

Country overview

Somalia

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Sexual Harassment in the Media

This research is the product of a collaboration between WAN-IFRA Women in News, BBC Media Action and City St George's, University of London. It was produced thanks to support from the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (UK FCDO) under the Public Interest Media and Healthy Information Environments (PIMHIE) programme.

We are grateful to our colleagues and partners in the 21 countries of the study for their support in disseminating the survey to respondents.

Women in News is a media development programme of the World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA). Its mission is to close the gender gap in news media. It works with 80 media organisations from 17 countries in Africa, the Middle East and South East Asia.

BBC Media Action is the BBC's international charity. With our partners, we reach more than 100 million people in need around the world, in more than 30 countries and 50 languages. We work to provide impartial, impactful, trustworthy media to people in need so that they can make informed choices to transform their lives.

City St George's, University of London has a mission to generate world-leading research on global social justice and inclusivity in journalism that brings lasting benefits to the industry through its Department of Journalism. We partner with journalists, think tanks, NGOs, and policymakers to explore how ethical, public interest journalism can be reimagined and protected for future generations.

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Somalia

This report is part of a 2025 international study on sexual harassment in media workplaces¹, examining experiences of sexual harassment among women, men and gender non-conforming media professionals across 21 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab region, South East Asia and Ukraine.

Conducted by the World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) Women in News (WIN) in partnership with City St George's, University of London and BBC Media Action, this is the largest study of its kind. It builds on research conducted in 2020 that identified persistent gaps in evidence on sexual harassment in media workplaces.

The survey across newsrooms in Somalia and Somaliland² shows that the prevalence of sexual harassment³ stands at 44%. Although this rate is based on a small sample size and therefore comparisons require caution, this rate is above the Sub-Saharan regional average of 33%. As this was the first time the survey was conducted in Somalia and Somaliland, there is no relevant dataset from 2020 available for comparison.

Results indicate that the gender gap for verbal workplace sexual harassment, which more frequently affects women, is much greater than for other forms of sexual harassment and rape. Unusually compared with other African countries surveyed, women respondents in Somalia and Somaliland stated they report workplace sexual harassment of all types more often than men.

¹This study defines sexual harassment as “unwanted and offensive behaviour of a sexual nature that violates a person’s dignity and makes them feel degraded, humiliated, intimidated or threatened”. For definitions for specific types of sexual harassment, see the [methodology page](#).

²In this report we use Somaliland as a country label to refer to the self-declared Republic of Somaliland, for clarity in contextual analysis and due to its de facto separate legal system. Somaliland is not a UN Member State, and the references in this document do not imply a position on its status or sovereignty.

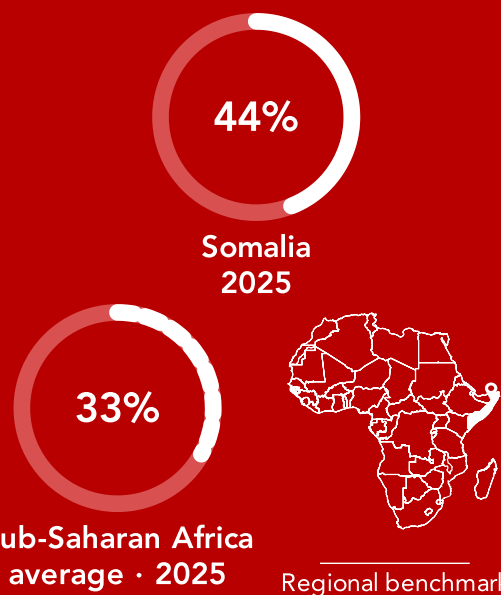
³The prevalence of sexual harassment for a given country/region is calculated as the mean average of the percentage of respondents from that location who reported having ever experienced verbal harassment, online harassment, physical harassment and/or rape while at work.

”

“Currently I am working with all female media outlets, and previously I was working with male-dominated media. Based on the experiences from my previous work, I suggest that Somali media outlets need a sexual [harassment] reporting mechanism that helps journalists, particularly women journalists.”

Female digital journalist aged 25–34

Overall rates of sexual harassment in newsrooms. First survey — no 2020 comparison



Context

Legislative and policy advancements on sexual harassment in the parallel legal systems of Somalia and Somaliland exist within a wider context of protracted conflict, displacement and widespread violence, where journalists are targeted by both the armed group Al-Shabaab and state security forces.

Women and girls – particularly internally displaced persons – face heightened exposure to sexual and gender-based violence, and limited access to protection or justice. Somalia’s blend of formal, Sharia and xeer (clan-based) laws particularly limits women’s access to justice. Under the latter, women must rely on a male guardian to access justice mechanisms.

In 2020 the Somaliland House of Representatives approved the Rape, Fornication and Other Related Offences Law No. 78/2020. This landmark law recognised sexual harassment as a criminal act. However, it did not clearly define the age of consent or provide comprehensive protection for survivors of sexual abuse.

In December 2023 Somalia’s Cabinet endorsed the Offences of Rape and Indecency Bill to update national laws on these issues. However, the UN Special Representative General on Sexual Violence in Conflict identified specific provisions in the bill that fell short of interna-

tional humanitarian standards, including its definitions of coercion and indecency. This reflects a pattern of legislative reform efforts in Somalia that have repeatedly stalled or been weakened under political pressure.

A 2025 report by the National Union of Somali Journalists documented 79 cases of sexual and gender-based violence against women journalists in Somalia between 2023 and 2025, but noted that the real figure is likely considerably higher, as fear of retaliation, stigma and low trust in formal complaint systems deter reporting. Women journalists describe experiencing sexual coercion by supervisors and threats linked to both their reporting and their gender.

In 2024 UNESCO and the Somali Women Journalists Organization launched training across five regions to address sexual harassment and create safer, more inclusive newsrooms – acknowledging that workplace protections in the sector remain seriously inadequate.



“What’s needed is real accountability, consistent support for those who speak up, and leadership that doesn’t just say the right things publicly but enforces them privately. A safe newsroom isn’t just about preventing harassment – it’s about creating an environment where respect is the norm, not the exception.”

Male middle manager for digital media aged 25–34

The survey

The sample for Somalia and Somaliland was one of the smallest in the 2025 survey, with only 39 media professionals taking part in the survey through an online questionnaire distributed among WAN-IFRA WIN and BBC Media Action networks.⁵ Respondents comprised 21 women, 18 men and no individuals who identified as gender non-conforming or who preferred to self-describe their gender identity (see Figure 1).⁴

Figure 1: Respondent demographics

All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number

By gender identity

54% n = 21

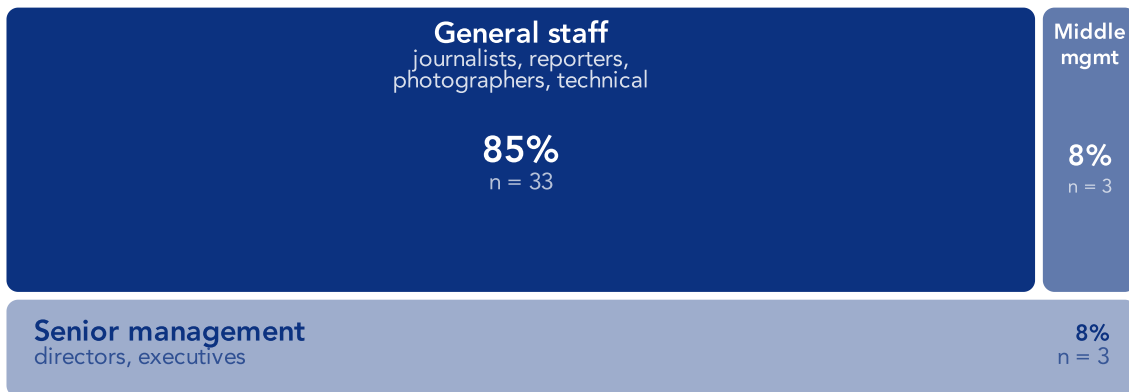
46% n = 18



Women

Men

By job level



⁵The sample for Somalia and Somaliland did not include any gender non-conforming respondent or individuals who preferred to self-describe their gender identity. To explore trends for these groups in other study countries, please refer to the relevant regional or global report.

⁴This study employed an online survey instrument comprising 33 closed questions and one open-ended question. The latter allowed respondents to provide additional comments, and was the source of the quotes included in this report. Respondents could skip any question if they wanted.

WIN and BBC Media Action regional media networks distributed the surveys. Each network aimed for a balance of respondents by gender, role and media organisation type. Response rates and sample sizes vary by country.

Given the sensitivity of the subject, the research team gave respondents access to relevant support resources in their country. Data was handled in accordance with City St George's, University of London's privacy policy and international data protection standards. For further details, see the [methodology page](#).

Experience of Sexual Harassment

The survey sample for Somalia and Somaliland was small, making it difficult to draw strong conclusions based on country-level data alone. Nonetheless, it appears that the gender gap is greater when verbal sexual harassment in the workplace is considered, compared to other types of harassment and rape (see Figure 2).

Some 12 women in the sample (60%) have experienced **verbal sexual harassment** at least once, compared with four out of 18 men. While the sample is small, 15% of women respondents said they had faced five or more incidents of this type of harassment at work.

Roughly half of all respondents – 11 women and eight men – had experienced **online sexual**

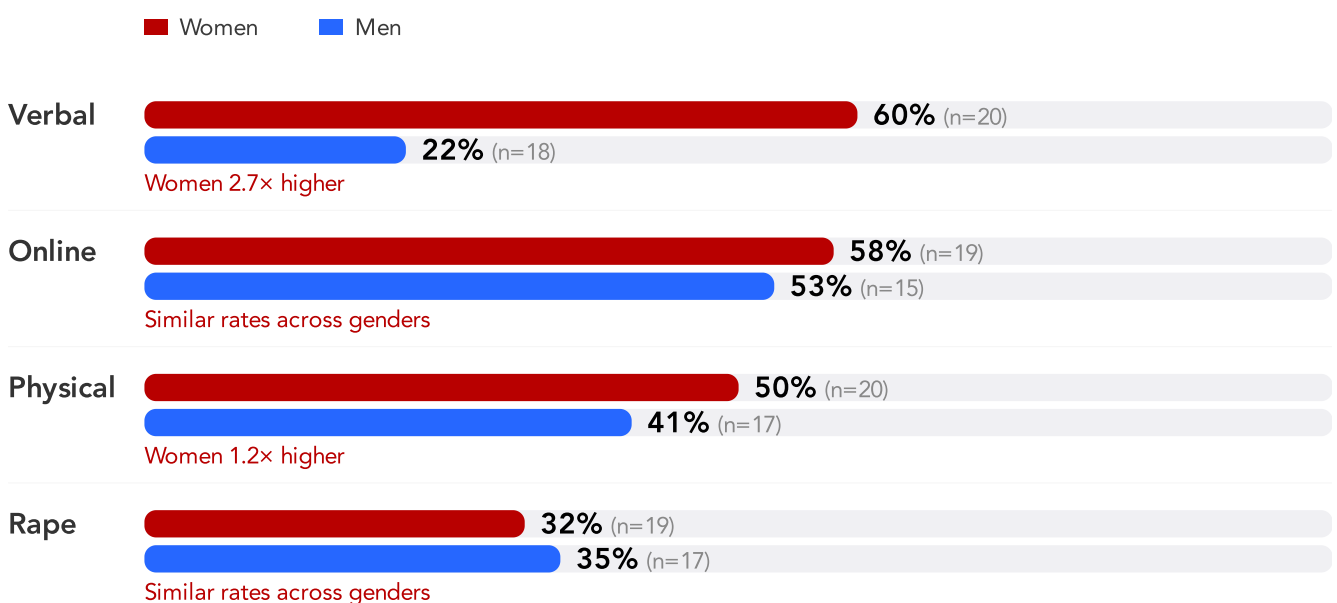
harassment in the course of their work.

Workplace **physical sexual harassment** is slightly less commonly experienced by both genders, having affected 10 out of 20 women, compared with seven out of 17 men in the sample.

Experiences of workplace **rape** are rare among this sample, but six men and six women said this had happened to them.

Figure 2: Experience by type of sexual harassment and gender

Base: all respondents, excluding "I can't remember". All percentages rounded to the nearest whole number.



Reporting and Action

The survey asked respondents who indicated they had experienced sexual harassment at work whether they reported the incident to their organisation. In such cases, the survey asked follow-up questions to assess whether their employers had taken any action as a result.

Unusually compared with other African countries surveyed, women respondents in Somalia and Somaliland appear to report workplace sexual harassment of all types more often than men (see Figure 3). However, the small sample size requires caution when making any comparisons.

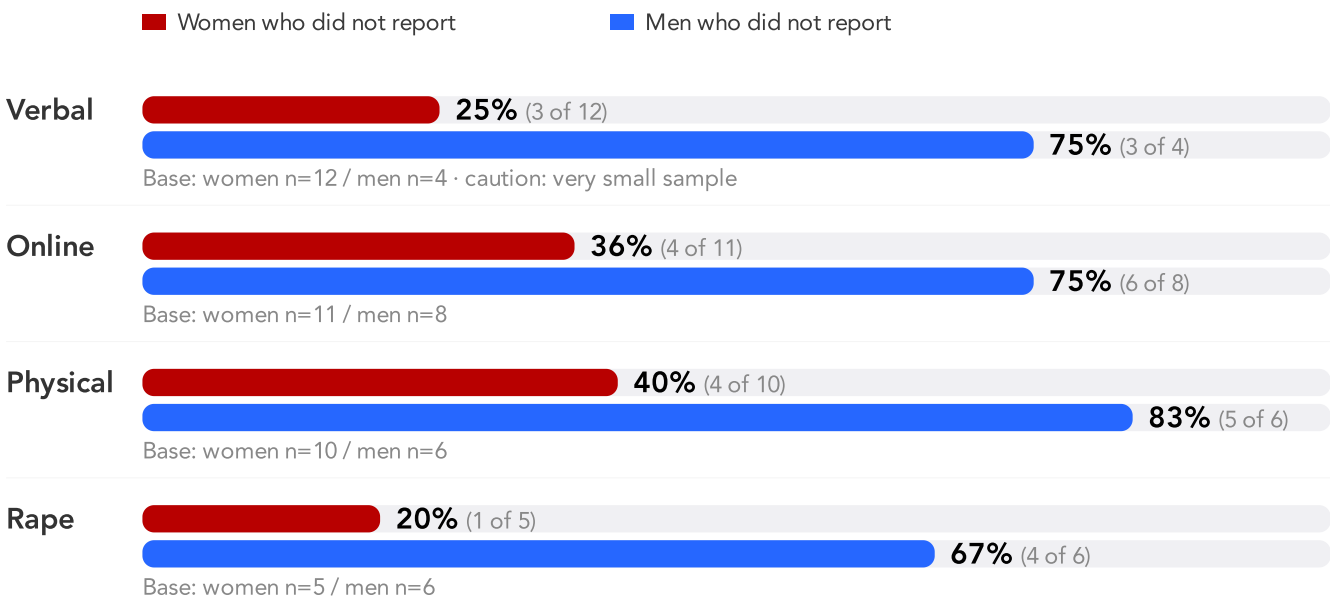
Women respondents in Somalia and Somaliland were highly likely to have officially reported ver-

bal sexual harassment, with only three out of 12 not having done this. However, the reverse was true for men.

Respondents cited various reasons for their hesitancy to report, including fears of losing their job, a negative impact on their career or potential retaliation from the perpetrator. A lack of reporting mechanisms was also cited as a factor.

Figure 3: Reporting rates by type of sexual harassment

Base: those who experienced each type and answered the reporting question. All percentages rounded.



“I hope this survey brings change to the situation of Somali journalists.”
 Male radio technical worker aged 25–34

The data on how organisations responded to reports of verbal sexual harassment is hindered by the small sample size (see Figure 4). Organisations mostly took action in response to complaints, most commonly warning the perpetrator, but in one case a woman complainant was fired. The police were informed in response to the sole complaint raised by a man in this sample.

When it comes to **physical sexual harassment**, six women respondents reported incidents to their employers, compared with only one man. Respondents' cited reasons for not doing so varied, but fear of losing their job ranked highly for both men and women. Employers took action in response to the majority of complaints, most commonly by warning or transferring the perpetrator.

Women were also more inclined than men to report **online sexual harassment**, but only two men and seven women had reported this type of harassment to their employer. While the sample size is small, organisations took action in the majority of cases reported by women. In half of these cases, employers transferred the perpetrator to another job or area. The only reported case for a man was dismissed after a case review.

Despite the small size of the sample, the analysis of **rape** data shows that a high proportion of women in Somalia and Somaliland reported instances of workplace rape they had encountered, at higher rates than in several other countries surveyed, yet the majority of men did not report similar experiences.

Figure 4: Action taken by organisations on reported sexual harassment

Base: those who reported harassment and answered the action question (excluding "I can't remember").

