



THE IRISH WORKPLACE BULLYING REPORT

2026



InsightHR

good people : good business

Why Workplace Bullying Still Persists

As Managing Director of Insight HR, I have seen first-hand how challenging workplace bullying can be - both for the people who experience it and for those responsible for dealing with it.

It was this experience that led us to carry out this research. We invited 2,000+ HR professionals and business leaders to share their views on how bullying is prevented and managed at work. While there is increasing focus on wellbeing, there is still surprisingly little research into bullying itself - despite it remaining a persistent and often misunderstood workplace issue.

In my view, many organisations continue to underestimate both how common bullying is and the impact it has. Too often, there is not enough investment in training, early intervention, or preventative measures. Instead, issues are allowed to escalate until they become formal complaints - by which point they are more difficult, more disruptive, and more costly to resolve.

One of the most striking things, both from this research and from experience, is just how many people encounter bullying at work. While case law, including the Ruffley v The Board of Management of St Anne's School, sets a high bar for proving bullying, that does not change the reality that poor and uncivil behaviour is still widely experienced.

The impact of that behaviour should not be underestimated. For individuals, it can affect confidence, wellbeing, and both mental and physical health. Bullying can and does lead to personal injury, and where a recognised psychiatric injury arises, the cost of defending claims - and any awards made - can be significant for organisations.

For employers, the cost is not just financial. Managing complaints and carrying out investigations takes time, resources, and expertise. Yet too often the focus is on resolving the issue quickly - getting the complaint "off the desk" - rather than asking a more important question: how did we get here in the first place?

There is still too little focus on taking a step back and looking at the systems, culture, and behaviours that allow issues to arise and persist. Without that reflection, the same problems are likely to repeat.

The research also highlights a clear gap between confidence and capability. Many HR professionals and managers believe they are well equipped to handle bullying complaints, but the reality is more complex. Investigations are not intuitive. They require a specific skill set - including objectivity, knowledge of employment law, strong interviewing techniques, conflict management, analysis, and report writing.

From our experience, and from the appeals we see, these are not skills that can be assumed. Without proper training and support, that gap between confidence and capability remains - increasing the risk of poor outcomes and undermining trust in the process.

This research aims to bring greater clarity to these issues - to better understand how bullying is experienced and managed, and where organisations need to do more.

Ultimately, if we are serious about creating safe and respectful workplaces, we need to move beyond policy and take a more proactive, informed approach to preventing and addressing bullying.

Best Regards
Mary

Mary Cullen
*Founder/Managing Director
Insight HR*



Section One

A Growing Concern

The research shows that bullying is rampant in Irish workplaces, complaints are not lessening and have become routine for HR professionals and business leaders

Bullying has become routine for Irish businesses

Bullying complaints are not only prevalent in Irish workplaces, they have become a routine and recurring part of organisational life for HR professionals and business leaders.

The findings from this survey highlight the scale and consistency with which bullying issues are being managed, with the vast majority of respondents having dealt with formal complaints during their careers, many on multiple occasions. Crucially, the data also indicates that this is not a diminishing problem; instead, complaint levels have largely remained steady or increased in recent years, with particular pressure emerging in certain sectors such as healthcare.

What was more eye-opening is that a majority of the respondents themselves said they had personally experienced workplace bullying, with more than two thirds of them later leaving the organisation. 80% of those who left said the bullying was the main reason they left.

Together, these insights point to a workplace environment where bullying is not just present, but persistent - requiring ongoing intervention, resources, and leadership attention.

85% have handled **at least one** bullying complaint in their career

62% have handled a bullying complaint **in the past 12 months**

of HR professionals and business leaders

Bullying complaints are not going away

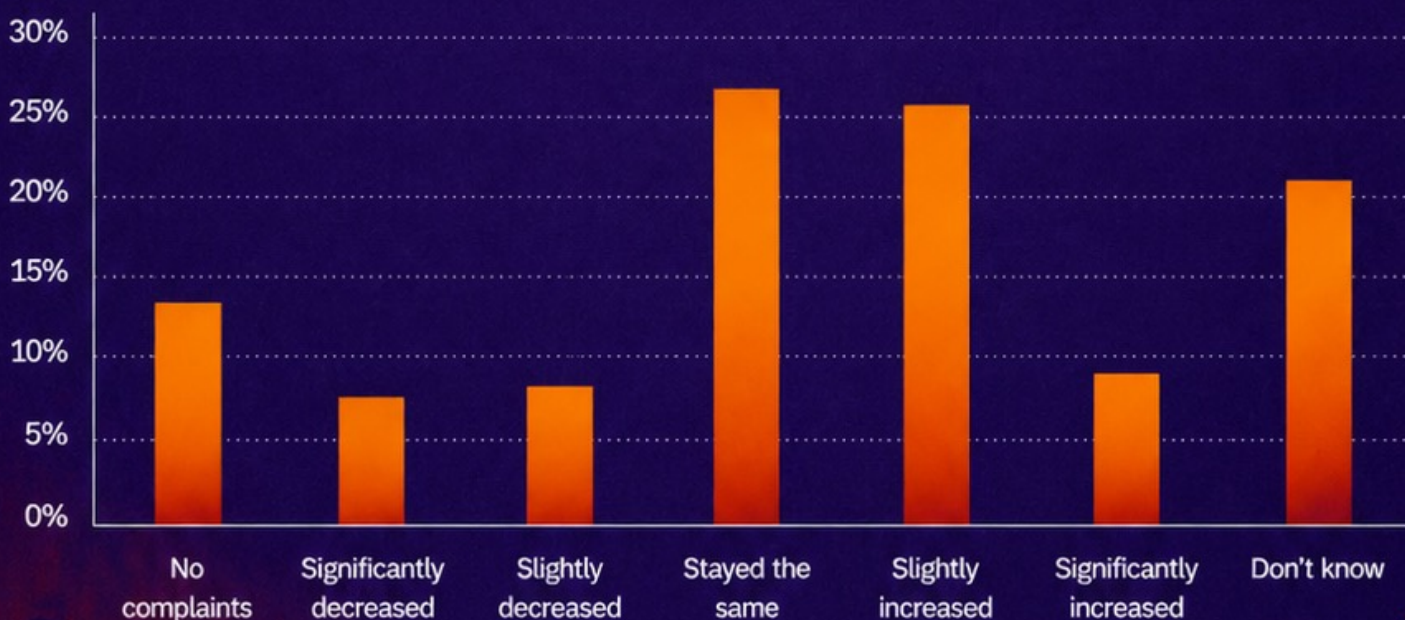
Over the past 5 years, the majority of respondents (55%) reported that the level of bullying complaints has either stayed the same, or increased slightly or significantly.

Only 14% of respondents acknowledged a decrease in complaints and only 12% experienced no complaints at all.

Looking back over their careers, nearly half of all respondents have handled between 3 and 10 complaints in their career, with a small number (13%) reporting they've handled 11+ complaints.

The scale of this indicates that the root cultural causes of bullying are not being tackled effectively by Ireland's business leaders.

Over the last 5 years, how has the **number of formal bullying complaints** in your organisation changed?

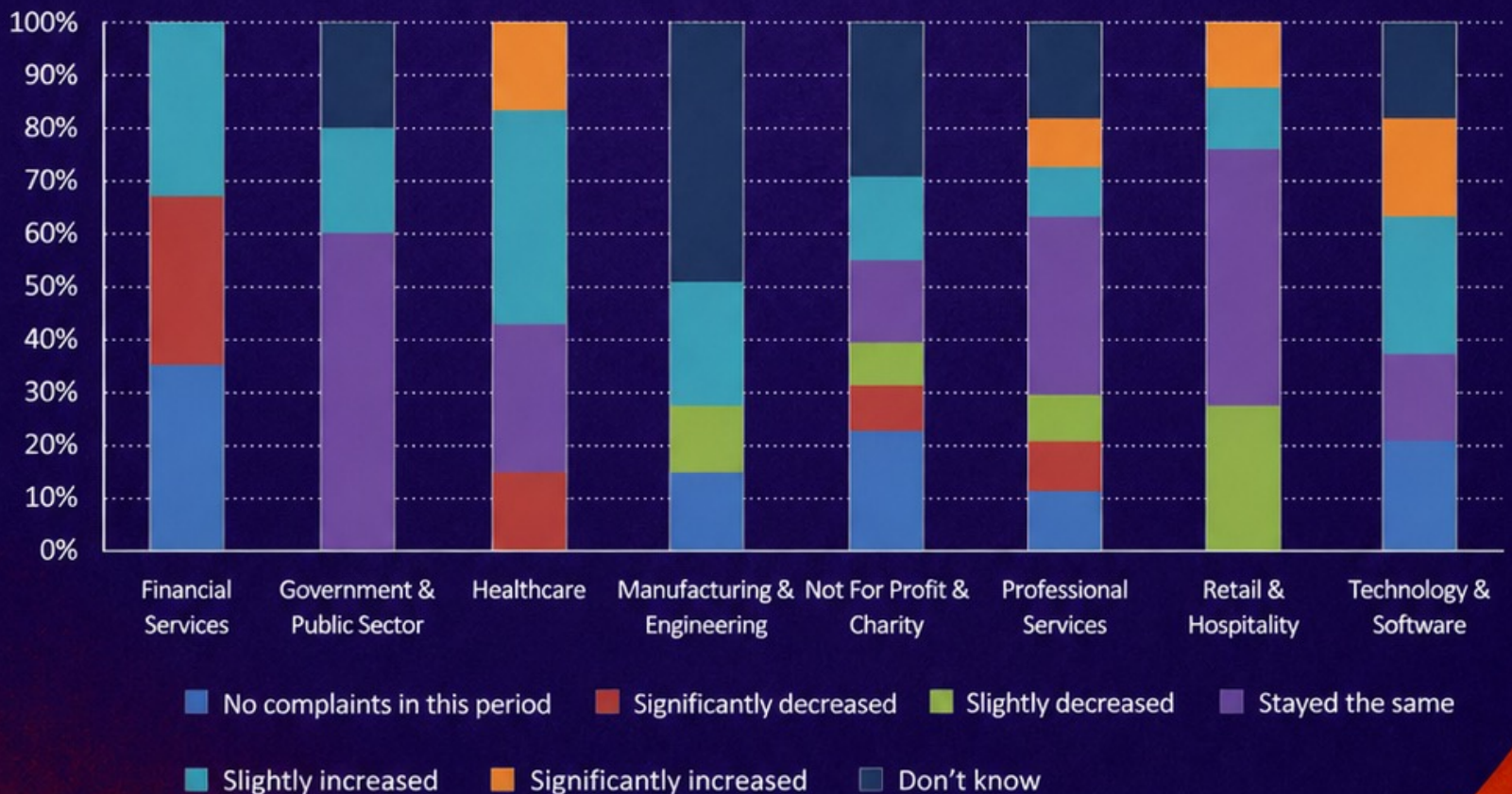


The Healthcare sector has seen the sharpest rise in bullying complaints

The majority of respondents in the healthcare sector (58%) said that bullying complaints have increased in the past 5 years, with only 11% of leaders in the sector reporting a decrease in complaints.

Conversely, the not-for-profit/charity sector reported the biggest decrease of complaints, with 38% of respondents acknowledging that complaints had reduced over the last 5 years, with 20% reporting there had been no complaints.

Respondents in the not-for-profit/charity sector were more likely to hire a third party for dignity at work training against all other sectors except for the public sector, indicating a potentially higher quality of training.



HR and business leaders are not immune to bullying

A majority (54%) of the respondents said they themselves have personally experienced bullying.

A further 11% said they would 'prefer not to say'. Of those that did experience bullying personally, 44% raised a formal complaint, and of those complaints only 55% said they were investigated.

Two thirds of respondents who said they were bullied at work later left that organisation and 80% of them said the main factor in them leaving the company was the bullying.

The ultimate result of bullying not being addressed is that the victims are taking matters into their own hands, leaving organisations with reduced headcount, talent drain and a bullying problem that persists.

54%
had personally
experienced
bullying

55%
of complaints
were
investigated

80%
of people who
subsequently left
their organisation
said the bullying
was a main factor in
their decision

Section Two

Who is Responsible?

Power, authority and leadership dynamics are centre stage in bullying complaints.

Power dynamics are at the core of bullying complaints

Unsurprisingly, workplace bullying in Ireland is strongly shaped by organisational hierarchy and power dynamics.

The findings from this survey make it clear that bullying is not evenly distributed across the workforce; rather, it is most frequently associated with those in positions of authority. Complaints are significantly more likely to be raised against managers and senior leaders, highlighting the critical role that leadership behaviour plays in shaping workplace culture.

At the same time, those raising complaints are most often employees without managerial authority, pointing to an imbalance in power between those experiencing bullying and those accused of it.

These dynamics underline an important reality: workplace bullying is not simply an interpersonal issue, but one closely linked to leadership practices, accountability, and organisational structures.

Understanding who is involved - both in terms of those raising complaints and those complaints are raised against - is essential to addressing the root causes of bullying and creating safer, more respectful working environments.

70% Of all complaints are raised against **senior leaders, executives or managers**

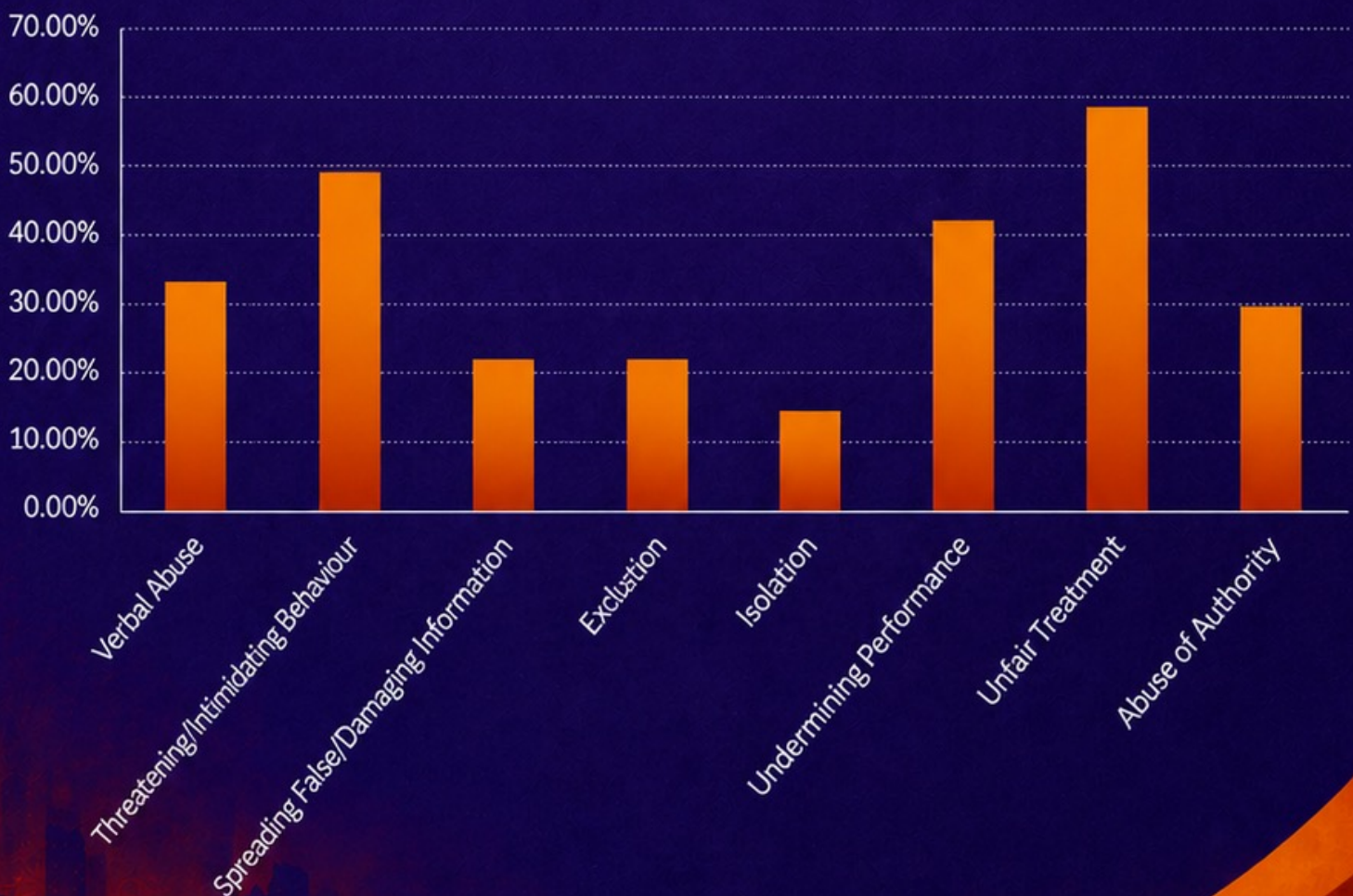
60% Of all complaints are raised by **experienced staff** who are **not in a managerial position**

Bullying is often subtle and insidious

Workplace bullying isn't as obvious as managers shouting at employees in the office.

Verbal abuse does represent a significant amount of complaints (32%), but the most common types of bullying are **'Unfair Treatment' (58%)**, **Threatening/intimidating behaviour (49%)** and **Undermining Performance (42%)**. This tells us that bullying often takes the form of being treated inconsistently, being undermined and experiencing a sinister abuse of authority.

In your experience, what types of bullying complaints are most common



The office is still the most likely bullying battleground

The research suggests that remote and hybrid working conditions are not significant drivers of workplace bullying complaints.

A strong majority of organisations who offer remote or hybrid working to their staff reported that there had been no bullying complaints arising from these dynamics.

Only 18% of organisations had a bullying complaint arise from remote working conditions, while 23% had a bullying complaint arise from hybrid working conditions. Hybrid and remote working models may minimise face-to-face conflict, but they are not a safe haven for the most common type of bullying indicated in the research – unfair treatment.

Of organisations that offer remote working...

18%

had bullying complaints arise from remote working dynamics

69%

had no bullying complaints arise from remote working dynamics



Section Three

Policy vs Reality

Bullying policies are now common practice, but the research reveals gaps in translating policy into meaningful cultural change

Ticking the box won't change your culture

While most Irish organisations have taken clear steps to address workplace bullying at a policy level, the findings from this survey reveal a notable gap between intention and implementation.

The vast majority of organisations now have formal policies in place (many of which have been recently updated), which is great to see. This demonstrates strong awareness of the issue and a commitment to compliance. However, policy alone is not proving sufficient.

The data highlights a disconnect between having a framework and embedding it effectively within the organisation. In particular, shortcomings in training, communication, and ongoing reinforcement mean that many employees and managers are not fully equipped to prevent, recognise or address bullying behaviours in practice.

As a result, organisations may be falling short of translating policy into meaningful cultural change. The research indicates a gap between what is written and what is experienced, and indicates that organisations are not doing enough to create safe and respectful workplaces.

94% Of all respondents said their organisation **have a policy on bullying**

38% Of all respondents said their organisation **doesn't conduct any training addressing workplace bullying**

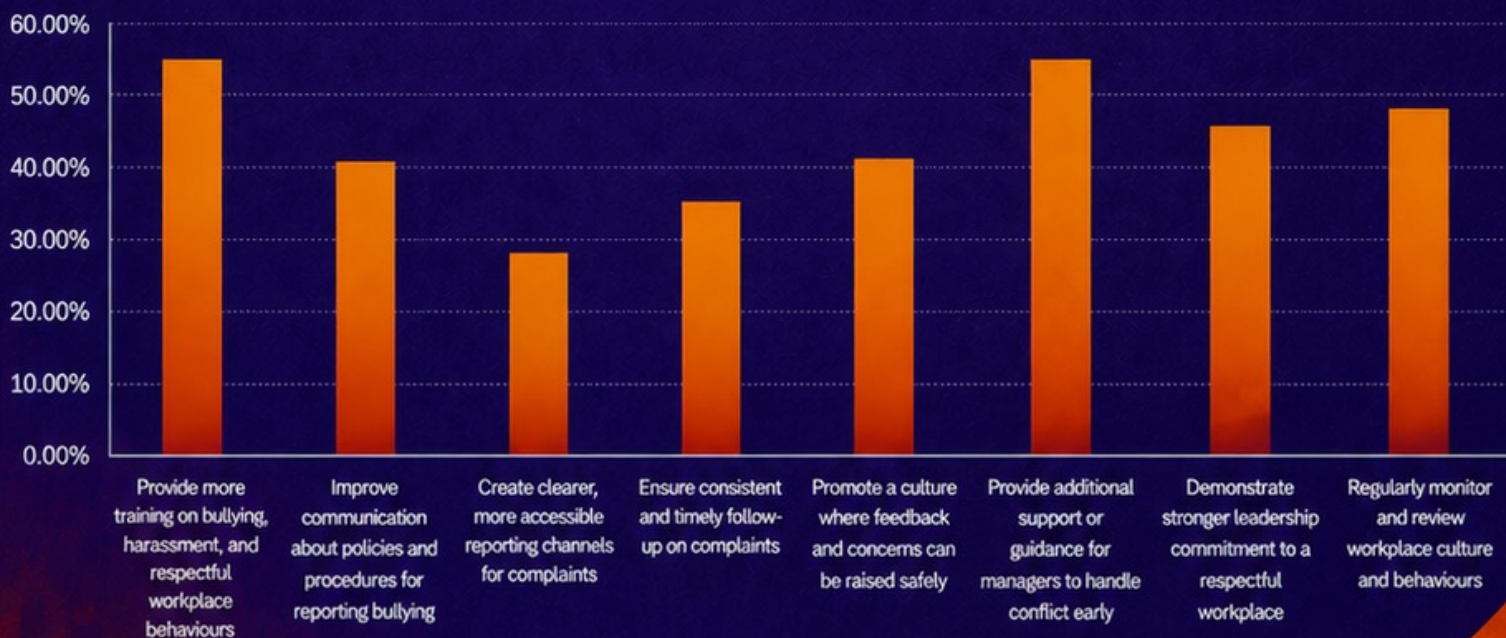
Training presents the biggest opportunity for change

More than half (54%) of respondents believe their organisation should provide more training on bullying, harassment, and respectful working behaviours.

In addition to this, another 54% called for their organisations to provide additional support or guidance for managers to handle conflict early.

Respondents also called for stronger commitments from leadership and a way to regularly review and monitor workplace culture and behaviours, indicating that significant cultural change needs to come from the top and move from policy enactment to consistent communication and monitoring.

What do you think your organisation could do better to prevent bullying in the workplace?



Consistent, regular training is key to cultural change

A surprising amount of respondents (38%) said their organisations are not conducting any training addressing workplace workplace bullying.

Of those that are conducting training, the majority (62%) said that the training happens at induction, with only 44% saying their organisations provide training at regular intervals.

The sectors most in need of training were the technology and not-for-profit/charity sectors, with 53% of respondents in each sector saying their organisations don't conduct any dignity at work training.

62%

said training happens at **employee induction**

44%

said training happens at **regular intervals**



Section Four

Confidence vs Capability

There is a high-level of confidence in Ireland's HR and business leaders when it comes to dealing with complaints, but there are significant gaps in training and capability

Feeling ready isn't the same as being ready

Effectively managing workplace bullying requires more than policies and procedures - it demands confidence, capability, and practical skill.

The research showed that HR and business leaders have a high level of confidence in their ability to handle bullying complaints, with an average of 63% of respondents feeling confident or highly confident in ALL areas of complaint management. But this confidence is not always matched by formal training or experience in key areas.

Many respondents are actively involved in managing and investigating complaints, often navigating complex and sensitive situations, yet gaps remain in the depth and consistency of training provided.

In particular, the data highlights a tendency for organisations to focus training on policy awareness and process, rather than on the practical skills required to conduct thorough investigations, manage conflict, and reach fair outcomes. This creates a potential mismatch between perceived competence and actual preparedness.

As organisations continue to rely on internal teams to manage increasingly complex cases, understanding and addressing this gap between confidence and capability will be critical to ensuring effective, fair, and consistent handling of bullying complaints.

71%

but only...

Of respondents said they **have conducted a workplace investigation**

56%

Of respondents said they **had been trained in conducting workplace investigations**

Strong on policy, short on training

When it comes to the types of training being conducted, the predominant focus is on policy, with much less emphasis put on the skills needed to deal with and investigate complaints

73% of respondents said their organisation's training covered policy with 61% calling out complaint handling, which is encouraging. However the skills needed to conduct meaningful and robust workplace investigations are under-represented, such as **investigation training, report writing and mediation training.**

This correlates with the biggest challenges facing HR and business leaders. Besides 'lack of time and workload pressures', **'limited training or experience in investigations'** was the second biggest challenge identified, with **36%** of respondents saying it was their main challenge when handling complaints.

What **bullying-related areas** did your organisation's training include?



Closing Thoughts

What next?

Meaningful action is needed at a leadership and cultural level in order to address systemic workplace bullying in Irish businesses

Workplace Bullying is being recognized, but not resolved

Workplace bullying is here to stay without meaningful cultural change, leadership buy-in and regular appropriate training.

The research shows us that workplace bullying in Ireland is persistent, widespread and deeply embedded in organisational culture. Complaints are not only common, they're routine.

While it's encouraging to see that most organisations are not starting from zero – the vast majority having developed and maintained policies – the gap between policy and practice is significant.

Workplace bullying remains a significant risk to businesses and a health risk to employees. Left unaddressed, it leads to talent loss, reduced engagement and long-term cultural damage. This is not just a HR challenge, this is a business-critical challenge.

The research shows us that in order to address this meaningfully, organisations must:

Invest in **practical, skills-based training** (not just policy awareness)

Equip managers to **handle conflict early and effectively**

Regularly review and reinforce workplace culture practices

Embed accountability at **leadership level**

Create **safe environments** where concerns can be **raised and addressed**

Can we help?

If these challenges feel familiar,
you're not alone.

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Trusted by leading
Irish organisations



Expert HR, legal &
mediation specialists

“

We don't just
solve problems —
we **equip teams**
to handle **what**
comes next. ”



Mary Cullen
Managing Director

Thank you for reading our report.
Remember - no matter what challenge you face in 2026, you're not alone.

We're always ready to help...



info@insighthr.ie



056 - 7701060



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