulnerability (NOS Nieuws, 2022).



## Italy

In a developed and avant-garde state like ours, women should feel free and safe to leave the house alone, without fear of being assaulted or groomed for no apparent reason. So why is this phenomenon so widespread? In many countries such as France, street harassment has become a criminal offence as it has nothing to do with a consensual flirtation attempt. In Italy, unfortunately, this reform has not yet been implemented and is perhaps the reason why this phenomenon is still so frequent. (Soardo, 2021). If, in addition to such phrases, it degenerates with threats or heavy epithets, then a violation of the rules is also revealed. In fact, if it is true that in Italy street harassment is not legislated from a regulatory point of view, if you go further, it leads to the crime of harassment. This crime in Italy provides for punishment for anyone "in a place open to the public that causes harassment or disturbance to a person". For this crime there are penalties such as arrest up to six months or a fine of 516 euros (Atrendyexperience, 2021). It is time for Italian lawmakers to take action and implement measures to protect women from street harassment. While it may seem like a small issue, it is a symptom of a larger problem of gender inequality and lack of respect for women's autonomy. Women should not feel like they have to constantly be on guard when walking down the street, and perpetrators of street harassment should face consequences for their actions. It is not enough to simply hope that individuals will change their behavior; there must be a legal framework in place to hold them accountable. Only then can women truly feel safe and empowered in public spaces.





## Portugal

In Portugal, harassment in public spaces is also characterised by physical contact, gestures, threats, words - with 'pyrope' being the most relevant (Oliveira, 2021). In Portugal, catcalling is a serious problem that affects many women on a daily basis. According to a recent survey, 81% of women in Portugal have experienced some form of street harassment, with catcalling being the most common form. This is a shocking statistic that highlights the prevalence of catcalling in the country. One of the main reasons why catcalling in Portugal is so common is because of the patriarchal society that still exists in many parts of the country. In Portugal, women are often objectified and treated as second-class citizens, which leads to men feeling like they have the right to comment on their bodies and appearance. Another reason why catcalling is so prevalent in Portugal is because of the lack of consequences for those who engage in this behavior.

There are currently no laws in Portugal that specifically address street harassment, which means that those who catcall are able to do so without fear of consequences. However, there are some initiatives that are trying to address the issue of catcalling in Portugal. For example, the "Chega de Fiu-Fiu" campaign is a movement that aims to raise awareness about street harassment and encourage women to speak out about their experiences. This campaign has been effective in starting conversations about the issue and has helped to bring attention to the problem. In addition to campaigns like "Chega de Fiu-Fiu", there are also several organizations and individuals who are working to combat catcalling in Portugal. This includes groups like Coletivo Feminista de Lisboa, which is an organization that is dedicated to fighting for women's rights and raising awareness about gender-based violence in Portugal.

Overall, catcalling in Portugal is a serious problem that needs to be addressed. It is a form of street harassment that is not only disrespectful but can also be very damaging to one's mental health and well-being. As a society, we need to take a stand against catcalling and work towards creating a safer and more respectful environment for everyone.





## Spain

Sexual harassment is the main one to occur in public space (streets, sidewalks, public transport, roads and parks) being practiced by strangers.

According to Plan International's 'Safer Cities for Girls' report, we read that: "78% of experiences in urban public space reported by young women in Madrid, Barcelona and Seville are linked to insecurity due to harassment. Being a woman and being young seems to be a risk factor for participants in their use of the city. By type of harassment, harassment without physical contact (comments of a sexual nature, threats, persecution, insinuations...) represents a large majority of the experiences, with 75% of the cases of harassment reported in this study. 54% of harassment experiences take place in the evening (night and early morning) and 43% of insecure situations occur in the street. 21% of young women say that they have become accustomed to this type of violent experience because it is an ongoing problem; in other words, young women have come to normalise a reality that discriminates against them and makes them feel unsafe.

Moreover, they tend to deal with it individually, with personal strategies to increase their sense of security, either by diverting their route, seeking company for their journeys or pretending to phone. On average, only 3% report to the authorities or security forces, and the experience remains in conversations with family or friends. Society is often unmoved by these situations of insecurity and here we have a chilling statistic: 90% of young women indicate that they have not received help from those who were present. This figure reveals the importance of raising awareness and training the population to learn how to act when faced with a situation of street harassment. The Women's Foundation is working to this end through the Stand UP programme against street harassment, developed by L'Oréal Paris in collaboration with the NGO Hollaback!" (#EsAcosoFM El acoso callejero y los datos en España, 2022).

Certainly, despite the unique cultural, social, and historical contexts of Poland, The Netherlands, Italy, Portugal, and Spain, there are common threads and areas of convergence in research on street harassment in these countries:

In conclusion, while the specific manifestations and contexts of street harassment may vary across Poland, The Netherlands, Italy, Portugal, and Spain, these countries share a common commitment to researching and addressing this pressing issue. By acknowledging the commonalities and building upon shared research findings, there is potential for the development of more comprehensive and effective strategies to combat street harassment, ultimately fostering safer and more inclusive public spaces for all.



**You'll find more here!**

## 4. Increasing waves of street harassment: Human rights issue

Since 2010, public awareness of street harassment has increased. Yet there are numerous people who still do not understand why the issue matters, trivialise it as a joke, call it a minor annoyance or a compliment, or blame the harassed person for causing it. These attitudes are reflected in movies, TV shows, and music videos, and also by companies like Fiat, Lego, and Snickers in their marketing materials. In reality, street harassment is a serious problem that should not be trivialised. It is a human rights violation that prevents equality, it falls along the spectrum of gender violence, and it connects with other social justice issues (Kearl, 2015, loc.242).



These “risk reduction” tactics limit a harassed person’s mobility and equality and can make the harassed person feel as though the harassment was deserved if every directive was not followed. The focus on the actions of harassed people instead of harassers is not only harmful and disempowering, but it also means the root causes of harassment are never addressed.

It is not just family members and friends who may blame harassed people and tell them to change (Kearl, 2015). Sexual harassment seems to be in the news all the time.



In 2018, there were more than seventy-five hundred claims filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), but those claims make up only a fraction of sexual harassment incidents that occur each year. The day after actress Alyssa Milano called for anyone who had experienced sexual harassment or assault to tweet #MeToo, there were an estimated 609,000 posts with that hashtag. Since 2017, there is certainly a greater public awareness of the problem, but it has not gone away (Griffin et al. 2018; Smith, 2020, loc.176).

One of the reason is that all countries recognise the problem of street harassment. They also take different ways to act and deal with street harassment. Each country and its policies take different steps in this direction. Since 2007, in Portugal, the criminalization of sexual harassment in public spaces is done through criminal legislation, with Article 170 of the **Portuguese** Penal Code - Sexual Harassment. The article states that anyone who performs exhibitionist acts of a sexual nature or who compels someone to have sexual contact will be punished with imprisonment for up to one year or with a fine penalty for up to 120 days, if a more serious penalty is not imposed by virtue of another legal provision. In this way, the article does not define as a crime, expressions or gestures that show some insinuation, but that do not formulate a sexual proposal, for example, the 'piropo'.

Therefore, the crime of sexual harassment takes many forms, as long as they assume a sexual connotation (Ribeiro, 2021). In the **Italian** legal system, unlike other countries, such as France, sexual harassment is not recognized as a crime in itself and this represents a first, important limit. The best way to tackle the problem should be that of cultural change and prevention (Romito, 2019). In 1991, the Recommendation of the European Commission on the protection of the dignity of women and men at work (92/131/ EEC) calls on States to adopt a Code of Conduct in the public and private sectors relating to the fight against sexual harassment. The figure of the Trusted Councilor must also be established, a person, preferably external to the organization, who can collect reports of harassment in absolute confidentiality and activate, in agreement with the victim, informal or formal procedures (investigations and possibly disciplinary actions against the harasser).

If the internal procedure proves insufficient, the worker (or Patrizia Romito 44 the worker) can contact the Equality Councillor (at provincial, regional or national level), a figure established in 2000 by Law 196 "Discipline of the activity of equality councillors and provisions on positive actions", and specified in 2006 by Law 198, the so-called "Code of equal opportunities between men and women".

The Equality Councillor(s) has the functions of promoting and monitoring the implementation of the principles of equality and non-discrimination for women and men at work; in the performance of its duties shall be a public official and has the obligation to report to the judicial authority for the crimes of which he becomes aware.

On 19 October 2021, Law no. 134 of 27 September 2021 came into force, containing the Delegation to the Government for the efficiency of the criminal process as well as on restorative justice and provisions for the rapid definition of judicial proceedings (Larussa, 2021). When looking at the various anti-discrimination measures, it appears that sex education could be a remedy. However, here too we see some discrepancies.





In the **Netherlands**, sexual education (sex ed) lacks aspects which are needed to change behaviours. Sex ed is decentralised to the extent that teachers decide what they teach. There is a need for a national curriculum deciding what needs to be covered. Due to the lack of topics like sexual diversity, sexual pleasure, consent and many more, sex ed in the Netherlands is considered incomplete.

Students have shared their concerns about the lack of these topics. Limiting sex ed to biology and safer sex is not teaching youngsters how to deal with sexuality. Teaching about consent and sexual rights can provide adolescents with tools to understand what sexual behaviour is acceptable and teach them about gender norms. Adding topics like consent and the importance of sexual pleasure to the curriculum, adolescents would learn “sexual manner” which can change street harassment (De Looze & Van Ditzhuijzen, 2022).


Antidiscrimination campaigns are being set up, in the Netherlands for instance in the form of a campaign ‘Are You OK?’, teaching bystanders what to do when they see someone experiences sexual harassment. You get tips on how to deal with a situation that feels unsafe or when, as a bystander yourself, you fear for your safety. Like the call, “Feeling unsafe? Offer distraction and ask the question, “Do you know where the supermarket is?” or “Don’t trust it? Ask a police officer, bus driver or bystander for help or call 911!” Awareness that street harassment does not belong is increasing. The Are You OK campaign encourages people to work together to make the streets feel safer.





In **Poland**, on 21 November 2005, the Act on Counteracting Domestic Violence, passed by the Sejm on 29 July 2005, entered into force. The Act brings a number of useful solutions in the field of combating violence by and against family members, including the first formal definition of domestic violence and a list of its types, discussion of the actions of individual services and institutions of the government administration/local government units/non-governmental organisations aimed at providing assistance and support to persons experiencing violence, as well as the introduction of legal mechanisms enabling more effective protection of such persons against perpetrators of violence. The decision of the Council of Ministers in 2006 established the National Programme for Counteracting Family Violence. Within the framework of the Programme, an inter-ministerial Monitoring Team was established, responsible for, among others, monitoring the phenomenon of counteracting family violence, coordinating the activities of individual institutions and services, initiating social programmes, as well as determining the measures necessary to perform the tasks related to counteracting family violence.

National Programme for Counteracting Family Violence increasing the effectiveness of the protection of victims of family violence and increasing the availability of assistance; increasing the effectiveness of intervention and corrective actions against persons using family violence. The Act on Counteracting Family Violence defines violence as "a single or repeated intentional act or omission violating the rights or personal interests of persons listed in para. 1, in particular exposing these persons to the danger of loss of life, health, violating their dignity, bodily integrity, freedom, including sexual freedom, causing damage to their physical or mental health, as well as causing moral suffering and harm to the persons affected by violence". Article 2 para. 1 of the Act defines a family member as the closest person within the meaning of Article 115 § 11 of the Penal Code, as well as another person living or farming together. In turn, the National Programme for Counteracting Family Violence clarifies the notion of victims of violence, stating that they may be: children, spouses or partners in informal relationships, elderly persons, persons with disabilities.

The illustration shows a blue clipboard with a silver clip at the top, holding a white sheet of paper with horizontal lines. A red gavel is positioned diagonally across the bottom of the clipboard. The background is a light blue gradient.

The sentence highlights the negative evaluation of the Act introduced in 2005 by a number of experts. This Act pertains to measures for dealing with violence against women, and a report prepared in 2007 by the Feminoteka Foundation showed that the Act had many legal flaws, with some of its provisions not being implemented. Despite the law having been supposed to be amended by 2008, there is still no final version. In response to the issue of harassment, a campaign titled "Stand Up. Oppose Harassment in Public Places" was launched in Poland by L'Oréal Paris and the Centre for Women's Rights and Right To Be, a global non-profit organization. The campaign kicked off with a panel discussion at Kinoteka cinema in which the issue of harassment was discussed and addressed by Grażyna Torbicka, a renowned journalist. The L'Oréal Paris campaign 'Stand Up.

"Oppose harassment in public places" was inaugurated through this debate, which was attended by several notable individuals, including Dominika Nockoska, Brand Champion L'Oréal Paris, Urszula Nowakowska, President of the Centre for Women's Rights, Anna Karczmarczuk, President of IPSOS Poland, a research firm, Magda Mołek, journalist and TV presenter, and Mateusz Banasiuk, actor. The sentence thus highlights the ongoing struggle against violence and harassment towards women in Poland and the various measures being taken by organizations and individuals to address the issue.





The issue of street harassment is a significant concern, especially for women, in many countries around the world. Although **Spain** has not yet created a separate crime of street harassment, the most severe instances of this form of violence can be included in other existing crimes. Various scholars and activists argue that "compliments" can be considered gender violence and should not be perceived as an innocent or beneficial action for women. Rather, it is an infringement of their freedom, dignity and integrity. Despite this, street harassment is still not addressed by lawmakers in Spain and many parts of Europe, which leaves women vulnerable to a range of problems. This essay explores street harassment in greater detail, why it is a key human rights issue, the different ways it has been criminalized within the European Union, and the current situation in Spain.

The lack of specific legal regulations in Spain and Europe on street harassment has led to difficulties in preventing and penalizing this form of violence. However, the Organic Law of Comprehensive Guarantee of Sexual Freedom aims to promote a consent-focused culture and recognizes any non-consensual act of a sexual nature as sexual violence. It also acknowledges that sexual violence occurs in both public and private spheres, including digital spaces. Overall, the issue of street harassment should not be taken lightly. It is a human rights issue that needs to be addressed by lawmakers and society as a whole. The creation of specific laws against street harassment will help protect the freedom, dignity, and integrity of women, and ensure that they can move around safely in public spaces.

Certainly, when considering the rising tide of street harassment as a human rights issue that demands action, there are several common grounds that unite people and organizations globally:



In summary, the rising tide of street harassment as a human rights issue has drawn attention to the commonalities that exist across regions and cultures. It is increasingly recognized as a global problem that demands collective action. By focusing on these common grounds, people and organizations around the world can work together to create safer, more inclusive, and more just societies where everyone can exercise their right to live free from harassment and violence.

**You'll find more here!**

## 5. The Impact of Street Harassment on Young Populations: Attitudes, Perceptions and Effects

Street harassment is a pervasive problem that affects individuals worldwide. It is a form of intimidation, bullying, and aggression, oftentimes directed towards women, that can take many forms, such as catcalling, groping, and stalking. Street harassment is a violation of human rights and a threat to personal safety. Young populations, in particular, are not immune to the issue and have attitudes and viewpoints that are worth examining. However, some young people still hold the belief that street harassment is a natural part of life. They may also believe that the person being harassed is responsible for the situation. It is important to recognize that this is a harmful and incorrect perception. Street harassment is not the fault of the victim, and it is a responsibility of everyone to work towards ending it.



In **Poland** recent research among 332 respondents, 271 women, 59 men, mostly between the ages of 18 and 24 (75.3%), with 10% between the ages of 30 and 40 showed that 72.9% had been a victim of cat calling and 90.7% had experienced verbal abuse. More than half of the respondents, 60.8% answered that they did not encounter the phenomenon of cat calling in their environment, while 25.9% said that they encounter it often and 5.7% answered that they witness such situations very often. The questionnaire shows that respondents most often feel disgusted when they are victims or witnesses of this phenomenon. This was answered by 75.6% of respondents. Other feelings that catcalling arouses in people are:

annoyance/anger/sadness, answered by 70.8% of the respondents, 55.1% feel insecure and 7.5% have an indifferent attitude towards this type of situation. 75.8% of people answered that they do not feel guilty after the whole event.

The survey asked participants about the impact of verbal taunts on their self-esteem, with 105 reporting no effect and the remainder reporting negative effects. Additionally, the survey inquired whether anyone followed up with participants after verbal taunts, with 26.2% responding affirmatively. The majority of participants (over 70%) reported experiencing or witnessing catcalling during the survey. This confirmed that this is a common phenomenon in society, although it is not known by its name. Many people shared their feelings with us after first finding out exactly what catcalling means. A significant proportion of those taking part in the survey shared emotions such as irritation, anger, sadness, disgust at the situations that occurred. This makes catcalling negatively characterised and is not perceived as a compliment. The majority of people in the survey used for this study answered 'yes' to the question of whether they felt unsafe in such a situation and that the most common reaction to catcalling is ignorance, which stems from fear, sometimes also from a lack of knowledge that it is a phenomenon that should not occur, that is pathological and can lead to much more serious events. Catcalling is not a compliment. It is not a way of showing admiration, of emphasising another person's worth. Catcalling is verbal violence and at the same time is the basis for committing physical violence (Boni, Sobkowicz i Tiesler, 2021).



In research conducted in **Portugal**, it is clear that for both boys and girls, sexual harassment is a behavior of a sexual character, unwanted by the person to whom it is directed. Both mention several examples of sexual harassment, such as groping, whistling, comments, etc., however, the girls mentioned more examples, told through their personal experiences. Girls report that situations of sexual harassment are often normalized by the observer, referring to them as a joke. Girls see this harassment as something offensive, while boys, although they agree that it is offensive, sometimes tend to consider that the behaviour can be not intended and justified. For both groups, it was clear that the spaces where they take place are “public spaces in general, and particularly the streets, bars and clubs, public transport, such as the metro or bus, and the school. (...) taxis (...) social networks and online platforms”. Regarding the strategies adopted, girls are the group that most seek to defend themselves by changing routes and routines - “walking faster on the street, pretending to be talking on the phone, trying to walk accompanied by friends/ and only ride in taxis whose driver is known or trusted by the father and/or mother” (Pontedeira i Guerreiro, 2019).



In turn, a report from **Italy** carried out in connection with z World Day against Violence against Women, Save the Children releases the results of a survey conducted on its behalf by Ipsos on a sample of adolescents aged between 14 and 18 in Italy. It is necessary to invest in protection systems, but above all in education that eliminates the opportunity gap between men and women that generates stereotypes and ultimately violence against women (Save the Children, 2020). According to Save the Children's 2020 report, Italian children are increasingly exposed to online content that normalizes violence against women, with 39% of boys and girls affected. Girls, in particular, have reported feeling offended and humiliated by content shared by their social contacts, with 10% feeling more exposed during the lockdown. Furthermore, 18% of respondents witnessed their friends experiencing violence, with fear preventing intervention in 9% of cases. Despite this, 83% of the time, there was an intervention from a reference adult or the police (2020). Sexual and physical violence against of a girl are seen as very serious respectively by 94% and 92% of young people, psychological violence by 88% of them.

The majority of respondents consider economic violence towards women to be a serious issue, with 75% agreement, but there is a noticeable difference in perception between men (69%) and women (81%). Adolescents still place great importance on physical appearance, with 57% believing that women's beauty can lead to success, and 46% indicating that being attractive is more important for women than for men. This perception is more prevalent among boys, with 53% agreeing, compared to 39% of girls interviewed. Not surprisingly, when asked to give their opinion on recent news events that have raised the issue of stereotypes, such as the case of a vice-principal at a Roman high school who allegedly advised female students not to wear miniskirts to avoid distracting teachers, more than 1 in 10 respondents (15% of boys and 10% of girls) expressed the belief that girls at school should not provoke teachers with revealing or skimpy clothing.





In **The Netherlands** “young people are quick to conform to prevailing gender norms. They are still discovering their own identity, which makes them insecure. It then feels safe to uncritically conform to gender norms so that you belong. Boys who do not conform to prevailing gender norms are often harshly punished by their social environment, while boys who behave in a dominant and tough manner are held in high regard” (<https://shop.rutgers.nl/nl/webwinkel/de-pleger-in-beeld/61070888>). This creates a toxic environment where toxic masculinity thrives and gender stereotypes are reinforced. Girls, on the other hand, are expected to adhere to feminine norms such as being nurturing, empathetic, and submissive. Those who do not conform to these norms are often labeled as tomboys or are ostracized by their peers. In addition, we must challenge the societal pressures that reinforce gender norms. Parents, educators, and media outlets must play a role in shaping the attitudes and beliefs of young people. By promoting gender equality and acceptance of all forms of gender expression, we can create a more equitable and compassionate world for everyone. It is crucial for young people to be taught that gender is a spectrum and that there is no one way to express gender. Encouraging exploration and experimentation with gender expression can help young people develop a stronger sense of self and allow for a more diverse and inclusive society. We need to create safe spaces for young people to express themselves without fear of judgment or punishment.





On the other hand in **Spain** “in the present research we explored how women are perceived as a function of their reactions to a harassing situation (piropo). Results showed that both male and female participants expressed less liking for the woman who reacted positively to the piropo as well as a lower intention to establish interpersonal relations with her; they also viewed this woman as less competent and more superficial. The relation between the woman’s reaction to the piropo and her likeability was mediated by the superficiality and competence with which she was perceived. Negative consequences for women who react positively to situations in which male strangers pay attention to their body” (Moya-Garófano, Moya, Megías and Rodríguez-Bailón, 2020).

These findings are concerning as they suggest that women who respond positively to piropos are more likely to be perceived in a negative light, which may have real-world implications for their personal and professional lives. Moreover, the results highlight the prevalence of gender-based harassment in public spaces and the importance of examining how different responses to such situations impact social perceptions of women. The study also points to the need for interventions to address gender-based harassment and to promote safer and more respectful public spaces for women.

## 6. Addressing Harassment in Public Spaces: Statistics and Recommendations

Harassment in public spaces – as many as 84% of Polish women have experienced it! In 2019, the IPSOS centre conducted an international survey of 500 women. 78% of them admitted that they had been victims of harassment in public spaces. 56% indicated male intrusive staring and making obscene gestures, 54% complained of men and making strange noises, 45% listened to erotic jokes and ambiguous proposals, street harassment was experienced by 44% of the women surveyed, and as many as 43% were victims of unwanted touching. IPSOS repeated this survey in 2021, this time asking only Polish women about harassment in public spaces. As many as 84% of women had experienced this type of harassment once or more. As many as 43% of girls had been victims of harassment before the age of 18, and 12% before they turned 12 (Molestowanie w przestrzeni publicznej, 2022).



In Spain, nearly 90% of women (in the sample) have been found to be in situations of whistling, honking, and compliments (source: Varela-Lérida, Caja-Peralta, and Rueda-Sánchez-Jauregui, 2019). In Italy, the results of the first national survey on sexual violence and harassment, published by Istat in 2018, show that 8,816,000 women aged 14 to 65 have experienced some form of sexual harassment in their lives. The problem is not limited to women, as 3,874,000 men reported experiencing at least one instance of harassment (source: Macro-Survey on Violence against Women carried out by the Spanish Government, 2019).





The situation is similar in the Netherlands. A proposal for interactions and suggestions was developed by Rutgers. This seems to be crucial for building coping strategies (Betrekken van jongens en mannen, 2023). As Rutgers notes "Too often the responsibility is still placed on girls to prevent sexually transgressive behavior. While boys in particular exhibit transgressive behavior. If we want to stop that behavior, it is necessary to make boys part of the solution. By involving boys and men in a positive way, we can make a real difference. Time to give boys and men an active role in the prevention of sexually transgressive behaviour" (Betrekken van jongens en mannen, 2023). Sexual education should focus on gender equality and gender norms, with a focus on involving boys in discussions about desires, boundaries, and consent. It's important to provide up-to-date knowledge about gender inequality and traditional norms related to gender and sexuality to help young people challenge unwanted patterns that encourage sexual boundary crossing. In addition, it's important to challenge traditional ideas about gender norms and stereotypes by discussing and deconstructing negative stereotypes and formulating statements positively. Responsibility for transgressive behavior should be placed on the perpetrator and not the victim, and expectations about gender norms and expectations should be discussed within families, communities, and friend groups.

Besides, research conducted by Save the Child (programs) shows that "the voice of adolescents shows us that the problem of gender violence must be tackled at the root, from the educational path of the youngest", as Raffaella Milano said, Director of Italy-Europe Programs of Save the Children. "If on the one hand we must strengthen the protection network, to support women who want to free themselves from domestic violence, on the other hand it is essential to act on the prevention of gender violence, going to the root of violent behaviour, starting from the educational context, involving adolescents themselves in a commitment that sees them as protagonists. We must listen to and strengthen the great majority of girls who today consider it unacceptable to suffer all forms of harassment and a violent attitude that identifies sharing with peers as one of the ways to overcome the barriers that still hinder the construction of their future" (Save the Children, 2020).

One way to combat catcalling is through education, starting from a young age. Schools should introduce educational programs that teach students how to respect others and behave in public places. Classes should teach children that every person has the right to respect and dignity, regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation, or appearance.

Another way is to change the law to recognize catcalling as a form of violence. This would allow for punishing perpetrators and preventing such situations in the future. We should encourage the creation and support of social initiatives and movements dedicated to fighting catcalling, as well as joining such organizations and supporting their actions.

It is also important for catcalling victims to feel safe and to have support from society and authorities. They should be heard and believed, and the process of explaining the situation should work quickly and effectively.

Fighting catcalling is a long process, but everyone can contribute to change. Let's support initiatives and organizations that fight this problem, and encourage our schools and authorities to take action. Let's not tolerate violent and harmful street culture and work together to create a safer and more respectful world for everyone.

**If we were to specify this, we pay attention to:**



**The recommendations would pertain to, in particular:**



## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, addressing harassment in public spaces requires a multi-faceted approach that combines awareness, legal reforms, community involvement, and support services. By implementing these recommendations and continuously raising awareness, societies can work towards safer and more inclusive public spaces where everyone can move freely without fear of harassment or violence.

*Thank you!*



TACKLING STREET HARASSMENT & GENDER  
STEREOTYPES IN YOUNGSTERS



websiteprojecty  
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# GLOSSARY

## BOOKLET. STREET HARASSMENT IN EUROPE

*Project EquAlley (2021-1-ES01-KA220-SCH-000032603)*

**BODY SHAMING** - *Shaming, humiliating or harassing someone because of how their body looks, usually because their body does not match gendered beauty ideals.*

**BULLYING, HARASSMENT** - *bullying, with the intention of harming the other person. The aggressive act is largely unprovoked and is repeated over a period of time. It is often defined as deliberate, repeated and unprovoked aggressive behaviour by one or a group of perpetrators towards the victim with the intent to cause physical pain, distress, humiliation or terror to the victim, usually in front of a group of "spectators" with a clear imbalance of power - the victim's inability to defend themselves and the perpetrator's feeling of impunity. The perpetrators of bullying are most often impulsive, domineering, lacking empathy and have a positive perception of violence. The victims are most often people with low self-esteem, a low sense of security, anxiety and a low rate of peer bonding.*

**CATCALLING** - *see: street harassment. series of evaluative and objectifying comments made in public and directed at women as a way of highlighting a sexualized part of their bodies. "[...] through looks, words or gestures, the man asserts his right to intrude on the woman's attention, calling her a sexual object, and forcing her to interact with him. The term arrived in Italy in 2013 where it was identified by the Accademia della Crusca as sexual harassment, as the term names a series of acts such as unsolicited compliments, vulgar comments directed at the victim's body, and even outright insults, which, because they are considered an expression of a sexist and devaluing mentality, constitute a specific type of sexual harassment and street harassment.*

**DISCRIMINATION** - *is treating someone worse than others in the same situation. People are discriminated against on various grounds, e.g. gender, race, age, material status, religion or sexual orientation.*

**GENDER IDENTITY** - *is the inner awareness of one's gender.*

**HARASSMENT** - *comments, gestures or unwanted acts directed at someone in a public space without their consent, unwanted behaviour, requests, mentioning their physical appearance, such as someone's body or the clothing they are wearing, Continuing to talk to someone after they ask being left alone, chasing, intentionally invading personal space or blocking the street, persistent requests for someone's name, number or other information, masturbating or touching oneself in public, sexist, racist, homophobic, transphobic insults or any comments that insult or belittle an aspect of someone's identity, showing pornographic images without someone's consent, staring at, taking a picture of someone without their consent, telling someone to smile, using a mirror to look at someone's skirt or dress without their allowed, Whistling.*

**HUMAN RIGHTS** - a set of rights and freedoms to which everyone is entitled regardless of race, sex, language, religion, political opinion, national and social origin, property, etc. Human rights are rights of a moral nature, a set of demands demanding respect for the values most precious to man, such as life, dignity, freedom, free development.

**INTIMIDATION** - Threatening act or words, which are intended to instil fear and force you to act or to desist from an action with the stimulus of fear; the very fear that in this way is aroused in others; giving in to intimidation; to force, to obtain with the l., with intimidation. In the navy, firing cannon shots or launching anti-submarine bombs towards the area where the enemy is supposed to be present, in order to distract him from the action.

**MALE DOMINATION** - places the woman in a constant insecurity of her own body and the claimed femininity is nothing more than a complacency towards male expectations. Women exist first and foremost for and through the looks of others on whom they are irremediably dependent.

**MASCHILISM** - attitude or mindset, based on the presumed superiority of man over woman.

**MISOGYNY** - feeling and a consequent attitude of aversion or repulsion towards women, manifested indifferently by men or other women. It is directed towards women considered as a group: a misogynist person can still have affectionate, friendly and loving relationships with single women; conversely, having negative relationships with a large number of women individually does not necessarily mean being a misogynist.

**SEXISM** - is the tendency to evaluate people's ability or activity on the basis of sex, gendered norms, stereotypes and prejudices. The presumed superiority or presumed greater value of men and masculinity over women and femininity.

**SEXISM** - The belief in the biological, intellectual, moral superiority of men and masculinity over women and femininity. A belief in the rightfulness of treating men better as a result of this superiority; discrimination against women as a result of a belief in the different value of members of different sexes.

**SEXUAL EDUCATION** - a general term that includes various themes and various disciplines related to education of children around sexuality and gender.

**SEXUAL HARASSMENT** - any unacceptable conduct of a sexual nature which has the purpose or effect of violating their dignity, or humiliating or degrading them. Sexual harassment can consist of (manifestations of) physical (groping, pinching, patting, etc.), verbal (vulgar nicknames, jokes, etc.) and non-verbal (gestures, pictures, photos) elements.

**SEXUAL VIOLENCE** - violence perpetrated in a sexual way.

**STEREOTYPE** - an exaggerated image of a given group, treating all its members in an undifferentiated manner, regardless of their individual characteristics. Stereotypes are often based on uncertain or false knowledge about the world, fixed by tradition and hardly subject to change. Stereotypes are characterised by their one-sidedness, rigidity, longevity, "waterproofness" - resistance to arguments and facts.

**VICTIM BLAMING** - holding victims (co)responsible for the violence or harassment that was perpetrated against them.

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**BOOKLET.**  
**STREET HARASSMENT IN EUROPE**

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