

For Immediate Release



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AUB's KIP workshop **tackles sexual harassment in the workplace**

Twenty-six participants from the Lebanese private sector attended a workshop at the American University of Beirut (AUB) for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) on the drafting of anti-sexual harassment guidelines and policies. The workshop was organized by the Knowledge is Power (KIP) Project on Gender and Sexuality, and held in partnership with the Office of the Minister of State for Women's Affairs (OMSWA), the Lebanese League for Women in Business, and the Global Compact Network Lebanon.

The participants included managers and senior Human Resources staff from a variety of local organizations and industries, including education, telecommunications, banking, healthcare, and production. Representatives from OMSWA were also present during the training, in addition to observers from civil society and academia.

Abir Chebaro, project manager at OMSWA, highlighted the potential for the private sector to mobilize for social change. "Management and leaders can play a bigger role in preventing sexual harassment in the workplace, getting the companies to do a better job in fulfilling their social responsibilities," she said.

Two local lawyers and activists, Youmna Makhoul and Layal Sakr, led the training along with lawyer Walid Nakib, head of the Legal Unit at the former Prime Minister's Office. Dr. Lama Abu-Odeh, international discussant from Georgetown University, was also present to offer input on various conceptions of the law around sexual harassment. With these four legal experts offering global, regional, and local perspectives, the conversation revolved around varying manifestations of sexual harassment in the workplace, as well as practical mechanisms for reporting and disciplinary action.

Participants learned how these regulations can stipulate the type of behavior—such as sexual harassment—which warrants sanctions and eventual termination, under Article 66 of the Lebanese Labor Law. The trainers also gave an overview of the definitions of sexual harassment according to the ILO standards, as well as those presented in the three draft laws proposed by each of the Office of the Minister of State for Women’s Affairs, MP Ghassan Moukheiber, and the feminist group Nasawiya in collaboration with the Legal Agenda.

By turning the lens on these various draft laws, participants were able to discuss notions of proof and consent in relation to sexual harassment in the workplace. Constructive debate emerged around the notion of proving sexual harassment at work and the impact on those reporting this type of abuse. Consent was also problematized, with the discussion suggesting that power dynamics complicate its practical manifestations.

The training facilitators also presented and discussed guidelines for drafting of internal regulations for reporting and disciplinary action procedures in cases of sexual harassment. Sakr provided an overview of various types of reporting and disciplinary mechanisms which can be utilized in workplace policies within the current legal framework.

By the end of the session, participants broke into groups to work on drafting internal guidelines and policies against sexual harassment, taking into account the existing legal framework. They later presented the results for feedback by the trainers. By providing interactive opportunities to draft guidelines, the workshop sought to offer practical solutions for social change.

“This is an example of AUB's OSB advocating creatively for policy change, garnering support from private sector for human rights activism and building strong and sustainable partnerships with government,” said Dr. Charlotte Karam, KIP project director. “This is new, exciting and a demonstration that we don't just create informational conferences, but also critical dialogue and substantive advocacy work for positive change.”

This workshop is the latest initiative by the KIP Project, and part of their efforts to push for the production and dissemination of knowledge around gender and sexuality and, more specifically, discrimination and sexual harassment in Lebanon, all made possible through a grant from the US Department of State.

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 130 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 420-bed hospital.

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