

# Sexism at work

## What is sexism?

**T** [Sexism](#) is linked to beliefs around the fundamental nature of women and men and the roles they should play in society. Sexist assumptions about women and men, which manifest themselves as [gender stereotypes](#), can rank one gender as superior to another. Such hierarchical thinking can be conscious and hostile, or it can be unconscious, manifesting itself as **unconscious bias**. Sexism can touch everyone, but women are particularly affected.

Despite legal frameworks set up across the EU to prevent discrimination and promote equality, women are still under-represented in decision-making roles, left out of certain sectors of the economy, primarily responsible for unpaid care work, paid less than men and disproportionately subject to gender-based violence<sup>[1]</sup>. Sexist attitudes, practices and behaviour contribute to these inequalities.

Within the European institutions there is no specific definition of sexism. Sexist behaviour is partly covered under Article 12a of the Staff Regulations on psychological and sexual harassment, where sexual harassment is defined as:

“

*... conduct relating to sex which is unwanted by the person to whom it is directed and which has the purpose or effect of offending that person or creating an intimidating, hostile, offensive or disturbing environment<sup>[2]</sup>.*

”

Sexist practices are prohibited under Article 1(d) of the Staff Regulations, which prohibits discrimination based on sex (among other forms of discrimination), as well as under Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU.

However, **while some sexist behaviour may breach these anti-harassment and anti-discrimination rules, some does not reach that threshold**. Additionally, the European Court of Auditors has found that while the ethical frameworks of the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission are largely adequate and staff rate their own ethical knowledge highly, **less than a quarter believe their colleagues would not hesitate to report unethical behaviour**<sup>[3]</sup>.

## Definition: sexism

Sexism is linked to power in that those with power are typically treated with favour and those without power are typically discriminated against. Sexism is also related to stereotypes since discriminatory actions or attitudes are frequently based on false beliefs or generalisations about gender, and on considering gender as relevant where it is not.

Source: EIGE<sup>[4]</sup>

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## Footnotes

[1] Directive 2006/54/EC on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation outlines provisions Member States are obligated to take to stop sexual harassment in the workplace, as well as direct and indirect discrimination

[2] Regulation No 31 (EEC), 11 (EAEC), laying down the Staff Regulations of Officials and the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants of the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A01962R0031-20140501>).

[3] European Court of Auditors, Special Report – The ethical frameworks of the audited EU institutions: scope for improvement, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019  
([https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR19\\_13/SR\\_ethical\\_frameworks\\_EN.pdf](https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR19_13/SR_ethical_frameworks_EN.pdf)).

[4] <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1367>