

## Workplace safety through vetting: Preventing sexual harassment



As South Africa continues to confront rising incidents of workplace harassment and economic crime, the importance of effective vetting processes cannot be overstated, and we should follow global trends. Recent legislation in the UK, the Worker Protection Act (WPA), underscores the growing emphasis on comprehensive pre-employment screening and ongoing monitoring to protect employees and organisations.

The Worker Protection Act, which came into effect on October 26, 2024, in the UK, is designed to enhance protection for employees in the workplace. It mandates that employers take proactive measures to prevent workplace harassment, particularly sexual harassment, which has seen an alarming increase—73% from 2014 to 2024, with 26% of all reported incidents occurring at work.

According to the 2020 report by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), approximately 35% of women in the workplace reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment. Which is unacceptable, not only is sexual harassment illegal, it also creates a hostile work environment.

These statistics emphasise the necessity of rigorous vetting processes in South Africa's corporate landscape. Organisations are now confronted with the responsibility to prevent harassment, and effective vetting should include the following:

- Comprehensive background checks during recruitment.

- Ongoing monitoring to identify potential risks.

- Utilisation of modern tools like social media screening for risk mitigation.

- Staff should be trained on handling incidents and adhering to a code of conduct.

Common challenges with screening to prevent harassment include outdated procedures, reliance on

singular checks, and insufficient training for HR personnel in handling incidents. Regular audits of the screening procedures and engaging with external experts can ensure that policies align with evolving legal requirements and industry standards, as well as global strategies to mitigate these risks.

These along with continuous training for HR professionals will aid in fostering a company culture of respect and result in a positive working environment, which will ensure you retain your top talent.

In the face of rising workplace harassment and economic crime, reviewing screening procedures is not just timely but essential. By embracing thorough vetting processes, companies in South Africa can foster a safer, more transparent work environment, positioning themselves to thrive in a landscape that demands integrity and accountability.

These enhanced measures protect employees and strengthen the organisation's reputation and resilience against fraud, damage, and harassment.