Harassment and Discrimination on the Basis of Gender and Race/Ethnicity in the FEMA Workforce

2021 Survey Follow-Up

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About This Report

In 2019, researchers from the Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center (HSOAC) fielded a survey designed to estimate the annual prevalence of workplace harassment and discrimination at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and assess employee perceptions of leadership and workplace climate. The survey results revealed areas in need of improvement and helped guide FEMA leadership decisions about programming and policy responses. With the results in hand, FEMA published its “Culture Improvement Action Plan” (FEMA, 2020b), which laid out objectives, programs, and actions intended to create a safe workplace for all employees.

To understand whether this objective had been achieved, FEMA asked HSOAC researchers to repeat the workforce survey two years after the first survey had been administered. The survey was repeated in the spring of 2021, with results indicating a substantial reduction from 2019, albeit still a high prevalence, of harassment and discrimination in the workplace. This report presents the results of the survey and a discussion about how changes in the workplace during the response period have perhaps influenced the findings. The annex to this report, Harassment and Discrimination on the Basis of Gender and Race/Ethnicity in the FEMA Workforce: Annex of Tabular Results and the 2021 FEMA Workplace Survey Instrument, contains detailed tabular data of survey results and the complete survey instrument.

With FEMA’s agreement, we have updated the estimates and analysis provided in Farris et al., 2020. Much of the original report’s content is retained, but we have extended the discussion as needed to account for differences in the 2021 survey.

This research was sponsored by FEMA’s Office of Equal Rights and conducted within the Strategy, Policy, and Operations Program of the HSOAC federally funded research and development center (FFRDC).

About the Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center

The Homeland Security Act of 2002 (Section 305 of Public Law 107-296, as codified at 6 U.S.C. § 185) authorizes the Secretary of Homeland Security, acting through the Under Secretary for Science and Technology, to establish one or more FFRDCs to provide independent analysis of homeland security issues. The RAND Corporation operates HSOAC as an FFRDC for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) under contract HSHQDC-16-D-00007.

The HSOAC FFRDC provides the government with independent and objective analyses and advice in core areas important to the department in support of policy development, decisionmaking, alternative approaches, and new ideas on issues of significance. The HSOAC FFRDC also works with and supports other federal, state, local, tribal, and public- and private-sector organizations that make up the homeland security enterprise. The HSOAC FFRDC’s research is undertaken by mutual consent with DHS and is organized as a set of
discrete tasks. This report presents the results of research and analysis conducted under task order 70FA4018F00000139, Workplace Survey Support.

The results presented in this report do not necessarily reflect official DHS opinion or policy.

For more information on HSOAC, see www.rand.org/hsoac. For more information on this publication, see www.rand.org/t/RRA383-2.

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Support from Jo Linda Johnson, former director of FEMA’s Office of Equal Rights and our project sponsor, was critical to the success of this survey effort. Her commitment to objectivity, employee privacy, and agency transparency encouraged employee candor. We appreciate her commitment to the research and her clear and thoughtful feedback. We also thank Leslie Saucedo, current acting director of the Office of Equal Rights, who supported the release and dissemination phase of the research. We are grateful to Erin Sehnert, who helped us arrange communication through the Deployment Tracking System to ensure that FEMA reservists would have the opportunity to participate in the survey, and Matthew Williams who helped us understand and interpret FEMA personnel data and who worked with RAND to coordinate secure transfer between the FEMA and RAND systems.

The survey was programmed, tested, and fielded by the RAND Survey Research Group, including Beverly A. Weidmer, senior survey director, and Evelyn Bogdon, programmer. Alexander Ishikawa assisted with email logistics. We thank operations researcher Herbert J. Shukiar for his detailed review of the complex survey logic. We are grateful to Maria C. Lytell and Dean Kilpatrick, who provided guidance on our methodological approach throughout the design process and a thoughtful review of this report, and Justin Lee, who provided a quality assurance review of the analytic code. Terrence Kelly, former director of HSOAC, and Henry H. Willis, director of the center’s Personnel and Resources Program, provided project support and thoughtful management review.

Finally, we are indebted to the many FEMA employees who gave freely of their time to candidly share their workplace experiences with us.
Summary

Following a widely publicized incident of sexual harassment and misconduct in its senior leadership ranks and an internal investigation, in September 2018, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) asked the Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center (HSOAC) to provide an independent and objective assessment of the prevalence and characteristics of harassment and discrimination at FEMA. In the spring of 2019, HSOAC researchers fielded a survey designed to estimate the annual prevalence of workplace harassment and discrimination at FEMA and assess employee perceptions of leadership and workplace climate. The survey results indicated that civil rights violations affected many employees in the FEMA workforce.

In response to these findings, FEMA published its “Culture Improvement Action Plan” (FEMA, 2020b), designed to increase awareness of the survey results; train and educate the workforce; improve communications; and ensure that FEMA was a safe workplace for all. To understand whether this objective had been achieved, FEMA asked HSOAC researchers to repeat the workforce survey two years after the first survey had been administered. We fielded the survey for the second time in April and May 2021 to 21,982 FEMA personnel, of whom 7,366 responded (a 33.5-percent response rate). The results indicated a dramatic decline in civil rights violations relative to 2019, which represents a significantly improved work environment for FEMA employees. Nonetheless, the overall prevalence remains high enough that it warrants continued efforts to further mitigate the risk of such experiences.

Prevalence of Civil Rights Violations

The workforce survey was designed to provide an independent and objective assessment of the prevalence and characteristics of harassment and discrimination at FEMA that goes beyond the incomplete picture offered by formally submitted complaints. Specifically, the intent was to measure harassment and discrimination in the workforce whether or not victims chose to elevate incidents to FEMA leadership.

The survey instrument included six types of civil rights violations:

- sexually hostile work environment harassment
- gender-based (sexist) hostile work environment harassment
- quid pro quo harassment
- gender discrimination
- racial/ethnic harassment
- racial/ethnic discrimination.
Collectively, we refer to these specific types of unlawful incidents as gender-based/sexual or race/ethnicity–based civil rights violations. We estimate, based on the 2021 survey results, that about one in five FEMA employees experienced at least one gender-based/sexual or race/ethnicity–based civil rights violation in the preceding year. The risk of experiencing a gender-based/sexual or race/ethnicity–based civil rights violation was about one-quarter lower in 2021 than it was in 2019.\footnote{We present comparisons of the 2019 and 2021 findings as adjusted risk ratios, which is the prevalence of a given outcome in 2021 divided by its prevalence in 2019. We present the findings in this way to adjust for the changes in the fielding period across the two surveys to ensure that these comparisons are not influenced by the change in survey methods. A risk ratio is the ratio of two prevalence estimates. For example, if 10 percent of FEMA staff experienced sexual harassment according to survey one and only 6 percent experienced sexual harassment according to survey two, the risk ratio is 0.6, or 60 percent the risk of sexual harassment in survey two relative to survey one. That is, the relative risk of experiencing a civil rights violation declined by 40 percent between the two surveys in this example.}

Delving into this top-line estimate a bit further, we estimate that more than 13 percent of FEMA employees experienced gender-based/sexual civil rights violations in the year preceding the survey—about a one-third reduction in risk relative to 2019 risk (Figure S.1). Women were more likely than men (17.2 percent versus 9.4 percent) to be categorized as experiencing some form of gender-based or sexual civil rights violation.

**FIGURE S.1**
Estimated Prevalence of Gender-Based/Sexual Civil Rights Violations Within the FEMA Workforce

![Bar chart showing the percentage of FEMA employees experiencing gender-based/sexual civil rights violations by gender and overall.](image)
About one in seven FEMA employees experienced a race/ethnicity–based civil rights violation in the year preceding the survey, about a one-quarter reduction in the risk of experiencing this type of civil rights violation in 2021 relative to 2019 risk (Figure S.2). Employees who identified as more than one race (24.3 percent) or black (17.8 percent) were more likely than white employees (12.2 percent) to be categorized as having experienced racial/ethnic civil rights violations.

We cannot be certain of the processes that caused this decline, but we can offer three plausible explanations:

- First, the survey time period coincided with national movements against sexual harassment (#MeToo) and police violence against black people (Black Lives Matter). These protest and awareness-raising movements have changed the national discussion of civil rights violations and might have contributed to increased reticence among would-be offenders to engage in inappropriate and unlawful work behavior.
- Second, FEMA has engaged in substantial changes to both training and policy to reduce the prevalence of civil rights violations within the agency (FEMA, 2020b). Indeed, according to our survey, nearly three-quarters of the workforce now say that they have participated in anti-harassment/civil treatment training offered by FEMA (71 percent). One-third of FEMA employees (32 percent) have attended a group meeting with their first-line supervisor about preventing harassment and discrimination; one-third
(33 percent) attended a town hall hosted by their Senior Executive Service–level office director that was related to employee misconduct and accountability, and 44 percent attended a town hall hosted by the FEMA administrator. Three out of five employees (57 percent) learned where to find the FEMA brochure that serves as an easy reference for where to go for concerns. These training and prevention efforts might have paid off and led to the observed decline in civil rights violations.

- Third, employees were asked to reflect on their workplace experiences from the spring of 2020 to the spring of 2021—that is, they were describing events that happened during a year that was fully disrupted by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Two-thirds (67 percent) of FEMA employees had worked entirely from home during the surveyed period and had interacted with their colleagues only by email, telephone, or video conference. FEMA employees who did spend some time at offices or worksites (33 percent) were working in sparsely populated workplaces under COVID-19 prevention protocols that limited interaction with others.

In addition, many FEMA employees were deployed to work directly on the national response to COVID-19, and these deployments might have differed substantially from the more-typical disaster deployments. The changes in the modes of communication, physical proximity to colleagues, and the type of work that was being performed during the COVID-19 pandemic might have together reduced offenders’ opportunities to harass and discriminate against their colleagues. We found some evidence in support of this hypothesis in an analysis that showed that the risk of experiencing a civil rights violation increased with the number of days an employee worked in person in the year prior to April and May 2021.

These potential explanations for the dramatic improvement in the FEMA workplace relative to results from the 2019 survey are not either–or explanations. Social justice movements, FEMA training, and COVID-19 changes might have collectively contributed to the change. Alternatively, there could be still other explanations that we have not explored. Unfortunately, we cannot say with certainty what caused the decline in civil rights violations at FEMA, but we can be reasonably certain that there was a decline. At the same time, current prevalence estimates are sufficiently high for FEMA to continue its mitigation efforts; in support of this, we provide further detail on the employee experience.

**Reporting**

The analysis of reporting decisions, perceived responses, and barriers to reporting presents both positive and troubling results. First, we observed that one-third to one-half of respondents who had experienced harassment or discrimination told a supervisor/manager or reported it through another official channel. Many employees who reported harassment indicated that the offender stopped harassing them or that harassment policies were explained to their work groups, which are positive outcomes.
At the same time, not all responses were positive, especially for discrimination. Across civil rights violations, more than one-third of victims who reported the incidents indicated that “the person [they] told took no action to improve the situation.” Between 33 and 47 percent of employees indicated that they were “encouraged to drop the issue.” Not surprisingly, less than 25 percent of employees were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the action taken. For those who decided not to report harassment or discrimination, common barriers to reporting were the employee “did not think anything would be done,” they “did not trust that the process would be fair,” and they were concerned that they “might be labeled as a troublemaker.”

Many employees who had experienced harassment or discrimination and reported it were victims of retaliation: This included a quarter or more who had reported harassment and a third or more who reported discrimination. Leadership at all levels must ensure that those who report these experiences are protected from retaliation. FEMA needs to continue or escalate efforts to ensure that supervisors and managers take appropriate action in response to disclosures of harassment or discrimination. Many of the common barriers to reporting can be alleviated by ensuring that leadership at all levels knows what to do with a report and has the tools at hand to take action, including a familiarity and comfort with lower levels of sanctions, such as talking with the offender about appropriate behavior.

Climate

We also examined employees’ perceptions of FEMA’s climate for sexual and racial/ethnic harassment—considering both perceptions of employees’ immediate supervisors and perceptions of FEMA leadership—as well as the climate of the general work environment. With respect to climate for sexual harassment at the levels of the immediate supervisor and FEMA leadership, men tended to have more-positive perceptions than women did. As for the climate for racial/ethnic harassment, black employees tended to have less positive perceptions than white or Hispanic employees did. Perceptions were more positive of immediate supervisors than of FEMA leadership for both climate types.

Despite the majority of employees saying that leaders would respond appropriately to negative gender-related or racial/ethnic climates, a fairly substantial proportion of employees perceived leadership behaviors as neutral, at best, if not actively harmful. For example, just over 20 percent of women indicated that they were neutral about, disagreed with, or strongly disagreed with a statement that their supervisors would report sexual harassment to the right FEMA authority; similarly, about one-quarter of black respondents had similar perceptions of how their supervisors would handle racial/ethnic harassment. Approximately 40 percent of women and 40 percent of black respondents expressed similar sentiments about senior leaders.

2 The survey defined supervisor as “the person who has the most influence on your work activities” and FEMA leaders as “all SES (senior executive service) employees and all FEMA directors.”
Finally, we broadly examined the general work environment, asking respondents about perceptions of their coworkers’ behavior. When this measure was broken out by demographic subgroups, the same patterns emerged: Men had more-positive perceptions than women did, and white and Hispanic employees had more-positive perceptions than black employees did. This suggests that, even when employees do not engage in explicitly sexist or racist behavior, certain demographic groups might be more likely to experience incivility. Although these findings suggest remaining concerns, the average perception scores in 2021 do represent a small but significant improvement relative to 2019.

Conclusion

Changing organizational culture and climate is no easy task, and the observed decline in gender-based/sexual and racial/ethnic civil rights violations at FEMA represents a substantial improvement in the workplace for FEMA employees. This change has also been accompanied by small but significant improvements in employees’ perceptions of their immediate supervisors’ and senior leadership’s commitment to a workplace free of harassment and discrimination.

With the passage of time and the improvements that are observed in the prevalence of gender-based/sexual and racial/ethnic civil rights violations at FEMA, it may be an opportune time for leadership to review the “Culture Improvement Action Plan,” collect information about the implementation of the plan, identify successes and opportunities for improvement, and, if necessary, update the plan moving forward. Although the decline in observed prevalence is notable, civil rights violations at FEMA are still common enough to warrant concern and highlight the need for ongoing efforts to combat their prevalence.

Given the uncertainty about the causes of the observed improvements, we recommend that FEMA continue to monitor civil rights violations into the future. If COVID-19–related work-from-home protocols are the main driver of the observed change, it is possible that these events will rebound as FEMA employees return to shared workplaces. A continued commitment to a comprehensive and holistic set of interventions that incentivize professional and respectful workplace behavior can help leaders ensure that the FEMA work environment suppresses individual proclivities toward negative behavior.
Contents

About This Report ................................................................. iii
Summary .................................................................................... v
Figures and Tables ..................................................................... xiii

CHAPTER ONE
Introduction .............................................................................. 1
Scoping Civil Rights Violations .................................................. 3
Survey of the FEMA Workplace ................................................. 4
Organization of This Report ....................................................... 8

CHAPTER TWO
Survey Design and Analytic Approach .................................... 9
Sample and Recruitment .......................................................... 9
Response Rates and Nonresponse Weighting ............................. 11
Survey Design ........................................................................... 12
Employee Characteristics ......................................................... 19
Statistical Analysis and Reporting Conventions ......................... 24

CHAPTER THREE
Overall Prevalence of Gender-Based/Sexual and Racial/Ethnic Civil Rights Violations and Additional Analyses ................................................................. 27
Estimate of Overall Prevalence ................................................... 28
Potential Explanations for the Decline in Prevalence .................... 29
Summary .................................................................................... 33

CHAPTER FOUR
Prevalence of Gender-Based/Sexual Civil Rights Violations in the Year Preceding the Survey ................................................................. 35
Prevalence of Gender-Based/Sexual Civil Rights Violations ............ 35
Prevalence, by Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity ............... 37
Prevalence Within FEMA Offices ................................................. 39
Prevalence, by Content of Behavior: Sexual or Sexist ................. 41
Inappropriate Workplace Behaviors ............................................ 43
Summary .................................................................................... 44

CHAPTER FIVE
Characteristics of Gender-Based/Sexual Civil Rights Violations ................................................................. 45
Sexual Civil Rights Violations ..................................................... 45
Gender-Based (Sexist) Hostile Work Environment Harassment ....... 48
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER SIX</th>
<th>Prevalence of Racial/Ethnic Civil Rights Violations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>xx</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevalence of Racial/Ethnic Harassment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevalence of Racial/Ethnic Discrimination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Prevalence of Race/Ethnicity–Based Civil Rights Violations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER SEVEN</td>
<td>Characteristics of Racial/Ethnic Civil Rights Violations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xx</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial/Ethnic Harassment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial/Ethnic Discrimination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER EIGHT</td>
<td>Reporting Decisions, Perceived Organizational Response to Reports, and Barriers to Reporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xx</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting Decisions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMA Response to Reported Harassment or Discrimination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Satisfaction with FEMA’s Response</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to Reporting Harassment or Discrimination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace Impacts from Harassment or Discrimination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER NINE</td>
<td>The FEMA Climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xx</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate Is Perceptions of Leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate for Sexual Harassment: Employee Perceptions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate for Racial/Ethnic Harassment: Employee Perceptions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate in the General Work Environment: Employee Perceptions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TEN</td>
<td>Conclusions and Recommendations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xx</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caveats and Considerations for Interpreting Findings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figures and Tables

Figures

S.1. Estimated Prevalence of Gender-Based/Sexual Civil Rights Violations Within the FEMA Workforce ................................................................. vi
S.2. Estimated Prevalence of Race/Ethnicity-Based Civil Rights Violations Within the FEMA Workforce ................................................................. vii
1.1. Scope of Civil Rights Violations ....................................................... 4
2.1. The Organizational Structure of FEMA ........................................... 22
3.1. Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Categorized as Experiencing a Gender-Based/Sexual or Race/Ethnicity-Based Civil Rights Violation in the Preceding Year .............................................................................. 28
3.2. Percentage of Time FEMA Employees Spent Working from Home in the Year Referenced by the Survey ..................................................... 31
3.3. Relationship Between Days Worked in a FEMA Office and the Likelihood of Experiencing a Civil Rights Violation ........................................ 32
4.1. Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Who Had Experienced Gender-Based/Sexual Civil Rights Violations in the Preceding Year, by Office ........................................... 40
4.2. Estimated Number of FEMA Employees Who Had Experienced Gender-Based/Sexual Civil Rights Violations in the Preceding Year, by Office ........................................... 41
4.3. Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Who Had Experienced Gender-Based/Sexual Civil Rights Violations in the Preceding Year ................................................... 42
4.4. Among FEMA Employees Who Had Experienced Any Sexual or Sexist Civil Rights Violations, the Estimated Percentage Who Had Experienced Either Alone or Both Together .................................................................... 43
5.1. Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Who Had Experienced Sexual Civil Rights Violations in the Preceding Year, by Gender and Amount of Time Deployed ......................................................... 46
5.2. Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Who Experienced Gender-Based Harassment in the Preceding Year, by Gender and Amount of Time Deployed ................................................... 48
5.3. Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Who Experienced Gender Discrimination in the Preceding Year, by Gender and Amount of Time Deployed ........................................... 50
6.1. Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Who Had Experienced Racial/ Ethnic Harassment in the Preceding Year, by Race/Ethnicity .................... 54
6.2. Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Who Had Experienced Racial/ Ethnic Discrimination in the Preceding Year, by Race/Ethnicity ................... 57
6.3. Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Who Had Experienced Racial/ Ethnic Civil Rights Violations in the Preceding Year, by Race/Ethnicity ............. 58
7.1. Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Who Had Experienced Any Racial/Ethnic Harassment in the Preceding Year, by Office ......................... 62
7.2. Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Who Had Experienced Any Racial/Ethnic Discrimination in the Preceding Year, by Office .........................64
8.1. Disclosure Decisions Among FEMA Employees Who Had Experienced Harassment or Discrimination in the Preceding Year ..........................69
8.2. Satisfaction with the Action Taken by the Personnel Handling the Situation, Among FEMA Employees Who Elevated Harassment or Discrimination Within FEMA ..................................................................................72
9.1. Average Scores for Climate for Sexual Harassment at the Supervisor and FEMA Leader Levels, by Gender ..........................................................84
9.2. Climate for Racial/Ethnic Harassment at the Supervisor and FEMA Leader Levels, by Race/Ethnicity .................................................................85
9.3. General Work Environment Average Scale Score, by Gender .........................87
9.4. General Work Environment Average Scale Score, by Race/Ethnicity ................87

Tables

3.1. Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Who Indicated Having Received Training or Education .................................................................30
4.1. Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Who Had Experienced Gender-Based/Sexual Civil Rights Violations in the Preceding Year, by Gender ........36
4.2. Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Who Had Experienced Gender-Based/Sexual Civil Rights Violations in the Preceding Year, by Sexual Orientation .................................................................................38
4.3. Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Who Had Experienced Gender-Based/Sexual Civil Rights Violations in the Preceding Year, by Gender Identity .............................................................................39
6.1. Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Who Had Experienced Racial/Ethnic Harassment for Whom the Harassment Was Directed Against Their Own Race, Someone Else’s Race, or Both, by Race/Ethnicity ..........56
6.2. Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Who Had Experienced Racial/Ethnic Civil Rights Violations in the Preceding Year, by Race/Ethnicity ....59
8.1. Estimated Percentage of Victims Who Indicated That Each Action Was Taken Following Their Report of Gender-Based/Sexual or Racial/Ethnic Harassment to a Supervisor/Manager or Through an Official Channel ....70
8.2. Estimated Percentage of Victims Who Indicated That Each Action Was Taken Following Their Report of Gender Discrimination or Racial/Ethnic Discrimination to a Supervisor/Manager or Through an Official Channel ..........71
8.3. Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Who Had an Experience Consistent with a Civil Rights Violation, Labeled It Harassment or Discrimination, and Reported It Through a Formal Channel ..........74
8.4. Estimated Percentage of Victims Indicating Barriers to Reporting, by Type of Harassment .................................................................................75
8.5. Estimated Percentage of Victims Indicating Barriers to Reporting, by Type of Discrimination ................................................................. 76
8.6. Estimated Percentage of Victims Who Used Leave and Wanted to Quit as a Consequence of Harassment or Discrimination in the Preceding Year............. 77
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In July 2018, the results of a seven-month internal investigation at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) confirmed allegations of sexual harassment, misconduct, and workplace misbehavior at high levels of the agency’s leadership. Then–FEMA administrator William “Brock” Long stated that the misconduct had been a “systemic problem going on for years” (Rein, 2018). Unlike leaders in other high-profile cases of sexual harassment and misconduct, FEMA leadership chose to discuss the findings publicly. Long stated at the time that he believed that it was important “to be open and transparent and tell this story rather than people telling it for us” (Rein, 2018).

Although the investigation provided important insight into the culture and misconduct in one FEMA office, it was not designed to provide a comprehensive account of harassment and discrimination across the entire organization. Thus, leaders remained uncertain about whether they were tasked with repairing a single rogue, “bad apple” office or whether a climate supporting workplace misconduct had also transferred to other parts of the organization. Official reports of harassment and discrimination submitted to the FEMA Office of Equal Rights provided one tracking mechanism, but, unfortunately, these reports provide an imperfect description of the scope of the problem. It is well established that most employees who face harassment or discrimination decide against revealing it to an employer (Fitzgerald, Shullman, et al., 1988; Gruber and Smith, 1995; Hotelling, 1991; Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015). In addition, high-profile cases of unlawful discrimination can erode trust in an organization’s leadership, and FEMA was concerned that its internal effort to uncover the scope of the problem associated with the recently substantiated allegations could be met with skepticism or distrust by rank-and-file employees.

In light of these challenges—combined with FEMA’s ongoing commitment to developing and maintaining a workplace in which all employees are treated with professionalism and respect—leadership concluded that the best course of action would be to have an independent organization assess the prevalence and characteristics of harassment and discrimination at FEMA. In September 2018, FEMA asked the Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center (HSOAC), a federally funded research and development center operated by the RAND Corporation, to assist with this effort.

RAND researchers have expertise in large epidemiological surveys designed to estimate the prevalence of hard-to-measure, sensitive behaviors, such as sexual harassment (Miller et al., 2019; Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2014; Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015). We leveraged this...
experience to develop, field, and analyze a survey of all FEMA employees. After the survey was fielded in the spring of 2019, we reported to FEMA leadership that civil rights violations affected many employees in the FEMA workforce. At that time, an estimated 20.0 percent of employees could be categorized as having experienced gender-based/sexual civil rights violations and 18.4 percent of employees categorized as having experienced a violation on the basis of race/ethnicity in the year preceding the survey (Farris et al., 2020).

In response to these findings, FEMA published the “Culture Improvement Action Plan,” designed to

• Increase employee awareness of RAND survey results
• Provide transparent communication of workforce culture objectives, programs, and improvements and associated implementation timelines.
• Demonstrate continued leadership commitment to [FEMA’s] core values. (FEMA, 2020b, p. 1)

The action plan included implementation plans in six areas:

• increasing engagement and advocacy
• training and education
• messaging and communications
• employee resources
• performance and accountability
• monitoring and assessment with three-, six-, and 12-month milestones in each area.

Together, these efforts were intended to “ensure FEMA remains a safe workplace free of harassment and discrimination” (FEMA, 2020b, p. 14).

To understand whether this objective had been achieved, FEMA asked HSOAC researchers to repeat the workforce survey two years after the first survey had been administered. By comparing the estimates of workplace civil rights violations that were produced in 2019 to new estimates calculated in 2021, it would be possible to determine whether FEMA’s efforts were coupled with an improvement in its workplace culture.

In this report, we summarize the results of the 2021 survey of FEMA employees, which showed a decline in gender-based/sexual and racial/ethnic civil rights violations compared with the results of the 2019 survey. This decline could be driven by national cultural changes or the substantial policy and training changes implemented at FEMA. The emergence of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and the broad transition to working from home is an alternative hypothesis that could also explain the change. In this report, we explore plausible explanations for the decline in greater detail.

With FEMA’s agreement, we have updated the estimates and analysis provided in Farris et al., 2020. Much of the original report’s content is retained, but we have extended the discussion as needed to account for differences in the 2021 survey.
Scoping Civil Rights Violations

An assessment of civil rights violations could be scoped in any of four ways:

- A *substantiated* civil rights violation is a series of incidents that has been investigated and determined to be true, although the strength of the evidence required to substantiate the claim will be different depending on whether the determination is made by an organizational, administrative, civil, or criminal authority. A substantiated civil rights violation is almost always a series of incidents, not a singular incident. Case law has established that the behavior must be repeated and must continue even after the offender knows that the person is offended. Legally, a single incident could be so severe that just one instance would be adequate, but, in practice, that is rare.

- A *reported* civil rights violation is an incident that an employee perceived to be problematic and subsequently reported formally to their organization. Provided that an agency is accurately tracking employee reports, the number of reported civil rights violations should be available through its civil rights office or similar office. That is, this group is also directly visible to organizational leadership and others, as depicted by the visible, top portion of the iceberg.

- A *self-identified* civil rights violation is one or more incidents that a victim perceived to be a problem and labeled as some form of unlawful harassment or discrimination (e.g., gender discrimination). Most employees who believe they have been harassed or discriminated against will not report the incident to their employers (Fitzgerald, Shullman, et al., 1988; Gruber and Smith, 1995; Hotelling, 1991; Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015), and, as a result, this group of incidents is depicted as falling largely underneath the water line of the iceberg and, therefore, out of sight. Estimates of self-identified, but not reported, civil rights violations can be surfaced though confidential, direct-query surveys that ask employees directly whether they have experienced “sexual harassment” or “racial/ethnic discrimination” (for example).

- *All* civil rights violations include every unlawful incident, whether or not the victim understood it to be a civil rights violation, and whether or not any evidence of the event exists outside of the memories of the victim and perpetrator. In Figure 1.1, this group is represented as the entire iceberg or the sum of all civil rights incidents.

This report describes the results of a survey that was designed to measure *all* gender-based/sexual and race/ethnicity–based civil rights violations (i.e., the entire iceberg). The measure-

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1 A substantiated civil rights violation is almost always a series of incidents, not a singular incident. Case law has established that the behavior must be repeated and must continue even after the offender knows that the person is offended. Legally, a single incident could be so severe that just one instance would be adequate, but, in practice, that is rare.
ment approach is distinct from direct-query methods in that it asks the detailed, behavioral questions necessary to understand whether an experience can be categorized as a civil rights violation and does not depend on the survey respondent to self-label it as such. These methods are described in detail in Chapter Two.

**Survey of the FEMA Workplace**

The overarching goal of the FEMA workplace survey was to estimate the annual prevalence of workplace harassment and discrimination at FEMA, assess change in that prevalence relative
to the estimates from the 2019 survey, describe the workplace climate, and assess employee perceptions of leadership. To help identify areas for improvement and guide decisions about programming and policy responses, the effort also included descriptions of the characteristics of incidents, offenders, and victims. These results were stratified by employee gender and race (to assess these demographic groups’ experiences of gender-based and race/ethnicity–based workplace harassment and discrimination) and by employee demographic profile (e.g., pay grade, age, employee type, deployment status, and office). In some instances, substantive differences were not present between employees of different ages, deployment statuses, or other employment categorizations. On those occurrences, we do not necessarily speak to these findings in the text of the current report; however, these analyses were executed, and an interested reader can find the relevant tables in the annex to this report.

The investigation that motivated this survey was focused on sexual harassment, but, when fielding the 2019 survey, both FEMA and the HSOAC team agreed that it was important to consider harassment and discrimination against all protected classes. In addition to sex, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Pub. L. 88-352) prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, and national origin. Unfortunately, survey efforts are limited by the time constraints of survey respondents, and a lengthy survey that included all civil rights violations might not be answered thoroughly and carefully, which would lead to biased results. Thus, we decided to focus on two bases of discrimination: first, discrimination on the basis of sex, given the origin of the survey effort, and second, discrimination on the basis of race/ethnicity. Race/ethnicity was selected because both we and FEMA hypothesized that it would be the second most common form of discrimination in the workplace, with gender-based concerns being the first.

In 2019, HSOAC researchers designed a workforce survey that would support evidence-based decisionmaking at FEMA, completing the following steps:

1. **We collaborated with FEMA leadership to define critical survey domains.** Balancing the desire for comprehensive data with limitations on the survey length, the following domains were prioritized for measurement in this effort:
   - prevalence of (the percentage of employees who had experienced)
     - sexually hostile work environment harassment
     - gender-based (sexist) hostile work environment harassment
     - quid pro quo harassment
     - gender discrimination
     - racial/ethnic hostile work environment harassment
     - racial/ethnic discrimination
   - characteristics of incidents of gender-based/sexual and racial/ethnic harassment and discrimination
   - perceptions of leadership (climate)
   - general workplace incivility, which is low-intensity, deviant behavior that is not directed specifically at a protected class of employee.
The decision to exclude other important constructs, such as discrimination on the basis of religion or country of origin, should not be interpreted as indicating that these violations are tolerated or absent. Rather, the attention and time constraints of survey respondents required selecting a small subset of survey items. The domains not included here could be prioritized for future study.

2. **We designed a survey instrument to accurately measure the domains listed in step 1.** HSOAC researchers were guided by the RAND Military Workplace Study (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2014), which assembled a team of internal and national experts in the measurement of sensitive topics to design survey instruments for harassment and discrimination that addressed the common measurement problems that can bias estimates of prevalence (Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2014, Chapters Two and Four). Informed by the unique characteristics of FEMA—a civilian rather than military organization—the military instruments were adjusted for alignment with FEMA legal and policy obligations.

3. **We obtained all required regulatory approvals,** which included approval from the RAND Human Subjects Protection Committee and the FEMA Privacy Office. A federal certificate of confidentiality was also obtained to protect identifiable survey responses from subpoena.

4. **We selected a sampling frame.** To ensure that estimates of harassment and discrimination across the workforce are reliable, particularly within smaller demographic subgroups, we chose a census design that invited all current FEMA employees, including local hires and reservists, to participate in the survey.

5. **We conducted test interviews.** Prior to survey administration, HSOAC researchers completed interviews with a small, diverse group \((N = 19)\) of FEMA employees who varied by gender, race, age, job title, organizational office, and number of years of service. We shared the draft survey with them and solicited feedback to improve the survey instructions, items, and response options. This step helped to ensure that respondents would interpret the meaning of the survey language similarly to what the survey developers intended.

6. **We fielded the survey.** Between April 22 and May 13, 2019, we invited all FEMA employees \((N = 19,917)\) to complete a confidential, online survey of their workplace experiences. For employees who did not respond to the survey, up to four reminder emails were sent at one-week intervals.

7. **We analyzed the survey results.** HSOAC researchers developed and applied nonresponse sampling weights and subsequently calculated descriptive statistics to summarize each survey domain.

8. **We reported our findings.** We presented our findings to FEMA, and publicly, in Farris et al., 2020.
With the 2019 survey and fielding plan as the starting point, HSOAC researchers made the following adjustments in 2021:

1. **We added new questions to the survey.** Additional questions assessed time spent working from home, which might have increased because of the pandemic, and employee engagement with various efforts at FEMA to improve the workplace climate, including training and engagement efforts. We also introduced questions about the employee’s sexual orientation and gender identity to further our understanding of employee experiences. The annex to this report contains the complete survey instrument.

2. **We adjusted the organization of the survey modules.** In 2019, the survey was not designed to separate the characteristics of gender-based (sexist) harassment experiences from the characteristics of sexually hostile work environment or quid pro quo harassment experiences. We reorganized the survey modules so that we could report the characteristics and consequences of gender-based (sexist) harassment experiences separately.

3. **We refielded the survey.** Between April 27 and May 13, 2021, we invited all FEMA employees (N = 21,982) to complete a confidential, online survey of their workplace experiences. FEMA’s Office of Equal Rights sent a message to all employees in support of the survey as well (May 4). For employees who did not respond to the survey, one reminder from RAND (May 10) was sent. An additional message was sent to reservists through the Deployment Tracking System on May 10, advising them to check their FEMA email addresses for their survey invitations. Originally, the active survey fielding period was scheduled to end May 18, 2021. FEMA leadership requested that it be closed early on May 13, 2021, out of concern about the “survey’s construction and language.” Because of the early closure, the two final reminder emails were not sent.

   Of those invited to participate, 7,366 answered enough of the survey to be counted as complete survey respondents, which required responding to at least half of the questions asked of all respondents. This gives an overall minimum survey response rate of 33.5 percent.4

4. **We analyzed the survey results, with some additional analyses.** Like with the 2019 survey results, HSOAC researchers developed and applied nonresponse sampling weights and subsequently calculated descriptive statistics to summarize each survey

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2 Internal FEMA correspondence, May 13, 2021. Some FEMA employees raised concerns about the dichotomous assessment of gender and about a racial/ethnic harassment screening question that assessed experiences in which FEMA employees had been called racial slurs. Our rationale for these measurement decisions is discussed in Chapter Two.

3 Of those invited to participate, 8,044 FEMA employees opened the survey. Of these, 678 completed less than half of the survey questions asked of all respondents and were not included in the final sample.

4 Response rate 1 (American Association for Public Opinion Research, 2016).
domain. In addition, we assessed trends in prevalence of civil rights violations across the two survey fieldings. We assessed trends only for prevalence estimates and assessments of climate.

Unfortunately, the early closure was an unexpected, methodological difference between the two fieldings that produced samples of FEMA respondents that were not comparable to one another. As we describe in more detail in Chapter Two, employees who respond later in the fielding period tend to have lower rates of civil rights violations than those who respond earlier, meaning that the 2021 survey would somewhat overestimate their prevalence. Because of this problem, we do not present 2019 prevalence estimates in direct comparison to 2021 estimates anywhere in this report. Instead, we summarize risk ratios that describe the percentage change in the 2021 risk of experiencing a civil rights violation relative to the risk in 2019 after accounting for error introduced by the early closure. Chapter Two contains additional detail on our procedure. Given that the survey was fielded during the COVID-19 pandemic, we also examined the relationship between working from home and the risk of civil rights violations.

Organization of This Report

The chapters that follow provide an overview of the survey design and analytic approach and a description of the survey results:

- additional detail about the survey design and analytic approach (Chapter Two)
- overall prevalence estimates of gender-based/sexual and racial/ethnic civil rights violations and discussion of trends between the 2019 and 2021 surveys (Chapter Three)
- prevalence estimates for gender-based/sexual civil rights violations (Chapter Four)
- prevalence estimates for racial/ethnic harassment and discrimination (Chapter Six)
- summaries of the characteristics of victims, offenders and the situation for gender-based/sexual civil rights violations (Chapter Five) and for race/ethnicity-based civil rights violations (Chapter Seven)
- reporting decisions, perceived organizational response to reports, and barriers to reporting (Chapter Eight)
- descriptions of employee perceptions of the FEMA leadership climate (Chapter Nine)
- an assessment of general workplace incivility (also in Chapter Nine)
- conclusions and suggestions for further action by FEMA leadership (Chapter Ten).

The annex to this report contains tabular data on prevalence results and characteristics and the 2021 FEMA workplace survey instrument.
CHAPTER TWO

Survey Design and Analytic Approach

This chapter describes details of the study design, sample, response rates, survey design, and statistical analyses. This information provides useful context to facilitate interpretation of the results described in the remaining chapters of this report.

Sample and Recruitment

All FEMA employees as of mid-March 2021, including reservists and other part-time employees, were recruited to participate in the survey—that is, the sample was a complete census of the organization.\(^1\) The research team made this decision with FEMA’s cooperation to ensure a sufficient number of respondents to accurately document the experiences of small but critical subgroups of the population, such as employees who had experienced sexual harassment but had not reported it.

FEMA provided HSOAC with email addresses for 21,982 of the 21,993 FEMA employees and planned to send each employee up to four recruitment emails between April 27 and May 18, 2021. Emails invited the employee to participate in the survey and included a single-use, personalized link to the web-based survey. The Office of Equal Rights also sent a message in support of the survey during the fielding period. Reservists, who are less likely to check their email regularly, were also sent a message through the Deployment Tracking System asking them to check their FEMA email for their survey invitation and unique link.

The survey was voluntary, and potential respondents were assured that their responses would be confidential.\(^2\) The RAND Survey Research Group managed individual survey responses, and only aggregate results (such as those presented in this report) were shared with FEMA. Respondents were assured that their choices about whether to participate and their individual responses to survey items would never be shared with FEMA. All personal identifiers were destroyed after the survey was fielded.

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\(^1\) Employees who contacted RAND to participate but who were not employed at the time of recruitment were thanked but were not sent the link to the survey.

\(^2\) The promise of confidentiality and certificate of confidentiality ensure protection of participants and prohibit data-sharing outside the research team.
Early Survey Closure

The online survey portal was scheduled to be open from April 27 to May 18, 2021, a timeline selected to mimic the 2019 survey fielding. The two surveys were designed to be fielded as identically as possible to increase our confidence that any observed changes over time could be attributed to true changes in the workforce rather than differences in the way the survey had been conducted. Unexpectedly, on May 13, 2021, FEMA leadership instructed us to close the survey early. The closure occurred several days before the planned closure date and before final, “last-chance” reminder emails had been sent to employees. In May 2021, we learned that this early closure was in response to employee complaints about the dichotomous form of one of the survey items assessing gender and concerns about the question assessing racial slurs used against FEMA employees. Two challenges arose because of the early closure: a reduction in overall response rate and the possibility that prevalence estimates might be different from what they would have been had more employees participated.

The early closure had substantial effects on the number of employees who participated in the survey (the response rate) and, as a result, the level of detail on subgroups that could be reported. In 2019, 8,946 FEMA employees completed the survey (44.9 percent of the workforce). In 2021, responses dropped to 7,366 employees (33.5 percent of the workforce). Cutting the survey fielding period short by several days contributed to a 11.4–percentage point reduction in the response rate. We typically experience an uptick in survey responses after the final reminder email informs employees that this will be their last chance to share their experiences with FEMA leadership before the survey closes. This last-chance email was never delivered to employees, which, in turn, meant that late responders were lost from the sample. This unexpected change in survey administration introduced a methodological difference between the way the first survey was conducted and the way the second survey was conducted. To determine whether the difference in survey fielding periods might bias our results, we analyzed the baseline survey data to determine whether late responders differed from early responders on our key top-line prevalence estimates (gender-based/sexual harassment, gender discrimination, racial/ethnic harassment, racial/ethnic discrimination, climate for sexual harassment, climate for racial/ethnic harassment, and general work environment).

Our analysis of 2019 data showed that respondents who completed the survey in the final days of fielding had lower rates of all types of violations than those who completed earlier. Because such respondents were excluded from the 2021 survey, the 2021 survey results somewhat overestimate the prevalence of those violations. Similarly, respondents who completed the survey later in the fielding period gave more-positive climate evaluations. Their exclusion because of the abbreviated fielding period in 2021 may create spurious differences when comparing the raw estimates across the 2021 and 2019 surveys.

To control for these biases when comparing prevalence of violations across years, we estimated risk ratios comparing risks of each type of civil rights violation in 2021 and 2019 while controlling for when in the fielding period each respondent completed their survey. In these comparisons, we adjusted only for the changes in the survey fielding period between these two surveys to ensure that these comparisons are not influenced by that change in survey
methods. Specifically, the square root of the number of days the survey was open before the respondent completed the survey was included as a covariate when estimating the survey year’s effect on each type of violation.

Risk ratios are interpreted as the ratio of two prevalence estimates—in this case, the prevalence of a given outcome in 2021 divided by its prevalence in 2019, all else equal. For example, if 10 percent of staff experienced sexual harassment in 2019 and only 6 percent experienced sexual harassment in 2021, the risk ratio would be 0.60, which corresponds to a 40-percent reduction in the risk of experiencing sexual harassment in 2021 relative to the risk in 2019.

When trends between the 2021 and 2019 survey results are presented in this report, the reported decline accounts for the effect of the early closure. For climate variables that are presented as mean ratings, we similarly controlled for the effects of the truncated 2021 survey fielding period to ensure that shifts in means across time were not artifacts of that change. This calculation was made in linear models predicting those climate scores as a function of year of survey and the square root of the time to completion.

Because of this shift in methods between the two surveys, we caution against directly comparing prevalence estimates from the 2019 survey with those in this report from the 2021 survey. Instead, readers should rely on the risk ratios provided in this report, which are adjusted to remove biases caused by the change in the survey fielding period. Although virtually all outcomes improved across these survey years, the magnitude of the improvement is underestimated unless the shorter survey fielding period in 2021 relative to 2019 is controlled for.

Response Rates and Nonresponse Weighting

As described earlier, of the 21,993 FEMA personnel invited to participate, 7,366 answered enough of the survey to be counted as complete survey respondents, which required responding to 34 or more survey questions (i.e., more than half of the questions asked of all respondents). This gives an overall minimum survey response rate of 33.5 percent.

Individual survey data were merged with administrative records containing the demographic and employment characteristics of each FEMA employee. Thus, we had detailed characteristics describing both the survey respondents and nonrespondents, which we used to estimate nonresponse weights that ensured that the weighted analytic sample was representative of the full FEMA population. Specifically, we used the Toolkit for Weighting and Analysis of Nonequivalent Groups (TWANG) package (Griffin et al., 2014) to balance the respondent sample to the characteristics of the full population on the following characteris-

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3 In 2021, 8,044 FEMA employees opened the survey. We did not include 678 partially completed surveys (i.e., those who responded to fewer than 34 survey questions).

4 Response rate 1 (American Association for Public Opinion Research, 2016).
tics: sex, age, Hispanic ethnicity, race, organizational component, job type (full or part time, reservist), pay grade, number of years at FEMA, supervisory responsibilities, recognized disabilities, and amount of time deployed in the prior year. This was done in TWANG using inverse probability weights, derived by using a machine learning algorithm to estimate the probability of responding as a function of all those characteristics, as well as all three-way interactions among those characteristics.

The initial sample, prior to nonresponse weighting, was relatively representative, with only small deviations between the respondents and the overall FEMA population. The four largest differences between the respondents and the total population prior to weighting were

- larger numbers of days deployed (average of 123 days among respondents, 113 days for population)
- fewer years at FEMA (six years for respondents, 6.27 years for population)
- fewer grade 1 employees (18 percent for respondents, 23 percent for population)
- more incident command (IC) pay plan employees (39 percent for respondents, 35 percent for population).

After we applied nonresponse weights, all categorical characteristics for respondents were within 1 percent of their population values. The largest difference remaining was for the amount of time deployed, which averaged 115 days among weighted respondents and 113 days among the full population. Because the unweighted respondents were quite similar in their characteristics to the full population, the variance inflation due to weighting was quite small in spite of weighting on a large number of characteristics. The Kish, 1965, approximation for the design effect was 1.2, suggesting that the statistical precision of estimates based on our weighted respondent sample is equivalent to a simple random sample of approximately 6,164.

Survey Design

The survey that FEMA employees were invited to complete was hosted on a secure, online survey portal. The survey included a series of modules that assessed whether, in the year preceding the survey, employees had experiences that were consistent with

- sexually hostile work environment harassment
- gender-based (sexist) hostile work environment harassment
- quid pro quo harassment
- gender discrimination
- racial/ethnic harassment
- racial/ethnic discrimination.

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5 Based on the FEMA personnel data variable Organizational Level 3.
Any respondent categorized as having experienced one of these civil rights violations in the year preceding the survey also received a series of follow-up items that assessed the characteristics of that violation (e.g., location, gender of the offender, working relationship with the offender), the respondent’s reporting decision, and reasons behind that decision. Finally, every respondent was asked to complete modules that assessed workplace climate as it relates to workplace harassment and to indicate their perception of the general civility climate of their workplace.

The survey measures for discrimination and harassment on the basis of gender and race/ethnicity were built largely on survey development work conducted by RAND researchers for the U.S. Department of Defense (see Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2014). The modified survey we developed for FEMA has been updated to account for the setting differences. It also includes expanded measurement of gender-based hostile work environment harassment and gender discrimination based on concerns from FEMA management that these types of violations could be present in the workforce.

In U.S. law, gender discrimination is the umbrella concept that includes all forms of unfavorable treatment of an employee on the basis of their gender (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, undated). Harassment is a type of gender discrimination and can take different forms (sexual, gender-based [sexist], and quid pro quo).

The Survey Module on Sexually Hostile Work Environment Harassment

Sexually hostile work environment harassment includes unwanted sexual or romantic advances, sexual comments, and other comments or physical gestures that are sexual in nature. However, when these behaviors do not offend anyone in the environment, they are not unlawful (although they might still be inappropriate or unprofessional); in addition, most isolated incidents, although potentially offensive to someone, are not unlawful overall. Instead, for workplace behavior to rise to the level of sexually hostile work environment harassment, it must be unwelcome and so severe or pervasive that it alters the conditions of one’s employment.

To translate these legal requirements into a survey form, we created ten screening questions that assessed a wide variety of behaviors that could be forms of sexually hostile work environment harassment (e.g., “did someone from work repeatedly tell you about their sexual activities in a way that made you uncomfortable, angry, or upset?”). Nine of the ten items include the phrase “make you uncomfortable, angry, or upset” to capture an alteration of the condition of one’s employment, often legally instantiated as situations in which a reasonable person would find it sufficiently upsetting or offensive that it becomes difficult or unpleasant to do the job. One item did not include this requirement because the behavior described in the item constitutes a criminal offense (intentional, unwanted sexual touching). Seven of the ten items assessed “repeated” behaviors to establish that the events were not isolated incidents. The term repeated was excluded from three items that assessed behaviors that a rea-
sonable person would understand are offensive in the workplace even if they occurred only one time (i.e., showing sexually explicit materials to a coworker, taking or sharing sexually explicit images of a coworker, and intentional unwanted sexual touching).

According to their responses on these initial screening items, respondents were categorized as having experienced “inappropriate workplace behavior” that might or might not rise to the level of unlawful behavior. For each screening item that a respondent indicated occurred, a series of follow-up items was asked. A set of two items asked the respondent whether the person who did it knew that it was unwanted and, if so, whether they continued the behavior after they knew that someone wanted them to stop. If these items were both answered affirmatively, the respondent was categorized as having experienced an unlawful sexually hostile work environment harassment on the basis of behavior that was persistent in their environment. If the behavior was not persistent, the respondent received another follow-up question that asked whether most people of their gender would have been offended by the behavior. If the respondent answered this item affirmatively, they were categorized as having experienced an unlawful sexually hostile work environment harassment via the reasonable-person standard.

One of the screening items was not followed by the persistence and reasonable-person standard questions. Any respondent who indicated that someone at work had intentionally touched them in a sexual way when they did not want them to was categorized as having experienced sexually hostile work environment harassment based on a reasonable-person standard.

Respondents categorized as having experienced sexually hostile work environment harassment might have indicated having experienced more than one of the types of behaviors included in this form of harassment. At least one of the behaviors persisted after the actor knew that it was unwanted or the respondent perceived it as meeting the reasonable-person standard.

The Survey Module on Gender-Based (Sexist) Hostile Work Environment Harassment

Not all hostile work environment harassment is sexual in nature; it can also include offensive comments and behaviors on the basis of an employee’s gender (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, undated). To assess this form of harassment, we designed a survey module that began with three screening items. These items assessed common forms of sexist behavior in the workplace, including sexist comments about a person’s gender, being ignored or excluded because of gender, or being told that one is not acting like a person of their gender should. Much like the sexual form of hostile work environment harassment, all three items included the phrase “made you uncomfortable, angry, or upset” to capture the legal requirement that the behavior be offensive to the employee. All respondents who answered one of

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6 Any behavior that is included in the criminal code definitionally meets the reasonable-person standard.
these screening items affirmatively were categorized as having experienced “inappropriate workplace behavior.” To meet the legal requirement of having experienced “gender-based hostile work environment harassment,” a respondent had to also indicate that the person engaging in the behavior knew that it was unwanted and continued the behavior after learning so (via two persistence follow-up items) or that it was so severe that most people of that gender would be offended by it (via a reasonable-person standard follow-up item). As above, respondents who were categorized as having experienced gender-related (sexist) hostile work environment harassment might have indicated having experienced more than one of the behaviors included in this form of harassment; at least one of the behaviors persisted after the offender knew that it was unwanted or the respondent perceived it as meeting the reasonable-person standard.

The Survey Module on Quid Pro Quo Harassment

Quid pro quo harassment occurs when someone uses their organizational power to coerce sexual behavior in exchange for a workplace benefit (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, undated). Two quid pro quo harassment screening questions assessed whether someone in the workplace had made the respondent feel that they would receive a workplace benefit (or avoid a workplace harm) in exchange for doing something sexual. Any respondent who answered either of these items affirmatively was categorized as having experienced an inappropriate workplace behavior. For this behavior to be categorized as an unlawful act, follow-up items assessed what made them feel that a sexual exchange had been offered. The respondent was asked whether (1) the offeror told them directly, (2) the offerer hinted to communicate the exchange (e.g., reminded them of their upcoming evaluation near the same time), or (3) someone else had told the respondent of having been punished or treated unfairly for not doing something sexual or, conversely, rewarded for doing something sexual. Any one of these three sources of information is legally admissible evidence of quid pro quo harassment, so respondents who answered one or more of them affirmatively were categorized as having experienced quid pro quo harassment.

The Survey Module on Gender Discrimination

The gender discrimination module assessed seven career and workplace harms that the respondent believed were due to their gender. For example, one item asked whether someone at work had made it “difficult or impossible to get a training opportunity” because of the respondent’s gender. Respondents who indicated that they had experienced one or more workplace harms on the basis of their gender were categorized as having experienced gender discrimination.

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7 Gender was based on the respondent’s self-identified gender. Questions were programmed to read “because you are a man,” “because you are a woman,” or “because of your gender.” The third option was displayed for any respondent who did not select a gender identity.
The Survey Module on Racial/Ethnic Harassment

Case law related to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in the United States does not distinguish various forms of racial harassment the way it distinguishes between forms of gender-based harassment. Thus, our single measure was designed to capture harassment that included race/ethnicity–motivated language, gestures, images, or behaviors that offended or angered the FEMA employee. For example, others’ repeated use of racial/ethnic slurs, display of material that threatens or insults a racial/ethnic group (e.g., displays of the confederate flag), or telling jokes derogatory of a particular racial/ethnic group were all assessed.

This survey module began with ten screening items that assessed a wide variety of behaviors that could be forms of racial/ethnic harassment (e.g., “ has someone from work made you uncomfortable, angry, or upset by claiming that their race/ethnicity is better than others?”). All ten items included the phrase “make you uncomfortable, angry, or upset” to capture the requirement that the behavior offended the respondent for it to be unlawful (e.g., banter between friends that includes a racial slur but does not cause offense does not meet legal requirements for harassment).

According to these initial screening items, respondents were categorized as having experienced “inappropriate workplace behavior” that might or might not rise to the level of unlawful behavior. For each screening item that a respondent indicated occurred, a series of follow-up items was asked. A set of two items asked the respondent whether the person who did it knew that it was unwanted and, if so, whether they continued the behavior after they knew that someone wanted them to stop. If these items were both answered affirmatively, the respondent was categorized as having experienced racial/ethnic harassment on the basis of behavior that was persistent in their environment. If the behavior was not persistent, the respondent received another follow-up question that asked whether the respondent believed that “most people would know that this behavior would be offensive to individuals in certain racial/ethnic groups.” If the respondent answered this item affirmatively, they were categorized as having experienced racial/ethnic harassment via the reasonable-person standard.

Respondents who were categorized as having experienced racial harassment might have experienced more than one of the types of behaviors included in this form of harassment.

Use of Racial Slurs on the Survey

The screening question assessing racial/ethnic slurs includes examples that are offensive when used against another person and can be painful to read. Given their strength and given the fact that they continue to be used against FEMA employees, we believed that it was a critical task for the survey to witness and record these events. Precise language is important for two reasons: (1) It tells employees who have been exposed to these slurs that their experiences are understood and are taken seriously enough to be witnessed and recorded, and (2) it ensures that everyone interprets the question similarly. We considered using the word *slur* instead of examples to communicate our meaning, but *slur* is not a common word with a universally understood definition. Some people include only the strongest words in this definition; others understand its meaning more broadly, and some Americans do not know
what the word means (Diaz-Legaspe, 2020). In survey research, examples are used to establish intended meaning in these situations and ensure that the survey measurement remains strong.

We did not make the decision to include example slurs in the survey lightly. It was critical to us that we heard from as many stakeholders as we could to ensure that we balanced strong measurement with respondent experiences. When this survey module was originally developed (Matthews et al., 2021), we brought together a panel of national experts on racial/ethnic harassment, including legal scholars, social science experts, and leading attorneys. They advocated for the importance of clearly describing and then witnessing racism in the workplace rather than using euphemisms to whitewash the experience. Subsequently, the full measure was reviewed and approved by research ethics oversight boards, whose job is to ensure the ethical treatment of research volunteers, including the RAND Human Subjects Protection Committee, the U.S. Army Human Research Protections Office, the FEMA Privacy Office, and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Compliance Assurance Program Office. To gather information from the FEMA perspective, the survey was vetted by FEMA's senior leaders prior to fielding, and we conducted interviews with FEMA employees in which we showed them each survey item and asked them how they interpreted it. No one spontaneously commented on the racial slurs. When asked directly about the slurs, no participant said that they were personally offended. Some offered that they understood why the question was asked and indicated that they had heard words like those listed in their workplaces.

Even with concurrence from a variety of stakeholders on the inclusion of example racial slurs, it was still important to proactively protect future respondents. To do so, we informed all respondents that some questions might cause discomfort or distress, their participation is voluntary, they could stop participating at any time, and they could skip any question. All items were programmed to allow respondents to skip them without answering. Respondents received survey contact information, staffed by the project leaders, who responded within 24 hours to any question or concern. A handful of respondents contacted us to voice concerns about the racial slur item, and all contacts were resolved fully with a phone call or email as overseen by the RAND Human Subjects Protection Committee.

**The Survey Module on Racial/Ethnic Discrimination**

Similar to the framing for gender discrimination, the racial/ethnic discrimination module was designed to assess career and workplace harms. However, rather than asking whether the respondent believed that these harms were due to the respondent’s gender, we asked whether the respondent believed that they were due to their race/ethnicity. We used the same behaviorally based examples of unfair workplace events for racial/ethnic discrimination as were used for gender discrimination. Respondents who were categorized as having experienced racial/ethnic discrimination might have experienced more than one of the types of behaviors included in this form of harassment.
Follow-Up Modules on the Characteristics of Civil Rights Violations

Any respondent categorized as having experienced a civil rights violation in the year preceding the survey received a set of follow-up items for that type of violation. The items varied based on the type of violation (see the survey instrument in the annex to this report) but typically included questions about the offender (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, work relationship [supervisor, peer, contractor]), location, reporting decision, and, depending on the reporting decision, either the barriers to reporting or FEMA’s response to reports.

Climate: Perceptions of the Leadership Response to Harassment

The survey included two ten-item modules that assessed the respondent’s beliefs about FEMA leadership’s response to sexual harassment and racial/ethnic harassment.

Respondents indicated the extent to which they disagreed or agreed with two series of five behaviorally based items about leadership responses, such as “My current supervisor lets people get away with racially inappropriate comments and behavior.” Each item was assessed first with the respondent’s “current supervisor” as the referent and second for “FEMA’s leaders,” who were defined as all Senior Executive Service (SES) employees and all FEMA directors.

The Survey Module on General Incivility

A seven-item module assessed general incivility in the respondent’s work environment. Unlike the measures of civil rights violations, these items were designed to assess poor workplace behaviors that contribute to negative work environments but are not explicitly linked to a protected class, such as gender or race. Respondents indicated the degree to which they disagreed or agreed with such items as “My coworkers intentionally make it hard for me to do my job” and “My coworkers spread gossip and rumors about each other.”

Training

As noted in Chapter One, FEMA initiated a “Culture Improvement Action Plan” (FEMA, 2020b) with the intent of increasing awareness and transparency and demonstrating commitment to FEMA’s core values. The implementation plan described initiatives in various domains and a variety of related activities. To provide a description of the activities, programs, and other engagements to which FEMA employees would likely have been exposed, we developed and asked a series of 12 specific questions assessing whether they had participated in various relevant activities.
COVID-19–Related Changes to the Workplace

We included questions to assess time spent working from home, which might have increased because of the pandemic. We developed the question set with two considerations in mind:

- Throughout the span of the year surveyed, how “open” businesses and government offices were in response to COVID-19 shifted as the conditions on the ground shifted.
- In addition, a large part of FEMA’s workforce are reservists whose FEMA duty time varies over the course of a year.

With these considerations, we asked a set of two questions for each quarter of the year: how much time was spent working from home in a given quarter and how much time was spent working for FEMA total in a given quarter. We used these items to estimate the number of days the employee worked from home during the prior year, the number of days exposed to the FEMA office or in-person environment, and the number of days worked for FEMA during the prior year. We then calculated the proportion of days worked in the office.

Employee Characteristics

To examine organizational factors that could be related to the survey results, we merged FEMA administrative personnel data with the survey data. We explored our survey results by organizational and employee characteristics, such as sex, race/ethnicity, organizational unit or office, amount of time the employee had been deployed in the prior year, employee type, pay grade, and age, to identify potential risk factors. Using personnel data in this way enabled us to save respondents’ time by omitting such questions on the survey but also limited the analyses to variables included in the administrative data and assumed that administrative data were current and accurate. Although we based our analyses on variables in the personnel data, we often simplified the variables for clarity of presentation or to avoid categories too small to generate useful estimates. Our goal was to identify trends that would help FEMA better target areas within the organization or identify characteristics of the experience that would guide prevention strategies and better support FEMA’s workforce.

Gender Identity

Gender was assessed twice on the survey. The first question appeared early in the survey and was used to program the survey to phrase gender discrimination items as negative events that were “because you were a man,” “because you were a woman,” or “because of your gender.” It asked the respondent to indicate whether they were a “man” or “woman,” with an option to skip the question if neither category was accurate. Although the information specifying gender was also available in the administrative data file, we used a survey self-report item to assess gender in order to obtain a current assessment in case the individual’s gender presentation had shifted since the administrative data had originally been collected.
Additional gender options, such as nonbinary, were considered but ultimately not included at this point in the survey. From population estimates (Crissman et al., 2017), we expected that between four and eight respondents would identify their gender as nonbinary on this survey. Because this group is so small, these employees would almost certainly be identifiable by inference. For example, there might be only one employee serving in region III as a reservist who identifies their gender as nonbinary. Even with all personally identifiable data removed from the survey data file, this person’s identity would remain easy to determine. Given our promise to protect all employees’ confidentiality, we did not want to risk undermining the privacy of employees who answered the first survey question and identified their gender as nonbinary.

Second, although it is important to understand civil rights violations against employees who identify their gender as nonbinary, a group of fewer than ten people would be too small to produce reliable estimates, so we would not be able to include their estimate separately in this report. That is, even if respondents shouldered the risk of identifiability and selected a nonbinary response option on the survey, the report would not have been able to include an assessment of prevalence separately for this group.

At the same time, it was critical to provide a survey experience that was respectful of people of all gender identities, and many of our survey items were programmed to reference the gender indicated by the respondent. To this end, respondents who selected neither “man” nor “woman” as their gender received survey items that were programmed to avoid use of such phrases as “because you are a man” or “because you are a woman” and instead viewed items that were phrased as “because of your gender.”

Respondents who did not identify as men or women were not included in gender-specific estimates, but they were included in the estimated percentage of FEMA employees overall. Given that people who identified their gender as nonbinary could be at particularly high risk for discrimination (Harrison, Grant, and Herman, 2012), it was essential that their experiences be included in the workforce estimates.

A second question about gender identity, new for 2021, appeared at the end of the survey and asked employees to indicate whether they identified as transgender or gender nonbinary (either yes or no). Respondents could also indicate that they preferred not to answer the question. Note that this item grouped the larger group of people who were transgender and identified as a man or woman with the much smaller group of people who identified as nonbinary. This grouping substantially decreases risk of identifiability by inference. Unfortunately, even this larger combined group was too small to reliably estimate and report their experiences.

**Sexual Orientation**

The 2021 FEMA workplace survey asked for the first time about employee sexual orientation to better understand differences in the risk of civil rights violations by sexual orientation. The research team worked with FEMA’s Pride Employee Resource Group in order to reach a solution that would feel sufficiently inclusive for those taking the survey, provide helpful infor-
mation to FEMA leadership about potentially vulnerable employees, and cluster employees in respondent groups that were large enough to help mitigate concerns about identifiability of respondents. We also asked these questions at the end of the survey, lessening the potential feeling of obligation to respond. Although strides are being made regarding the best practices for asking these types of questions, at the time of the survey development, there is no one universally accepted phrasing. For this item, employees were asked whether they identified as (1) heterosexual or straight, (2) bisexual or pansexual, (3) gay, or (4) lesbian. Respondents could also indicate that they preferred not to answer the question. Too few respondents selected options 2, 3, or 4 to be able to present the results for these options separately, so they were aggregated in order to provide stable estimates.

Race/Ethnicity
The administrative personnel data included dichotomous variables for one ethnicity (Hispanic) and five race categories: Alaska Native/Native American, Asian, black, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and white. An employee could be included in one race/ethnicity category, multiple race/ethnicity categories, or none. For presentation of the overall prevalence estimates of racial/ethnic harassment and discrimination, we recoded employees into mutually exclusive race/ethnicity categories. An employee was identified as (1) Hispanic if Hispanic ethnicity was selected alone or in combination with any race identifier. An employee was identified as (2) white, (3) black, (4) Asian, (5) Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or (6) Alaska Native/Native American if the single race/ethnicity category was selected and no other race/ethnicity identifier was selected. An employee who had not already been identified as Hispanic and who selected two or more race identifiers would be included in a (7) two or more races category. Finally, any employee for whom all race/ethnicity identifiers were absent was included in an (8) unknown race group.

For finer-grained analyses, smaller race/ethnicity groups (such as Hawaiian/Pacific Islander) tended to lack the statistical precision to report results. Therefore, for all follow-up analyses, we used a simplified four-category variable. In this simplified variable, the (1) Hispanic group was categorized as above. Any employee who had not already been classified as Hispanic was categorized as (2) black if the black indicator was selected, even if other racial categories were also selected; (3) white if the white indicator was selected; or (4) other for all remaining indicators and combinations of indicators. Any employee with no race/ethnicity indicator selected was coded as missing.

Organization
FEMA is divided into six main organizational units: the Office of the Administrator, Resilience, Mission Support, U.S. Fire Administration, regions I through X, and the Office of Response and Recovery (Figure 2.1). This information is contained in several administrative variables that describe employee office assignment at increasing levels of detail.
We used FEMA’s own administrative variable (Organizational Level 2) to provide office-level breakouts in the same style as FEMA leadership typically sees. In Figure 2.1, offices shaded in blue are level 2 offices, for which we estimated prevalence of civil rights violations unique to that office. Offices shaded in green are offices for which we do not provide unique estimates. However, survey responses from those offices do contribute to the estimate for the office to which they report. For example, employees working in the National Continu-
ity Programs directorate are included in the estimates for Resilience. In any table reporting results by organization, when the number of respondents working in a level 2 office was too small to produce a stable estimate of prevalence, the corresponding table cell is marked as not reportable (NR).

**Time Deployed**
The raw administrative variable indicating the amount of time deployed is a continuous variable with a minimum of 0 (no time deployed) and a maximum of 366 days deployed. For presentation, we collapsed the raw variable into four categories: 0 (no days deployed), 1 to 30 (about a month deployed), 31 to 180 (one to six months deployed), and more than 180 (six months or more). This allowed us to characterize prevalence rates by exposure to the disaster-deployed environments compared with those in normal duty station environments.

**Employee Type**
The raw administrative data describe types of employment at FEMA with 12 categories:

- Cadre of On-Call Response/Recovery Employees (CORE)
- direct-charge CORE (DCC)
- incident management (IM) CORE
- local hire
- permanent full time
- reservist
- IM assistance team (IMAT)
- permanent part time
- Schedule C
- SES (appointed or career)
- temporary full time
- temporary part time.

Some of these categories incorporate relatively few employees. To simplify the variable for presentation and to reduce privacy concerns, we recoded the variable to five categories: CORE, local hire, permanent full time, reservist, and other. Because the DCC appointment structure is very similar to CORE’s, DCC employees were recoded as CORE. An employee characterized as belonging to one of the larger employee groupings (CORE, local hire, permanent full time, reservist) retained their group, while the remainder were aggregated into the “other” category included in the original raw administrative data.
Pay Grade
The FEMA administrative variable “grade” describes the pay-grade level for each employee. The variable has 16 levels, ranging from 0 to 15. Despite its face similarity to the categories present on the General Schedule (GS) pay scale for federal employees, not all FEMA employees are paid on the GS pay scale. For example, many employees are hired under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Pub. L. 100-707, 1988), which governs responses to disasters and is associated with different pay schedules.

To analyze pay grade, we included only respondents who were paid on the GS pay scale (temporary and permanent full and part time, and Schedule C) or the IC pay plan (CORE), which mirrors the GS pay scale, and excluded those who were not (e.g., reservists and local hires). In the 2019 analyses, small pay-grade groups were aggregated to ensure a minimum group size of 300 respondents. This aggregation resulted in final groupings of grades 5 to 8, grades 9 to 10, grade 11, grade 12, grade 13, and grades 14 and 15. The 2021 analyses used the same groupings.

This variable excludes a large proportion of the FEMA workforce; for example, reservists make up approximately 35 percent of the weighted respondents. Thus, we created a separate variable to isolate employees on those pay scales associated with the Stafford Act that do not mirror the GS pay scale. Employees who were included in the grade variable above or who were not on a similar pay scale (local hires and SES employees) were excluded from this variable, which includes reservists, IM CORE, and IMAT employees. In 2019, the requirement to aggregate groups with fewer than 300 respondents resulted in having two pay bands only (IM-1 and incident team [IT]-1) and all higher groups (IM-2 through 5 and IT-2 through 5). The 2021 variable was constructed using the same aggregation.

Age
For our analyses, employee ages were aggregated into five groups: under 29, 30 to 39, 40 to 49, 50 to 59, and 60 or older.

Statistical Analysis and Reporting Conventions
The analyses presented in this report employ statistical procedures designed to reduce the likelihood of drawing inappropriate conclusions or compromising the privacy of respondents. We report only those estimates for which we have a certain precision, and estimates should be considered in conjunction with their confidence intervals (CIs).

The report contains estimated population percentages that vary dramatically in their statistical precision, as shown by their CIs. CIs indicate the uncertainty in the estimated population characteristic, with wider intervals indicating a less precise estimate. Specifically, for a 95-percent CI, an estimated value can be said to be significantly different from values outside the CI (at the standard level of statistical significance, $p < 0.05$), but we cannot reject the null hypothesis of no difference for values within that interval. Some estimates have 95-percent
CIs with a width of 0.5 percentage points, while others have widths of 20 percentage points. This occurs because some percentages are estimated using more than 7,000 respondents, while others are estimated on small subsamples.

To reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation, percentages with very low precision are not reported. Specifically, percentages estimated with a margin of error greater than 10 percentage points are marked NR (where the margin of error is defined as the larger half-width of the CI). In such cases, the CIs are still presented to communicate the range of percentages that are consistent with the data. Such imprecise estimates are better thought about as ranges than as points. A table column consisting of all nonreportable point estimates is typically a sign of very wide CIs. In this case, the CIs are also not reported. This suppression of imprecise results also helps to protect the confidentiality of respondents because it suppresses estimated percentages based on fewer than approximately 65 respondents.

The reader is cautioned to interpret all estimates with respect to their CIs rather than their apparent numerical precision. In general, the report includes CIs (either in the body of the report or in its annex) for all statistics that are interpreted as population estimates. To streamline presentation, the report focuses primarily on large effects or large differences between groups. With large differences, formal tests of statistical significance are not included in the text because significance can be inferred from nonoverlapping CIs. Whenever a difference between estimates is interpreted in the text as meaningful, it is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$, two-tailed), unless explicitly noted otherwise.

As discussed previously, all estimates presented in the report use survey weights that account for survey nonresponse. CIs for proportions were computed as binomial (Clopper–Pearson) with the Graubard and Korn, 1998, adjustment, using the Survey package within the R statistical programming environment. CIs for continuous values were computed using the standard normal approximation. We typically estimated variance with the Taylor series linearization method; however, that method cannot be used to estimate the variance of a percentage with a 0 numerator. In those cases, CIs were computed using the Hanley and Lippman-Hand, 1983, method, with the sample size defined using the Kish, 1965, estimate for effective sample size.
CHAPTER THREE

Overall Prevalence of Gender-Based/Sexual and Racial/Ethnic Civil Rights Violations and Additional Analyses

As detailed in Chapter Two, we estimated the proportion of FEMA employees whom we categorized as having experienced one or more of any of the following six civil rights violations:

- sexually hostile work environment harassment
- gender-based (sexist) hostile work environment harassment
- quid pro quo harassment
- gender discrimination
- racial/ethnic harassment
- racial/ethnic discrimination.

In this chapter, we present the combined overall prevalence of civil rights violations, summarize an analysis of change in the current prevalence relative to the 2019 survey, and discuss the factors that could be influencing that change. In subsequent chapters, we present more details about the six types of civil rights violations that we measured.

Each measure of civil rights violations in the FEMA workplace queried inappropriate workplace behaviors committed by “someone from work.” We used this phrase rather than “coworker” to ensure that respondents included all work contacts, not just those they perceived as peers. We asked the respondent to consider any person with whom they had contact as part of their FEMA duties, and we reminded them that the person could be a supervisor, coworker, or someone they managed.

We also asked them to include anyone with whom they had contact as part of their job, whether the person worked for FEMA or not. FEMA employees could experience inappropriate workplace behaviors by contractors or state partners who are not direct FEMA employees, and these behaviors might occur outside of the office but at a designated workplace (e.g., at a disaster site). Chapter Two presented detail on the structure of these survey measures and the logic guiding categorization of some employees as having experienced gender-based/sexual or race/ethnicity-based civil rights violations in the preceding year.
Estimate of Overall Prevalence

From the 2021 survey, we estimate that about one in five FEMA employees experienced at least one gender-based/sexual or race/ethnicity–based civil rights violations in the preceding year (Figure 3.1). The risk of experiencing a civil rights violation is lower in 2021 than it was in 2019. Specifically, the relative risk was 0.72, indicating a 28-percent reduction in the risk of experiencing a civil rights violation in 2021 relative to the risk in 2019. This relative risk calculation controls for the effect of early survey closure in 2021, which might have caused the prevalence in 2021 to appear higher than it otherwise would.\(^1\) Although this represents a substantive decrease in prevalence, the overall prevalence is nonetheless high enough that it warrants continued efforts to further mitigate the risk of such an experience.

**FIGURE 3.1**
Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Categorized as Experiencing a Gender-Based/Sexual or Race/Ethnicity–Based Civil Rights Violation in the Preceding Year

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\(^1\) Risk ratios are the ratio of two prevalence estimates. For example, if 10 percent experienced sexual harassment in survey one and only 6 percent experienced sexual harassment in survey two, the risk ratio is 0.6, or 60 percent as much risk of sexual harassment in the second survey relative to the first. That is, the relative risk of experiencing a civil rights violation declined by 40 percent between the two surveys in this example.
Potential Explanations for the Decline in Prevalence

Several reasons for this observed decline in relative risk are possible: national cultural change, policy changes and training at FEMA, and changes in the work environment as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

National Cultural Change

First, the year preceding the 2021 survey administration was marked by a broad social impetus to spotlight diversity, equity, and inclusion—most notably, Black Lives Matter. Sparked by police violence in the United States, protests spread across the globe (Westerman, Benk, and Greene, 2020), and organizations worked to elevate the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace and integrate those principles more effectively (Winfield, 2020). In addition, the #MeToo movement continued to raise awareness of sexual harassment. Employees and management at many workplaces spent time considering what these principles meant for everyday workplace behaviors that might previously have been considered appropriate. It could be that the FEMA workforce, much like the rest of the country, was more focused on workplace equity and that this awareness, in turn, discouraged would-be offenders from engaging in inappropriate and unlawful work behavior.

Policy Changes and Training at FEMA

Second, in the two years that passed since the initial survey, FEMA implemented substantial training and policy changes intended to “ensure FEMA remains a safe workplace free of harassment and discrimination” (FEMA, 2020b, p. 14). The action plan included a variety of training, education, messaging and communications, and engagement with employees. To help FEMA determine whether the activities undertaken to ameliorate harassment and discrimination in its workplaces were reaching their intended audiences, we included survey items that assessed employee exposure to and participation in activities and programs related to the “Culture Improvement Action Plan.”

Many employees accessed the increased training resources (Table 3.1). Nearly three-quarters of the workforce indicated that they had participated in anti-harassment/civil treatment training offered by FEMA (71 percent). One-third of FEMA employees (32 percent) had attended a group meeting with their first-line supervisor about preventing harassment and discrimination; one-third (33 percent) had attended a town hall hosted by their SES-level office director that was related to employee misconduct and accountability, and 44 percent had attended a town hall hosted by the FEMA administrator. Three out of five employees (57 percent) said that they had learned where to find the FEMA brochure that serves as an easy reference for where to go with concerns. Collectively, the broad influence of these initiatives might have had a beneficial effect and possibly led to the decline in gender-based/sexual and racial/ethnic civil rights violations.
The COVID-19 Pandemic

In the same time period, the COVID-19 pandemic swept the globe. Starting in January 2020, the beginnings of the pandemic were being widely reported (Goldstein and Singer, 2020; Sun and Bernstein, 2020; Wigglesworth, Lin, and Kohli, 2020). States began implementing stay-at-home orders, with the earliest “lockdown” declared in California on March 19, 2020 (Office of Governor Gavin Newsom, 2020). Beginning in March 2020, nationwide, essential workers continued to report to work in person, but nonessential workers began working from home (“A Timeline of the Trump Administration’s Coronavirus Actions,” 2020), an arrangement that would persist into 2022 during the writing of this report.
When the second FEMA workplace survey was fielded during April and May 2021, the key questions assessing civil rights violations asked employees to reflect on their experiences in the immediate year—that is, between April or May 2020 and the day they were taking the survey. In other words, employees were reflecting on a workplace that had been dramatically reshaped. Two-thirds of FEMA employees had worked entirely from home in the preceding year, and only 18 percent of the workforce spent at least half of their time at an office or worksite (Figure 3.2). Those few employees who continued to report in person were working in a very different workplace, with offices emptied out and strict physical distancing and masking protocols limiting collegial interactions and conversations. In addition, the nature of deployments was characteristically different as FEMA helped the United States respond to this public health crisis, in addition to responding to various natural disasters.

The changes to the workplace associated with the COVID-19 pandemic might have also affected the likelihood of workplace civil rights violations. A sexual or racial/ethnic civil rights violation that has a physical component cannot occur when employees are not in the same location. We might also speculate that verbal harassment, unwanted overtures, and offensive racial comments would be less likely when employees are not spending lunches, coffee breaks, and idle moments before meetings together. Video and telephone conferences, so often attended by multiple employees, might include too many observers for offenders to feel comfortable harassing others. Then again, audio and video interaction do not strictly prevent harassing language and behaviors, and it is plausible that some employees would feel less inhibited in these settings.

**FIGURE 3.2**

**Percentage of Time FEMA Employees Spent Working from Home in the Year Referenced by the Survey**
We conducted a statistical analysis to determine whether there was a relationship between an employee’s exposure to in-person work environments and the likelihood that they would be a victim of a civil rights violation. This analysis showed a positive association between the number of days that an employee worked in a FEMA office or location (rather than from home) and the likelihood of being a victim of a gender-based/sexual or racial/ethnic civil rights violation (Table A.1 in the annex to this report). Thus, exposure to in-person work environments is associated with a greater likelihood that a FEMA employee will be the victim of a civil rights violation.

Although each additional day in the office incurs only a small increment in increased risk, this increased risk accumulates over a work year (Figure 3.3). For example, the estimated risk of experiencing a civil rights violation for employees who worked in person at FEMA for 200 days (29.4 percent) was 5.7–percentage points higher than someone who worked in person for only 100 days (23.7 percent). At the most extreme, working entirely from home was related to a dramatic reduction in the risk for experiencing a gender-based/sexual or race/ethnicity-based civil rights violation (18.9 percent) compared with the risk for those who worked entirely in person (33.1 percent).

**FIGURE 3.3**
**Relationship Between Days Worked in a FEMA Office and the Likelihood of Experiencing a Civil Rights Violation**

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2 We fitted a weighted logistic regression model using the civil rights violation indicator as the outcome variable and the number of days worked in the office as the predictor. We used this model to estimate the risk of a violation as a function of the number of spent days in the office.
Summary

Although the overall decline in the prevalence of civil rights violations is something to celebrate, the risk remains high enough to warrant strong mitigation efforts. We cannot conclusively ascertain the true cause or causes of the decline in prevalence of civil rights violations in the FEMA workplace. However, we can speak to the broad experience and engagement of FEMA employees in activities intended to reduce their prevalence. In addition, broad social changes and the reduced risk of a largely at-home workforce might have also contributed.
CHAPTER FOUR

Prevalence of Gender-Based/Sexual Civil Rights Violations in the Year Preceding the Survey

In this chapter, we provide estimates of the proportion of FEMA employees whom we categorized as having experienced one of four types of gender-based/sexual civil rights violations in the preceding year:1

- sexually hostile work environment harassment
- quid pro quo harassment
- gender-based (sexist) hostile work environment harassment
- gender discrimination.

**Relative to the 2019 survey, employee risk for all types of gender-based/sexual civil rights violations declined**

- Sexually hostile work environment harassment: ↓ 55%
- Quid pro quo harassment: ↓ 54%
- Gender-based hostile work environment harassment: ↓ 38%
- Gender discrimination: ↓ 32%
- Any of the above: ↓ 34%

Prevalence of Gender-Based/Sexual Civil Rights Violations

The *sexually hostile work environment harassment* measure was designed to capture a type of sexual harassment that includes sexual language, gestures, images, or behaviors that offend or anger a FEMA employee.2 Examples include repeated sexual comments about the respondent’s body or display of sexually explicit materials that offended or angered the respondent.

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1 The findings and conclusions described in this chapter are subject to the limitations of self-report survey research. A full investigation of the experiences described by respondents could discover that incidents we did not classify as sex- or gender-based civil rights violations did indeed qualify as violations or that some of those we classified as sex- or gender-based civil rights violations could prove not to be such violations.

2 See Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2014, for the legal and methodological rationale for measure design decisions.
An upsetting workplace event like this was categorized as a hostile work environment violation if the behavior was either persistent (i.e., the respondent indicated that the behavior continued even after the offender knew that it was upsetting to others) or was described by the respondent as severe (i.e., the behavior was so severe that most people of their gender would find it offensive). Of respondents, 3.8 percent were categorized as having experienced this type of sexual harassment in the preceding year, and it was more common among women (5.4 percent) than among men (2.0 percent). The relative risk of experiencing hostile work environment sexual harassment at FEMA was lower in 2021 than it was 2019. Specifically, the relative risk was 0.45, indicating a 55-percent reduction in the risk of experiencing hostile work environment sexual harassment in 2021 relative to the risk in 2019.

The measure of *quid pro quo harassment* identified incidents in which someone used their power or influence at FEMA to attempt to coerce sexual behavior. An inappropriate workplace event like this was categorized as a civil rights violation if the respondent indicated having any of three types of legally admissible evidence that a workplace benefit or punishment was contingent on a sexual behavior. This form of sexual harassment was less common than hostile work environment sexual harassment (Table 4.1). We estimate that less than 0.5 percent of respondents experienced quid pro quo harassment in the preceding year. The relative risk of experiencing quid pro quo harassment at FEMA was 0.46, a 54-percent reduction in risk in 2021 relative to the risk in 2019.

The measure of *gender-based (sexist) hostile work environment harassment* assessed, for example, sexist comments and suggestions that someone was not acting appropriately for their gender that offended or angered the respondent. As was the case for *sexually hostile*

### TABLE 4.1
Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Who Had Experienced Gender-Based/Sexual Civil Rights Violations in the Preceding Year, by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Civil Rights Violation</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any sexual civil rights violation</td>
<td>2.0 (1.6–2.7)</td>
<td>5.4 (4.7–6.3)</td>
<td>3.8 (3.3–4.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexually hostile work environment harassment</td>
<td>2.0 (1.6–2.6)</td>
<td>5.4 (4.7–6.3)</td>
<td>3.8 (3.3–4.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quid pro quo harassment</td>
<td>0.2 (0.1–0.5)</td>
<td>0.4 (0.2–0.7)</td>
<td>0.3 (0.2–0.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any gender-based civil rights violation</td>
<td>8.4 (7.5–9.5)</td>
<td>15.0 (13.9–16.3)</td>
<td>11.9 (11.1–12.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender-based (sexist) hostile work environment harassment</td>
<td>3.0 (2.4–3.7)</td>
<td>9.6 (8.7–10.7)</td>
<td>6.4 (5.8–7.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender discrimination</td>
<td>7.4 (6.5–8.4)</td>
<td>10.7 (9.7–11.8)</td>
<td>9.1 (8.4–9.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any type of gender-based/sexual civil rights violation</td>
<td>9.4 (8.4–10.6)</td>
<td>17.2 (16.0–18.5)</td>
<td>13.5 (12.7–14.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** The 95-percent confidence interval for each estimate is indicated in parentheses.
work environment harassment, these inappropriate workplace behaviors were categorized as harassment if they either were persistent (i.e., the respondent indicated that the behavior continued even after the offender knew that it was upsetting to others) or were described by the respondent as severe (i.e., the behavior was so severe that most people of their gender would find it offensive). Gender-based (sexist) hostile work environment harassment had been experienced by 6.4 percent of FEMA employees in the preceding year and was more common than sexually hostile work environment harassment at FEMA. Women (9.6 percent) were 3.2 times more likely than men (3.0 percent) to experience gender-based hostile work environment harassment. The risk of experiencing gender-based hostile work environment harassment was lower in 2021 than in 2019. Specifically, the relative risk was 0.62, indicating a 38-percent reduction in risk in 2021 relative to 2019 risk.

Finally, the gender discrimination measure assessed unfair workplace events in which the respondent experienced a workplace harm on the basis of gender, such as a respondent indicating having received a worse evaluation or being denied a leave request because of their gender. Just over 9 percent of respondents were categorized as having experienced gender discrimination in the year preceding the survey, and women (10.7 percent) were 1.4 times more likely than men (7.4 percent) to experience it (Table 4.1). The relative risk of experiencing gender discrimination at FEMA was 0.68, a 32-percent reduction in 2021 relative to 2019.

Gender discrimination is challenging to measure on a self-report survey. We included items that assessed incidents in which the respondent knew that an unfair workplace experience was due to their gender. However, there are likely other incidents of gender discrimination in which the individual is never aware that they were discriminated against. Within a self-report survey, we cannot estimate how common these hidden cases of discrimination might be. All discrimination on the basis of gender is unlawful, but here, we measured only those incidents the respondent knew about.

On the other hand, it is also possible that a respondent would attribute a negative experience at work to their gender that actually had legitimate causes. For example, an employee with legitimate workplace performance deficits could attribute being passed over for a promotion to their gender when, in fact, the person who received the promotion was truly better qualified. Despite the challenges that arise from self-report survey data, the fact that nearly one in ten respondents indicated perceiving that they were the victim of unfair treatment on the basis of their gender in the preceding year is notable.

Prevalence, by Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

The 2021 FEMA workplace survey asked for the first time about employee sexual orientation and gender identity to better understand the civil rights violation experiences of employees who do not identify as cisgender and heterosexual—in particular, whether they tend to be a target for civil rights violations of a particular type or more often than other people. According to our analyses, employees who identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual were nearly twice
as likely to experience a gender-based/sexual civil rights violation in the year preceding the survey (21.7 percent) as heterosexual employees were (11.6) (see Table 4.2). Employees identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual experienced significantly higher levels of nearly every type of gender-based/sexual civil rights violations in the preceding year than heterosexual employees did. For example, lesbian, gay, or bisexual employees were three times more likely to have experienced a sexual civil rights violation (8.7 percent) than heterosexual employees were (2.9 percent).

The number of survey respondents who identified as transgender or nonbinary was too small to allow us to provide point estimates for the percentage of transgender or nonbinary employees who experienced gender-based/sexual civil rights violations in the year preceding the survey (Table 4.3). However, we can say, based on the CIs, that employees who identified as transgender or nonbinary were significantly more likely to experience gender-based civil rights violations than cisgender employees were.

### TABLE 4.2
**Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Who Had Experienced Gender-Based/Sexual Civil Rights Violations in the Preceding Year, by Sexual Orientation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Violation</th>
<th>Heterosexual</th>
<th>Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any sexual civil rights violation</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.5–3.4)</td>
<td>(5.9–12.6)</td>
<td>(3.3–4.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexually hostile work environment harassment</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.5–3.4)</td>
<td>(5.6–12.2)</td>
<td>(3.3–4.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quid pro quo harassment</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.1–0.3)</td>
<td>(0.3–2.9)</td>
<td>(0.2–0.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any gender-based civil rights violation</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(9.6–11.3)</td>
<td>(14.4–23.1)</td>
<td>(11.1–12.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender-based (sexist) hostile work environment harassment</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4.9–6.1)</td>
<td>(9.9–17.5)</td>
<td>(5.8–7.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender discrimination</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(7.4–8.9)</td>
<td>(8.6–15.8)</td>
<td>(8.4–9.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any type of gender-based/sexual civil rights violation</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(10.8–12.5)</td>
<td>(17.4–26.6)</td>
<td>(12.6–14.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: The 95-percent confidence interval for each estimate is indicated in parentheses.
Prevalence Within FEMA Offices

There was some variation in the prevalence of gender-based/sexual civil rights violations across offices in FEMA (Figure 4.1; Table A.2 in the annex to this report). The Office of the Chief Financial Officer is notable for its low prevalence estimate of only 4.5 percent; however, this office is relatively small at FEMA (Figure 4.2). Employees working there were less likely to experience a civil rights violation than employees who worked in the Office of the Administrator, Office of Chief Counsel, Office of External Affairs, Office of Policy and Program Analysis, regional offices, Resilience, or Response and Recovery. employees working in Mission Support were also at lower risk for being the target of a civil rights violation than employees working in the Office of Policy and Program Analysis or in regional offices. (See also Tables A.5, A.13, and A.21 in the annex to this report for further details on sexual civil rights violations, gender-based harassment, and gender discrimination, respectively.)

Although these differences exist, it is important to recognize that no office was free from civil rights violations—that is, all offices should continue to strive to reduce the prevalence

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3 The Office of the Administrator, Office of External Affairs, and Office of Policy and Program Analysis are not shown in Figure 4.1 because of imprecision in the point estimate. Nonetheless, examination of the 95-percent CIs showed that the upper bound of the Office of the Chief Financial Officer was smaller than the lower bound of possible estimates for these offices. Table A.2 in the annex to this report includes complete details.
of these types of experiences among their employees. Moreover, some offices with lower prevalence levels, such as Response and Recovery, are quite large. Even a low prevalence rate in these offices represents a high number of employees affected simply because of the large number of employees in a given office (Figure 4.2). Therefore, further reducing prevalence rates in these offices could have a larger impact on FEMA’s overall prevalence of civil rights violations. If FEMA wishes to continue to move the needle lower on prevalence rates, it is essential that a unified and consistent message be sent by leadership across the organization.
Prevalence of Gender-Based/Sexual Civil Rights Violations in the Year Preceding the Survey

Prevalence, by Content of Behavior: Sexual or Sexist

FEMA leaders who are tasked with preventing civil rights violations might find it useful to group the four gender-based/sexual violations by presumed offender motive or the content of the behavior—that is, whether the violation was sexual or sexist in nature. The policies, programs, and practices that will be necessary to prevent inappropriate sexual behavior in the workplace (e.g., repeated, unwanted sexual overtures; sexual conversations in shared spaces) could be very different from the strategies to prevent sexist behavior in the workplace (e.g., suggesting that women should not be sent on deployments). For example, policies that prohibit colleagues from dating might reduce unwanted romantic advances but are unlikely to ensure that women’s contributions in team meetings are respected.

To capture differences in the content of the behavior, we created two additional variables. The first, sexual civil rights violation, estimates the percentage of respondents who had experienced sexually hostile work environment harassment or quid pro quo harassment (or both) in the preceding year. The second, gender-based or sexist civil rights violation, estimates the percentage of respondents who had experienced gender-based (sexist) hostile work environment harassment or gender discrimination (or both) in the preceding year. As shown in Figure 4.3, sexist civil rights violations were more common than sexual civil rights violations at FEMA for both women and men. Among respondents, 5.4 percent of women and
2.0 percent of men were categorized as having experienced sexual civil rights violations. More employees were categorized as having experienced sexist civil rights violations: 15.0 percent of women and 8.4 percent of men. The risk of experiencing a sexual civil rights violation was lower in 2021 than it was in 2019. Specifically, the relative risk was 0.45, indicating a 55-percent reduction in prevalence in 2021 relative to 2019. The relative risk of experiencing a sexist civil rights violation at FEMA was 0.62, a 38-percent reduction in prevalence in 2021 relative to 2019. (See also Table A.3 in the annex to this report for additional details.)

Overall, of the 13.5 percent of respondents who had experienced either sexual or sexist civil rights violations, the majority experienced either only sexist or a combination of sexist and sexual violations (Figure 4.4).

Note that the survey is structured based on the type of violation (harassment or discrimination), so the rest of our discussion about gender-based/sexual civil rights violations in Chapters Five and Eight pertains to that characterization.
Inappropriate Workplace Behaviors

Each section of the FEMA workplace survey begins with a series of questions that assess inappropriate workplace behaviors. For those who indicated having experienced a particular harassment behavior, follow-up questions assessed whether the experience rose to the level of a civil rights violation. According to their answers to these follow-up questions, some employees’ harassment experiences did not meet the legal criteria for a violation. Nonetheless, FEMA leaders might be interested in understanding these specific behaviors, both because they represent evidence of a poor workplace climate and because they provide a more descriptive account of the types of events that are occurring.

When gender differences did occur in the experience of inappropriate workplace behaviors, women were more likely than men to indicate having experienced each of the behaviors (Table A.4 in the annex to this report). In general, gender-based (sexist) behaviors were more common than any of the sexually inappropriate behaviors. The three most-common inappropriate workplace behaviors for respondents were someone at work ignoring or excluding them because of their gender (6.7 percent), making it harder for the respondent to get a promotion or new position because of their gender (5.5 percent), and being assigned to either an undesirable or unimportant task because of their gender (4.7 percent).
Summary

In this chapter, we have provided estimates for four types of gender-based/sexual civil rights violations. Our findings suggest that 3.7 percent of FEMA employees had experienced sexually hostile work environment harassment in the preceding year. We estimate that less than 0.5 percent of the workforce experienced quid pro quo harassment. Our estimates of gender-based (sexist) civil rights violations show that 6.4 percent of respondents experienced gender-based (sexist) hostile work environment harassment and 9.1 percent experienced gender discrimination. Overall, 13.5 percent of respondents were categorized as having experienced one or more types of gender-based/sexual civil rights violations, and women were more likely than men to experience them.

Although the incidents that sparked this research were sexual in nature, across the entire population of FEMA employees, this type of harassment was less common than other types of incidents. Among civil rights violations of this type, most victims were targeted with gender-based (sexist) behavior (e.g., offensive comments about women or men)—either those behaviors alone (71.7 percent) or sexist behavior in combination with harassment that was sexual in nature (16.3 percent).

In Chapter Five, we describe characteristics of these gender-based/sexual civil rights violations.
CHAPTER FIVE

Characteristics of Gender-Based/Sexual Civil Rights Violations

We explored the characteristics of each of the gender-based/sexual civil rights violations in the FEMA workforce in greater detail, including locations of incidents, victims, and offenders. In the first section of this chapter, we discuss characteristics of incidents that we categorized as sexual civil rights violations (which include hostile work environment sexual harassment and quid pro quo harassment).\(^1\) We follow this with additional details about the characteristics of gender-based (sexist) hostile work environment harassment and gender discrimination in the FEMA workforce.

Sexual Civil Rights Violations

*Sexual civil rights violation* combines *sexually hostile work environment harassment*, which captures a type of sexual harassment that includes sexual language, gestures, images, or behaviors that offend or anger a FEMA employee, and *quid pro quo harassment*, which identifies incidents in which someone used their power or influence at FEMA to attempt to coerce sexual behavior.

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\(^1\) We used behaviorally based survey measures to estimate the percentage of FEMA employees who had experienced at least one civil rights violation in the preceding year. These measures of harassment and discrimination first documented inappropriate workplace behaviors, followed by (where applicable) an assessment of additional legal requirements necessary for these experiences to rise to the level of civil rights violations. We categorized an employee as having experienced a civil rights violation if their survey answers indicated that someone from work had engaged in (1) harassing behavior that offended the respondent and was either persistent or severe or (2) behavior perceived as discriminatory that caused a workplace harm. This classification treats the survey respondents’ answers as accurate. An independent investigation of the experiences described by respondents could discover that some people had experienced civil rights violations even though we had not classified them as having had one, while some people whom we classified as having experienced violations did not. See Chapter Two for further details.
Location Characteristics
Victims most often indicated that sexual civil rights violations had occurred on deployment (68.3 percent) or at FEMA offices (36.0 percent), but 28.6 percent indicated that they had occurred off duty, and 8.7 percent experienced the harassment during training. As shown in Figure 5.1, for women only, the risk of being a target was higher for those who deployed more than one month than it was for those who did not deploy, which might suggest lax professional standards in deployed settings. Women who had been deployed for longer than six months in the preceding year (6.9 percent) were twice as likely to indicate experiences consistent with sexual civil rights violations than women who had not deployed in the preceding year (3.3 percent). Our data cannot speak to whether it is longer time deployed overall or changing deployment climate after one month has passed that increases women’s risk, although anecdotal data at FEMA suggest that it is the latter. See Tables A.6 and A.7 in the annex to this report for full results.

Victim Characteristics
For both male and female employees, the percentage who had experienced sexual civil rights violations in the preceding year varied little across most employment types (permanent full time, reservist, local hires, and CORE). The one exception was that the mixed “other”
employee group was associated with a greater risk than permanent full time, local hires, and CORE employees. See Table A.8 in the annex to this report for full results.

For women at FEMA, risk of sexual civil rights violations appears to decline with age. Women younger than 29 were 4.7 times more likely than women aged 60 or older to be categorized as having experienced a sexual civil rights violation in the preceding year. Table A.9 in the annex to this report contains additional detail.

For employees in grades 5 to 15 on the GS or equivalent IC pay scales, higher grades typically reflect greater organizational power. For men, there was not a significant relationship between grade and risk of experiencing a sexual civil rights violation. However, women at higher pay grades (GS-13 through GS-15) were significantly more likely than women at lower pay grades (GS-5 through GS-8) to be the target of a sexual civil rights violation. One might expect that women with greater organizational power would be less likely to be targeted, but this is not necessarily the case. It could be that women who rise to positions of power are seen as breaking gender norms and are increasingly sexually targeted as a way to penalize them (Berdahl, 2007). It could also be that women at more-senior levels of experience are more likely to be aware of appropriate behavioral norms and upset by inappropriate workplace behaviors. Tables A.10 and A.11 in the annex to this report summarize the results for pay grade under the GS or equivalent IC pay scales for employees and on the reservist, IM CORE, and IMAT pay scales under the Stafford Act hiring authority, respectively.

Offender Characteristics

Sexual civil rights violations against female victims are most commonly committed by a single offender (80.9 percent) rather than by a group of offenders (19.1 percent). Most female victims (83.2 percent) indicated that the offender was a man or men. Approximately two-thirds were harassed by FEMA coworkers, and 22.8 percent were harassed by FEMA managers, supervisors, or bosses. The harassment continued for longer than one month for about 40 percent of female victims. Samples for men were too small to report offender characteristics with sufficient precision. Table A.12 in the annex to this report contains additional details.

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2 Employee types with fewer than 100 survey respondents total were collapsed into a single “other” category that includes IMAT, permanent part time, Schedule C, SES (appointed or career), temporary full time, and temporary part time. DCC employees were collapsed into the CORE category.

3 The pay-grade analysis was limited to employee types that followed the same or similar pay-grade systems; the analysis included GS-scale (temporary full-time, permanent full-time, temporary part-time, permanent part-time, and Schedule C) and IC plan (CORE and DCC) employees. The Stafford Act pay-grade system analysis included reservists, IM CORE, and IMAT employees. SES and local hires were excluded.
Gender-Based (Sexist) Hostile Work Environment Harassment

Location Characteristics
Victims most often indicated that gender-based harassment had occurred at FEMA offices (49.6 percent) or on deployment (53.8 percent). However, 8.1 percent indicated that this harassment had occurred off duty, and 5.0 percent experienced the harassment during training. As shown in Figure 5.2, for women only, the risk of being the target of gender-based harassment increased with time spent on deployment in the preceding year. Specifically, women who were deployed one or more months were significantly more likely to have been targets than those who were not deployed at all. Women who had been deployed for longer than six months in the preceding year were more than twice as likely to indicate having experienced gender-based harassment (13.2 percent) than women who had not deployed in the preceding year (6.1 percent). See Tables A.14 and A.15 in the annex to this report for full results.

Victim Characteristics
The percentage of male respondents who had experienced gender-based harassment in the preceding year does not appear to vary across employee types. However, for female respondents, local hires (4.4 percent), reservists (6.6 percent), and CORE (9.5 percent) appear to be at lower risk than permanent full-time employees (15.0 percent) and other employee types

FIGURE 5.2
Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Who Experienced Gender-Based Harassment in the Preceding Year, by Gender and Amount of Time Deployed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount of time deployed</th>
<th>Percentage of employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not deployed</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One month or less</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One to six months</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than six months</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Women: 13.2
Men: 6.1
Characteristics of Gender-Based/Sexual Civil Rights Violations

(22.7 percent). Reservists and local hires might be at lower risk because they spend less of the year engaged in FEMA duties than other employee types. See Table A.16 in the annex to this report for full results.

For women at FEMA, risk of gender-based harassment appears to decline with age. Employees younger than 29 were almost three times more likely than employees ages 60 or older to be categorized as having experienced gender-based harassment in the preceding year. Table A.17 in the annex to this report contains additional detail.

For employees in grades 5 to 15 on the GS or equivalent IC pay scales, higher grades typically reflect greater organizational power. For men, there was not a significant relationship between grade and risk of gender-based harassment. However, women at higher pay grades were significantly more likely than women at lower pay grades to be targeted for gender-based harassment (23.7 percent for women in grades 14 and 15 compared with 4.9 percent for women in grades 5 to 8). One might expect that women with greater organizational power would be less likely to be targeted, but as previously described this is not necessarily the case. Some combination of being targeted as a penalty for broken gender norms (Berdahl, 2007) or greater attention to appropriate behavioral norms may be at play. Table A.18 in the annex to this report contains additional details.

Employees on the reservist, IM CORE, and IMAT pay scales under the Stafford Act hiring authority showed a similar pattern as employees on the GS or equivalent IC pay scales. For men, there was not a significant relationship between grade and risk of gender-based harassment. However, women at higher pay grades (11.4 percent) were more than twice as likely than women at lower pay grades (5.3 percent) to be targeted for gender-based harassment. Table A.19 in the annex to this report contains additional details.

Offender Characteristics

Gender-based harassment was most commonly committed by a single offender (62.1 percent) rather than by a group of offenders (37.9 percent). Most female victims indicated having been harassed by a man or men (87.2 percent). For women, 58.3 percent were harassed by FEMA coworkers and 46.1 percent were harassed by FEMA managers, supervisors, or bosses. The harassment continued for longer than one month for just over half of victims. Table A.20 in the annex to this report contains full results.

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4 Employee types with fewer than 100 survey respondents total were collapsed into a single “other” category that also includes IMAT, permanent part time, Schedule C, SES (appointed or career), temporary full time, and temporary part time. DCC employees were collapsed into the CORE category.

5 The pay-grade analysis was limited to employee types that followed the same or similar pay-grade systems; the analysis included GS-scale (temporary full-time, permanent full time, temporary part-time, permanent part-time, and Schedule C) and IC plan (CORE and DCC) employees. The Stafford Act pay-grade system analysis included reservists, IM CORE, and IMAT employees. SES and local hires were excluded.
Gender Discrimination

Location Characteristics

For discrimination, the survey did not include an item assessing location of the incident, because victims might not know precisely where the decision to, for example, deny them promotion on the basis of gender was made, and location may not be critical to understand when designing discrimination prevention strategies. Using administrative FEMA data, we were able to examine the relationship between deployment and gender discrimination.

For men, the risk for gender discrimination was significantly higher for deployments of one to six months in duration compared with employees who did not deploy but the risk was no different for deployments of other durations. For women, the risk for gender discrimination was higher on deployments more than six months in duration, rising from 8.9 percent for deployments of one month or less to 12.8 percent for deployments that continued for more than six months (see Figure 5.3 and, in the annex to this report, Table A.22).

Victim Characteristics

The percentage of male respondents who had experienced gender discrimination in the preceding year did not vary significantly across employee types. However, among female employees, permanent full-time employees (14.2 percent) were more likely to experience gender discrimination than reservists (8.0 percent). It is possible that reservists have lower risk of experiencing discrimination at FEMA because they spend less of the year engaged in

FIGURE 5.3
Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Who Experienced Gender Discrimination in the Preceding Year, by Gender and Amount of Time Deployed
FEMA duties than full-time employees. Other employees have the highest risk of gender discrimination at 28.0 percent. Table A.23 in the annex to this report has full details.

Risk of gender discrimination appears to decline for women once they reach the age of 60. For example, female employees between the ages of 30 and 39 were 1.5 times more likely than female employees ages 60 or older to be categorized as having experienced gender discrimination in the preceding year. For male employees, there were no significant differences across age groups with respect to risk of gender discrimination. For a detailed overview of the relationship between gender, age, and gender discrimination, see Table A.24 in the annex to this report.

For men and women at FEMA on the Stafford Act pay scales (IT and IM), there is no significant difference in the risk of gender discrimination in general. For employees on the GS or equivalent pay scale, the pattern was not as clear, except at the higher pay grades, in which women experienced significantly more gender discrimination than men did. Additional details of the estimated percentage of FEMA employees who had experienced gender discrimination across these pay scales can be found in Tables A.25 and A.26 in the annex to this report.

Offender Characteristics

Women who had experienced gender discrimination were likely to identify a man or men as the perpetrator of that discrimination (54.9 percent), although about one-third of women indicated that offenders were a mix of men and women (29.3 percent). Only 15.7 percent of women identified another woman or only women as the perpetrator of gender discrimination. Men who had experienced gender discrimination were most likely to identify a woman or women (42.1 percent) as the perpetrator; one-third indicated that the perpetrators were a mix of men and women (32.1 percent), and 25.8 percent identified a man or men as the offender. See Table A.27 in the annex to this report for complete details.

Summary

In our assessment of the characteristics of gender-based/sexual civil rights violations, we found similar trends for all types of these violations in the FEMA workforce. In general, women were more likely to experience gender-based/sexual civil rights violations than men.

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6 Employee types with fewer than 100 survey respondents total were collapsed into a single “other” category. It includes IMAT, permanent part-time, Schedule C, SES (appointed or career), temporary full-time, and temporary part-time employees.

7 The pay-grade analysis was limited to employee types that followed the same or similar pay-grade systems; the analysis included GS-scale (temporary full-time, permanent full time, temporary part-time, permanent part-time, and Schedule C) and IC plan (CORE and DCC) employees. The Stafford Act pay-grade system analysis included reservists, IM CORE, and IMAT employees. SES and local hires were excluded.
In the case of sexual civil rights violations and gender-based harassment, violations most frequently occurred while victims were on deployment or at FEMA offices. For all types of violations, we found that, for women, the risk of being a target was generally higher with longer periods of deployment, declined with age, but increased with pay grade. In Chapters Six and Seven, we turn our focus to the prevalence of racial/ethnic civil rights violations and the characteristics of those violations.
Prevalence of Racial/Ethnic Civil Rights Violations

We also estimated the proportion of FEMA employees whom we categorized as having experienced one of two types of race/ethnicity–based civil rights violations in the preceding year:

- racial/ethnic harassment
- racial/ethnic discrimination.

Additional detail on the structure and content of these measures and the logic guiding categorization of an employee as having experienced a civil rights violation in the preceding year was described in Chapter Two. As with the earlier-described measures of gender-based/sexual civil rights violations, the survey measures of race/ethnicity–based civil rights violations in the FEMA workplace queried inappropriate workplace behaviors committed by “someone from work.” This phrase was used rather than “coworker” to ensure that respondents included all work contacts, not just those they perceived as peers. In addition, when considering whom to include when responding to each item, respondents were asked to include “any person you had contact with as part of your FEMA duties.” They were also reminded that the person could be a supervisor, coworker, or someone they managed. This chapter contains estimates of race/ethnicity–based civil rights violations.

Relative to the 2019 survey, employee risk for all types of racial/ethnic violations declined

- Racial/ethnic harassment: ↓ 26%
- Racial/ethnic discrimination: ↓ 19%
- Any of the above: ↓ 26%

1 The findings and conclusions described in this chapter are subject to the limitations of self-report survey research. A full investigation of the experiences described by respondents could discover that incidents we did not classify as race/ethnicity–based civil rights violations do indeed qualify as violations, whereas some of those we classified as civil rights violations based on race/ethnicity could prove not to be such violations.
Prevalence of Racial/Ethnic Harassment

The *racial/ethnic harassment* measure was designed to capture harassment that included race/ethnicity–motivated language, gestures, images, or behaviors that offended or angered the respondent. For example, a coworker’s repeated use of racial/ethnic terms typically used as insults, display of material that threatens or insults a given racial/ethnic group, and telling jokes derogatory of a particular racial/ethnic group were all assessed. We categorized a workplace event as a civil rights violation if the behavior either was persistent (i.e., the respondent indicated that the behavior continued even after the offender knew that it was upsetting to others) or was described by the respondent as severe (i.e., the behavior was so severe that most people would be aware that members of a given race/ethnicity would find it offensive).

Overall, 12.0 percent of respondents had experienced racial/ethnic harassment in the year preceding the survey (Figure 6.1 and, later in this chapter, Table 6.2). The relative risk of experiencing racial/ethnic harassment at FEMA was 0.74, a 26-percent reduction in risk in 2021 relative to 2019. Employees who identified as two or more races (21.8 percent) or black (15.7 percent) were more likely than white (10.4 percent) or Hispanic (10.7 percent) employees to have experienced racial/ethnic harassment. An insufficient number of respondents

**FIGURE 6.1**
Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Who Had Experienced Racial/Ethnic Harassment in the Preceding Year, by Race/Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percentage of employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prevalence of Racial/Ethnic Civil Rights Violations

who identified as Alaska Native/Native American or Hawaiian/Pacific Islander responded to allow provision of point estimates for each, so these groups are not included in Figure 6.1.

Inappropriate Workplace Behaviors

The survey instrument assessing racial/ethnic harassment began with a series of questions that assessed inappropriate workplace behavior. As described previously, we categorized a behavior an unlawful act only when follow-up items confirmed that the behavior had been persistent (continued even after the offender knew that someone was offended) or severe (met a reasonable-person standard). However, even behaviors that did not meet these standards still reflect an unprofessional work environment and might require intervention as precursor behaviors to civil rights violations. They might also be helpful to review as a more descriptive account of the types of harassment behaviors that are occurring in the workforce.

The most–commonly experienced inappropriate workplace behavior overall was someone from work showing a lack of respect because of one's race/ethnicity (7.1 percent), which was more commonly experienced by black employees than by white or Hispanic employees. The next most–common behaviors overall were someone from work directing an offensive action or comment at another person because of their race/ethnicity (5.2 percent) and someone from work telling racial/ethnic jokes (5.0 percent). Table A.29 in the annex to this report provides information on the prevalence of each harassment behavior measured. Some survey items also provided example behaviors, which are not listed in Table A.29 (in the annex to this report) but can be seen in the full survey (also in the annex to this report).

Harassment Against One’s Own or Another Racial/Ethnic Group

For some of the harassment behaviors included in the survey, the item wording was designed to include harassment directed toward the respondent’s race and that directed toward someone else’s race. For example, the survey question that assessed whether someone from work had “used a racial/ethnic term that made you uncomfortable, angry, or upset” was designed to measure both incidents in which an employee was called a racial slur specific to their own race and incidents in which an employee was offended by hearing a racial slur used against another person’s race. For any respondent who indicated having experienced a type of harassing behavior that might have been directed at them or at someone else’s race, the survey included a follow-up question that queried whether the upsetting behavior was directed at the respondent’s own racial/ethnic group, someone else’s racial/ethnic group, or both the respondent’s own and someone else’s racial/ethnic group. It was important to gather this type of information because negative experiences that are directed at an employee’s own race can be qualitatively different experiences from those directed at someone else.

Table 6.1 shows that, among white employees who had experienced racial/ethnic harassment, more than 40 percent described experiences in which they were uncomfortable, angry, or upset about witnessing another racial/ethnic group being targeted. Black employees were less likely than white employees to indicate that the harassment they experienced had been
directed at someone else’s race and more likely to experience harassment directed at their own race.

Prevalence of Racial/Ethnic Discrimination

The race/ethnicity–based measure of discrimination assessed unfair workplace events in which the respondent experienced a workplace harm on the basis of race/ethnicity, such as a respondent indicating having received a worse evaluation or being denied a leave request because of their race/ethnicity. Figure 6.2 shows that, overall, an estimated 5.3 percent of FEMA employees had experienced racial/ethnic discrimination in the preceding year. The risk of experiencing racial/ethnic discrimination was lower in 2021 than it was in 2019. Specifically, the relative risk was 0.81, indicating a 19-percent reduction in risk in 2021 relative to 2019 risk. Black employees (8.6 percent) and employees who identified as two or more races (8.7 percent) were more likely than white employees (4.0 percent) to have experienced racial/ethnic discrimination. An insufficient number of respondents identified as Alaska Native/Native American or Hawaiian/Pacific Islander to allow provision of point estimates for each, so these groups are not included in Figure 6.2.

The most–commonly experienced discriminatory behavior overall was someone from work making it harder to get a promotion or new position because of one’s race/ethnicity (3.4 percent), and black employees more commonly indicated having experienced this behavior (5.4 percent) than white (2.8 percent) and Hispanic (2.0 percent) employees did. The next most–common behavior was someone from work assigning the employee to an undesirable or unimportant task because of their race/ethnicity (2.4 percent), which was more commonly experienced by black employees (4.4 percent) than by white (1.4 percent) employees. For many individual behaviors, black employees were more likely than white or Hispanic employees (the other two largest racial/ethnic groups) to experience each discriminatory behavior measured. (Table A.38 in the annex to this report provides information on the prevalence of
each racially/ethnically discriminatory behavior measured. Some survey items also provided example behaviors, which are not listed in Table A.38 in the annex to this report but can be seen in the full survey, also contained in the annex.)

**Overall Prevalence of Race/Ethnicity–Based Civil Rights Violations**

We considered the prevalence of racial/ethnic harassment and racial/ethnic discrimination separately, and then we combined them to estimate the overall prevalence of any racial/ethnic civil rights violation, which was reported by 13.9 percent of FEMA employees (see Table 6.2 later in this chapter). Figure 6.3 illustrates the extent to which employees of different races and ethnicities experienced racial/ethnic harassment or racial/ethnic discrimination. Some employees might have experienced both racial/ethnic harassment and racial/ethnic discrimination, but each employee is counted once (not twice) in the figure. The relative risk of experiencing any racial/ethnic civil rights violation at FEMA was 0.74, a 26-percent reduction in risk in 2021 relative to 2019 risk. Racial/ethnic civil rights violations were more commonly experienced by those who identified as two or more races (24.3 percent) or black employees
(17.8 percent) than by employees who identified as Hispanic (11.7 percent) or white (12.2 percent). An insufficient number of respondents who identified as Alaska Native/Native American or Hawaiian/Pacific Islander responded to allow provision of point estimates for each, so these groups are not included in Figure 6.3.

**FIGURE 6.3**  
Estimated Percentage of FEMA Employees Who Had Experienced Racial/Ethnic Civil Rights Violations in the Preceding Year, by Race/Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percentage of employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: An insufficient number of respondents identified as Alaska Native/Native American or Hawaiian/Pacific Islander to allow provision of point estimates for each, so these groups are not included in figure.

### Summary

Table 6.2 summarizes the information provided in Figures 6.1 through 6.3. As seen in this table, those who identified as two or more races and black employees experienced each type of civil rights violation—racial/ethnic harassment and racial/ethnic discrimination—more commonly than white employees. Overall, almost 14 percent of all FEMA employees were categorized as having experienced these forms of civil rights violations in the prior year.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Violation</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Two or More Races</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any experience of racial/ethnic harassment</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6.9–17.5)</td>
<td>(13.7–17.9)</td>
<td>(8.8–12.9)</td>
<td>(9.4–11.5)</td>
<td>(15.6–29.6)</td>
<td>(11.2–12.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any experience of racial/ethnic discrimination</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4.0–12.7)</td>
<td>(7.1–10.3)</td>
<td>(2.7–5.3)</td>
<td>(3.4–4.7)</td>
<td>(5.1–14.5)</td>
<td>(4.8–5.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any experience of race/ethnicity–based civil rights violation</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(9.5–20.9)</td>
<td>(15.7–20.2)</td>
<td>(9.7–14.0)</td>
<td>(11.2–13.3)</td>
<td>(17.9–32.1)</td>
<td>(13.0–14.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: The 95-percent confidence interval for each estimate is indicated in parentheses. An insufficient number of respondents identified as Alaska Native/Native American or Hawaiian/Pacific Islander to allow provision of point estimates for each, so these groups are not included in this table.
Characteristics of Racial/Ethnic Civil Rights Violations

In this chapter, we provide additional details about the characteristics of racial/ethnic civil rights violations in the FEMA workforce. For racial/ethnic harassment, we review organizational, location, victim, and offender characteristics. For racial/ethnic discrimination, we also review organizational, victim, and offender characteristics. The survey did not include items to assess location characteristics of discrimination because victims might not know precisely where the decision to, for example, deny them promotion was made, and it might not be critical to understand location when designing discrimination prevention strategies.

Racial/Ethnic Harassment

Organizational Characteristics

There was some variation in the prevalence of racial harassment across offices in FEMA (Figure 7.1; Table A.30 in the annex to this report). As was the case for gender-based/sexual civil rights violations, the Office of the Chief Financial Officer was notable for its low prevalence estimate of only 3.6 percent. Employees working there were less likely to experience racial harassment than employees who work in the Office of Chief Counsel, Office of External Affairs, Office of Policy and Program Analysis, Office of Equal Rights, regional offices, Resilience, or Response and Recovery. Employees working in Mission Support were also at lower risk for being the target of racial harassment than employees working in the Office of

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1 We used behaviorally based survey measures to estimate the percentage of FEMA employees who had experienced at least one civil rights violation in the preceding year. These measures of harassment and discrimination first documented inappropriate workplace behaviors, followed by (where applicable) an assessment of additional legal requirements necessary for these experiences to rise to the level of civil rights violations. We categorized an employee as having experienced a civil rights violation if their survey answers indicated that someone from work had engaged in (1) harassing behavior that offended the respondent and was either persistent or severe or (2) behavior perceived as discriminatory that caused a workplace harm. This classification treats the survey respondents’ answers as accurate. An independent investigation of the experiences that respondents described could reveal that some people had experienced civil rights violations even though we had not classified them as having had one, while some people whom we classified as experiencing violations did not. See Chapter Two for further details.
Although these differences among offices exist, no office was free from racial/ethnic harassment—that is, all offices should continue to strive to reduce the prevalence of these types of experiences among their employees. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter Four, some of the offices where prevalence was lower are quite large, and these offices represent a high overall number of employees affected simply because of the number of employees in the office.

Location Characteristics
Employees categorized as having experienced racial/ethnic harassment in the preceding year were most likely to indicate that the harassment had occurred while they were deployed (64.4 percent). About 41 percent indicated that the harassment had occurred at a permanent FEMA office; 15.7 percent indicated that it had occurred off duty (e.g., hotel, restaurant, or bar), and 7.3 percent indicated that it had occurred during training.

2 Some offices are not shown in Figure 7.1 because of imprecision in the point estimate. Nonetheless, examination of the 95-percent CIs could still be used to establish that the upper bound of an office was smaller than the lower bound for a comparison office. Table A.30 in the annex to this report includes complete details.
Employees who deployed for more than six months (13.0 percent) or for between one and six months (15.2 percent) were more likely to be categorized as having experienced racial/ethnic harassment than those who had not deployed at all in the previous year (9.3 percent). (Tables A.31 and A.32 in the annex to this report provide additional details.)

Victim Characteristics
The risk of experiencing racial harassment varied little across most employment types (permanent full time, reservist, local hires, and CORE). The one exception was that the mixed “other” employee group was associated with an increased risk relative to permanent full time, reservists, local hires, and CORE employees. See Table A.33 in the annex to this report for full results. Employees between the ages of 30 and 49 were at higher risk for experiencing racial harassment than employees who were 60 years old or older (Table A.34 in the annex to this report). Finally, it appears that risk might increase with organizational power; employees at grade 13 or above (14.3 to 14.9 percent) were more likely to experience racial/ethnic harassment than employees in pay grades 9 and 10 (7.0 percent) (see Tables A.35 and A.36 in the annex to this report).

Offenders
Perpetrators of racial/ethnic harassment were most often acting alone (66.2 percent), white (63.1 percent), and male or a mix of men and women (68.5 percent). Across racial/ethnic groups, the offender was usually a coworker (63.2 percent) or a supervisor, manager, or boss (34.7 percent). The harassment continued for longer than one month for 40.0 percent of victims. (Table A.37 in the annex to this report contains full results.)

Racial/Ethnic Discrimination
Organizational Characteristics
There were differences in the prevalence of racial/ethnic discrimination across offices in FEMA (Figure 7.2; Table A.39 in the annex to this report), and the pattern was different from that for gender-based/sexual civil rights violations and racial/ethnic harassment. With respect to racial/ethnic discrimination, the regional offices stand out as locations in FEMA where the prevalence is low (3.9 percent). Employees working there were less likely to experience racial/ethnic discrimination than employees who worked in the Office of External Affairs or Resilience. Despite this low prevalence, however, the regional offices include a very large number of FEMA employees. This means that their low prevalence rate represents a

3 Employee types with fewer than 100 survey respondents total were collapsed into a single “other” category that includes IMAT, permanent part-time, Schedule C, SES (appointed or career), temporary full-time, and temporary part-time employees. DCC employees were collapsed into the CORE category.
Harassment and Discrimination on the Basis of Gender and Race/Ethnicity in the FEMA Workforce

As mentioned previously, the survey did not assess the location of racial/ethnic discrimination incidents because a victim might not know where a discriminatory decision had been made. We used FEMA administrative data to assess the relationship between deployment locations and discrimination and found that the amount of time deployed in the preceding year was not significantly related to risk for racial/ethnic discrimination for employees of any race/ethnicity (see Table A.40 in the annex to this report).

**Location Characteristics**

As mentioned previously, the survey did not assess the location of racial/ethnic discrimination incidents because a victim might not know where a discriminatory decision had been made. We used FEMA administrative data to assess the relationship between deployment locations and discrimination and found that the amount of time deployed in the preceding year was not significantly related to risk for racial/ethnic discrimination for employees of any race/ethnicity (see Table A.40 in the annex to this report).

**Victim Characteristics**

Respondents, including permanent full-time employees, reservists, local hires, CORE, and other employee types, had similar rates of racial/ethnic discrimination in the preceding year, ranging from 4.6 percent to 6.7 percent. However, local hires (1.4 percent) were at significantly lower risk for racial/ethnic discrimination than permanent full-time employees (6.7 percent).
and reservists (5.6 percent). As noted previously, this finding might reflect that local hires might have spent relatively little time in the preceding year engaged in FEMA duties.

Overall, respondents ages 40 to 59 were more likely than younger (under 29) employees to experience racial/ethnic discrimination. Overall, risk for racial/ethnic discrimination appeared to be similar across pay grades 5 to 15 for GS or equivalent pay-scale employees and for employees on the Stafford Act pay scales.4

See Tables A.41 to A.44 in the annex to this report for full details of victim characteristics.

Offenders
Among respondents whom we categorized as having experienced racial/ethnic discrimination, 41.4 percent pointed to a mix of men and women as the offenders in their cases. In 27.8 percent of cases, the victim identified a man or men as having perpetrated the behaviors we categorized as racial/ethnic discrimination; they identified a woman or women in 30.7 percent of the cases (Table A.45 in the annex to this report). Fewer follow-up questions were asked of employees who experienced discrimination than those who experienced harassment. Because discrimination is more discrete in time and not specific to a location, the survey did not include items about the duration or location of the event. In addition, by definition, the offender had a position of power that allowed them to carry out a workplace harm; therefore, it was not necessary to query the work relationship.

Summary
This chapter delved into the characteristics of racial/ethnic harassment and discrimination in the FEMA workforce. Our findings showed little variation across many characteristics examined. A notable exception is that the Office of the Chief Financial Officer had a lower prevalence than other FEMA offices in the preceding year for racial/ethnic harassment, like we saw for gender-based/sexual harassment. In the case of racial/ethnic discrimination, the regional offices stood out as having the lowest prevalence rates.

Racial/ethnic harassment occurred most when employees were deployed or in permanent FEMA offices. Most incidents involved at least one white offender and at least one male offender who, in the majority of cases, was a coworker. Racial/ethnic discrimination was similar across employee types, but local hires experienced significantly lower risk for racial/ethnic discrimination than other employee types. Unlike with racial/ethnic harassment, nearly half of employees who experienced racial/ethnic discrimination indicated a mix of men and women as offenders.

4 The pay-grade analysis was limited to employee types that followed the same or similar pay-grade systems; the analysis included GS-scale (temporary full-time, permanent full time, temporary part-time, permanent part-time, and Schedule C) and IC plan (CORE and DCC) employees. The Stafford Act pay-grade system analysis included reservists, IM CORE, and IMAT employees. SES and local hires were excluded.
CHAPTER EIGHT

Reporting Decisions, Perceived Organizational Response to Reports, and Barriers to Reporting

In addition to understanding the prevalence and characteristics of harassment and discrimination in the workforce, it is important to understand the organizational response to incidents that are brought to supervisors’ or leaders’ attention and the challenging choice that victims face when deciding whether to disclose an offense. In this chapter, we describe the people with whom victims chose to talk about their experiences, if they did disclose them.

For victims who reported the harassment or discrimination—that is, described their experience to someone who was obligated by policy and law to investigate and end the harassment or discrimination—we describe the victim’s perception of how FEMA responded to the report and how satisfied the victim was with that response. For victims who chose not to disclose their experiences to a supervisor or through an official channel, we describe the factors that contributed to their decisions not to report the incidents—that is, the perceived barriers to reporting.

On review of the data, we found that the postreporting experiences of harassment and discrimination victims shared similarities whether the victim was targeted based on gender or race/ethnicity. We therefore combined their reporting experiences into this single chapter to simplify comparisons.

Reporting Decisions

To better understand the reporting decisions of harassment and discrimination victims, all respondents who were categorized as having experienced harassment or discrimination were asked with whom they discussed the situation. Response options included “friends, family, or coworkers,” “a counselor or medical professional,” “a supervisor or manager,” or “some
other official channel.” We characterized disclosure choices into three mutually exclusive categories:

- victims who told no one
- victims who told only a friend, family member, coworker, counselor, or medical professional
- victims who told their FEMA supervisor/manager or made an official report.\(^1\)

Every supervisor, manager, or human resource specialist at FEMA has a legal obligation to ensure that a complaint of harassment or discrimination based on a protected class (including both gender and race/ethnicity) is properly investigated and that the harassment or discrimination ceases.\(^2\) Because of this requirement, we treated disclosure to a manager or supervisor as an indicator of having elevated the incident within FEMA. As shown in Figure 8.1, approximately one-third to one-half of respondents who had experienced harassment or discrimination in the preceding year brought these experiences to the attention of a supervisor/manager or reported them through another official channel. Tables A.46 to A.50 in the annex to this report contain further details.

**FEMA Response to Reported Harassment or Discrimination**

For any respondent who was categorized as having experienced harassment or discrimination in the preceding year and who also indicated that they had reported it to their supervisor/manager or through an official channel, the survey included a series of items to assess FEMA’s response to the allegation.

**Harassment Response**

Table 8.1 summarizes responses to victims of harassment. Some victims experienced two or more types of responses, so the percentages sum to more than 100 percent. The most frequently endorsed FEMA response was the same for all three types of harassment. According to victims, for sexual harassment, gender-based harassment, and racial/ethnic harassment, the most common result of elevating the incidents within FEMA was that the

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\(^1\) A victim who told a supervisor/manager or made an official report might or might not have also talked to someone in their informal network (e.g., friend, family member). However, those who told only a friend, family member, coworker, or professional were not considered in the group classified as elevating the incident within FEMA.

\(^2\) All FEMA employees who experience or witness harassment “are obligated to immediately report the matter” to a supervisor, management official, FEMA’s Office of Professional Responsibility, or the DHS Office of Inspector General (FEMA, 2020a, p. 2). However, because employees do not have the same legal obligation to investigate the harassment and ensure that it ceases, we did not categorize sharing an incident with a coworker as a formal report to FEMA.
harassment stopped, although this was less common for victims of gender-based harassment (61.1 percent) than it was for victims of sexual harassment (79.5 percent) or racial/ethnic harassment (73.8 percent). For victims of gender-based harassment, other common FEMA responses were that the person they told took no action (36.9 percent) or they were encouraged to drop the issue (36.5 percent). For victims of racial/ethnic harassment, other common FEMA responses were that the person they told took no action (41.0 percent) or they were encouraged to drop the issue (24.3 percent).

Some respondents who were categorized as having experienced harassment in the preceding year and who reported the incident indicated that they were retaliated against by their supervisor (22.9 to 24.9 percent), their colleagues (27.3 to 29.2 percent), or an offender (29.2 to 30.8 percent). Victims of racial/ethnic harassment (15.8 percent) were more likely than victims of gender-based harassment (6.6 percent) to indicate that their work assignments were changed to help them avoid the person.

Tables A.51, A.52, and A.53 in the annex to this report provide FEMA’s responses to harassment, by victim gender (for sexual and gender-based harassment) or victim race/ethnicity (for racial/ethnic harassment).
Table 8.1 summarizes responses for respondents who believed that they had been discriminated against on the basis of gender or race/ethnicity. Among respondents who had experienced gender discrimination and reported it to FEMA, the most-common responses were that they were encouraged to drop the issue (47.0 percent), the person they told took no action (42.6 percent), and the “person(s) who did it” retaliated against them for complaining.

### Discrimination Response

Table 8.2 summarizes responses for respondents who believed that they had been discriminated against on the basis of gender or race/ethnicity. Among respondents who had experienced gender discrimination and reported it to FEMA, the most-common responses were that they were encouraged to drop the issue (47.0 percent), the person they told took no action (42.6 percent), and the “person(s) who did it” retaliated against them for complaining.
TABLE 8.2
Estimated Percentage of Victims Who Indicated That Each Action Was Taken Following Their Report of Gender Discrimination or Racial/Ethnic Discrimination to a Supervisor/Manager or Through an Official Channel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Taken</th>
<th>Gender Discrimination</th>
<th>Racial/Ethnic Discrimination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You were encouraged to drop the issue.</td>
<td>47.0 (40.8–53.2)</td>
<td>45.2 (36.2–54.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The [person/people] who did this retaliated against you for complaining.</td>
<td>37.4 (31.6–43.6)</td>
<td>44.0 (35.0–53.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You were discouraged from filing a complaint.</td>
<td>34.7 (29.0–40.9)</td>
<td>40.2 (31.4–49.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The person you told punished you for bringing it up</td>
<td>31.2 (25.5–37.6)</td>
<td>37.8 (29.0–47.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your coworkers treated you worse, avoided you, or blamed you for the problem.</td>
<td>30.4 (24.7–36.7)</td>
<td>36.4 (27.7–46.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The person you told took no action to improve the situation.</td>
<td>42.6 (36.6–48.9)</td>
<td>35.7 (27.4–45.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You received an email stating that your complaint had been received.</td>
<td>27.9 (22.6–33.9)</td>
<td>28.1 (20.6–37.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your work assignment was changed to help you avoid [that person/those people].</td>
<td>14.1 (10.1–19.3)</td>
<td>13.9 (8.4–22.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone talked to the [person/people] to ask them to change their unfair decision.</td>
<td>11.2 (7.7–15.8)</td>
<td>10.9 (6.1–18.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was some official career action taken against the [person/people] for their upsetting behavior.</td>
<td>4.1 (2.0–8.2)</td>
<td>3.7 (1.4–9.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: The 95-percent confidence interval for each estimate is indicated in parentheses. Some respondents indicated more than one type of response, so percentages do not sum to 100 percent.

(37.4 percent). Among employees who experienced and reported racial/ethnic discrimination, the most-common responses were that they were encouraged to drop the issue (45.2 percent), subject to “retaliation by the person(s) who did it” (44.0 percent), and discouraged from filing a complaint (40.2 percent). In general, FEMA responses to victims of gender-based or racial/ethnic discrimination were similar. Tables A.54 and A.55 in the annex to this report provide details on responses, by gender or by race/ethnicity.

Employee Satisfaction with FEMA’s Response

For respondents who chose to disclose harassment or discrimination to a supervisor/manager or to report it through another official channel, the survey assessed their satisfaction with FEMA’s response to the report. As shown in Figure 8.2, across the four types of civil rights
violations displayed, less than 25 percent were satisfied or very satisfied with the action taken. Between 36 percent and 56 percent were very dissatisfied or dissatisfied, and about 40 percent indicated that they were neither dissatisfied nor satisfied with the action taken by FEMA personnel. Overall, this pattern of results suggests that, for a majority, their level of satisfaction with the process was, at best, neutral or negative. Tables A.56 to A.60 in the annex to this report include further detail on satisfaction with reporting.

### Barriers to Reporting Harassment or Discrimination

For respondents who were categorized as having experienced harassment or discrimination in the preceding year but who had not disclosed the experience to a supervisor/manager or through another formal reporting channel, the survey included items that assessed (1) their reasons for not reporting and (2) their single main reason for not reporting. First, the respondent selected all barriers that contributed to their decision not to disclose their experience. Then the respondent received a follow-up item that asked them to choose their single main
reason for not discussing the situation with someone who was responsible for stopping the behaviors.

These alternative ways of quantifying barriers to reporting (focusing on reasons overall or the single main reason) revealed similar patterns of common and uncommon barriers. Thus, the rest of this section details findings using the first strategy, examining overall reasons for not reporting. Details on the primary reason for not reporting are in Tables A.61 to A.65 in the annex to this report.

One important issue to consider when exploring why someone does or does not report harassment or discrimination is whether the victim considers the experience to be something worth reporting. This judgment often hinges on whether the victim labels the experience as harassment or as discrimination. It is not uncommon for people who describe experiences on a survey that are classified as harassment or discrimination to not label these experiences as civil rights violations—that is, not to consider their experiences as harassment or discrimination on the basis of a protected class. Most laypeople are not familiar with laws surrounding Title VII or equal employment opportunity (EEO) law and related regulations, and, although they might view their experiences as problematic, they are unlikely to be able to label them as civil rights violations (Fitzgerald, Swan, and Fischer, 1995).

It is for this reason that our measures of harassment and discrimination first documented workplace behaviors that employees experienced, followed by (where applicable) follow-up questions that assessed the applicability of additional legal requirements for such behaviors to constitute civil rights violations. Asking questions in this manner meant that respondents’ familiarity with EEO law was not at issue when describing their experience on the survey. However, because labeling the experience as a civil rights violation is an essential step in an individual’s determination of whether to report the experience as a violation and because prevalence rates based on behavioral measures of harassment and discrimination tend to be much higher than reports of harassment (see Morral, Gore, and Schell, 2015), we did explicitly ask respondents who reported having experienced relevant behaviors whether they considered the offensive things they indicated having experienced to be harassment or discrimination.

Of those whose experiences, as described via survey items, met the legal definition of unlawful behavior, not all labeled the experience as such (Table 8.3). Specifically, about three-fifths of those who had experienced sexual civil rights violations labeled them as such; three-fifths of those who experienced gender discrimination or racial/ethnic harassment and four-fifths of those who had experienced racial/ethnic discrimination labeled it as such. Still

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3 Title VII refers to that title of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Pub. L. 88-352) as amended, which prohibits employment discrimination based on membership in a protected class. The original protected classes were race, color, religion, sex, and national origin. As of this writing, the protected classes also include age (40 or older), disability, and genetic information; sex is now interpreted to include pregnancy, sexual orientation, and gender identity.
fewer—roughly one in ten across the types of civil rights violations—chose to report these experiences through formal channels.

**Barriers to Reporting Harassment**

We now turn to a consideration of the barriers that people face when deciding whether to make a formal report. Although the most–frequently cited barriers for each type of harassment are not necessarily significantly more frequent than all others (as can be seen when CIs do not overlap), it might still be useful to review common barriers because these are the ones more employees face. One of the most–common barriers cited as a reason for not reporting harassment was that the employee did not think that anything would be done about it (Table 8.4). Victims of gender–based harassment (64.2 percent) were significantly more likely than victims of sexual harassment (44.3 percent) and racial/ethnic harassment (42.9 percent) to cite as a barrier the belief that nothing would be done.

Wanting to “forget about it and move on” (35.6 to 47.8 percent) and the fear of being “labeled as a troublemaker” (36.8 to 52.2 percent) were other common barriers to reporting. Some victims of harassment indicated that they did not elevate the incident to FEMA because they believed that the situation had already been resolved. For example, they indicated that they had taken other actions to handle the situation (18.2 percent to 32.8 percent), or they believed that it would not happen again (16.6 to 28.8 percent). Finally, it is worth noting that few harassment victims cited confusion about the reporting process as a barrier to coming
### TABLE 8.4
Estimated Percentage of Victims Indicating Barriers to Reporting, by Type of Harassment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Sexual Harassment</th>
<th>Gender-Based Harassment</th>
<th>Racial/Ethnic Harassment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You did not think anything would be done.</td>
<td>44.3 (36.6–52.3)</td>
<td>64.2 (57.3–70.5)</td>
<td>42.9 (38.4–47.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You thought you might be labeled as a troublemaker.</td>
<td>41.4 (33.9–49.4)</td>
<td>52.2 (45.3–59.0)</td>
<td>36.8 (32.6–41.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You wanted to forget about it and move on.</td>
<td>47.8 (40.0–55.8)</td>
<td>38.2 (31.7–45.0)</td>
<td>35.6 (31.3–40.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You did not trust that the process would be fair.</td>
<td>30.2 (23.4–38.0)</td>
<td>46.1 (39.4–53.0)</td>
<td>32.5 (28.4–36.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You thought it was not serious enough to report.</td>
<td>37.6 (30.3–45.6)</td>
<td>41.0 (34.3–48.0)</td>
<td>26.0 (22.1–30.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You thought it might hurt your performance evaluation or career.</td>
<td>36.4 (29.0–44.4)</td>
<td>50.8 (44.0–57.7)</td>
<td>25.9 (22.2–30.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You were worried about retaliation by the person(s) who did it.</td>
<td>30.6 (23.8–38.4)</td>
<td>37.9 (31.5–44.8)</td>
<td>24.8 (21.1–28.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You were worried about retaliation by a supervisor or manager.</td>
<td>28.9 (22.1–36.8)</td>
<td>36.3 (30.0–43.1)</td>
<td>22.0 (18.5–26.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You took other actions to handle the situation.</td>
<td>32.8 (25.8–40.7)</td>
<td>18.5 (13.6–24.7)</td>
<td>18.2 (15.0–21.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You didn’t think it would happen again.</td>
<td>28.8 (22.3–36.4)</td>
<td>17.4 (12.6–23.5)</td>
<td>16.6 (13.5–20.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You did not want to hurt the person’s career or family.</td>
<td>29.9 (23.0–37.8)</td>
<td>13.1 (9.0–18.8)</td>
<td>13.5 (10.7–16.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You thought you would not be believed.</td>
<td>19.1 (13.5–26.3)</td>
<td>24.2 (18.9–30.3)</td>
<td>13.3 (10.5–16.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You thought other people would blame you for the situation.</td>
<td>15.9 (10.7–23.0)</td>
<td>21.4 (16.4–27.5)</td>
<td>12.8 (9.9–16.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You were worried about retaliation by your co-workers.</td>
<td>19.1 (13.6–26.1)</td>
<td>19.8 (15.0–25.8)</td>
<td>12.8 (10.0–16.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You did not want more people to know.</td>
<td>21.5 (15.9–28.5)</td>
<td>13.1 (9.2–18.3)</td>
<td>9.5 (7.0–12.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You did not know how to report it.</td>
<td>7.1 (3.9–12.3)</td>
<td>6.1 (3.5–10.5)</td>
<td>8.2 (5.9–11.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You thought you might get in trouble for something you did.</td>
<td>11.0 (6.8–17.2)</td>
<td>11.3 (7.7–16.3)</td>
<td>6.1 (4.2–8.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone told you not to report it.</td>
<td>3.2 (1.1–8.7)</td>
<td>1.4 (0.5–3.9)</td>
<td>1.5 (0.8–2.9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: The 95-percent confidence interval for each estimate is indicated in parentheses. Some respondents indicated more than one type of barrier, so percentages do not sum to 100 percent.
forward (6.1 to 8.2 percent). See Tables A.66 to A.68 in the annex to this report for additional detail on barriers to reporting harassment.

**Barriers to Reporting Discrimination**

For FEMA employees categorized as having experienced gender or racial/ethnic discrimination in the preceding year and who did not disclose the experience to a supervisor/manager or through another reporting channel, the survey included items that assessed their reasons for not reporting (Table 8.5). The most-common barriers to reporting gender discrimination were that the employee did not think that anything would be done (62.2 percent), was concerned that they would be labeled as a troublemaker (50.9 percent), and did not have proof that the unfair decision was because of their gender (50.7 percent). For FEMA employees who had experienced racial/ethnic discrimination and who chose not to elevate an incident to a

**TABLE 8.5**

**Estimated Percentage of Victims Indicating Barriers to Reporting, by Type of Discrimination**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Gender Discrimination</th>
<th>Racial/Ethnic Discrimination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You did not think anything would be done.</td>
<td>62.2</td>
<td>66.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(56.7–67.4)</td>
<td>(59.3–72.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You did not trust that the process would be fair.</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>59.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(41.4–52.3)</td>
<td>(52.2–65.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You thought you might be labeled as a troublemaker.</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>53.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(45.4–56.4)</td>
<td>(46.2–60.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You thought it might hurt your performance evaluation or career.</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>53.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(43.6–54.6)</td>
<td>(46.0–59.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You did not have proof that the unfair decision was because of your [gender or race/ethnicity].</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(45.2–56.2)</td>
<td>(43.1–57.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You were worried about retaliation by a supervisor or manager.</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(32.7–43.3)</td>
<td>(37.3–51.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You were worried about retaliation by the person(s) who did it.</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(32.7–43.5)</td>
<td>(34.5–48.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You wanted to forget about it and move on.</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(33.6–44.3)</td>
<td>(21.9–34.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You thought it was not serious enough to report.</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(25.4–35.6)</td>
<td>(11.5–22.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You did not know how to report it.</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5.4–11.0)</td>
<td>(5.4–13.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone told you not to report it.</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.6–6.9)</td>
<td>(0.8–4.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*NOTE: The 95-percent confidence interval for each estimate is indicated in parentheses. Some respondents indicated more than one type of barrier, so percentages do not sum to 100 percent.*
FEMA authority, the most-common barriers were that the employee did not think anything would be done (66.1 percent), did not trust that the process would be fair (59.3 percent), and was concerned that they would be labeled a troublemaker (53.3 percent). For the most part, barriers to reporting gender and racial/ethnic discrimination were similar. The one exception was that victims of racial/ethnic discrimination were less likely to believe that the incident was not serious enough to report (16.2 percent) than victims of gender discrimination (30.2 percent).

For gender discrimination, the barriers to reporting were similar for men and women (see Table A.69 in the annex to this report). Because the samples were so small, the comparison of barriers across racial/ethnic groups was not advisable because many estimates are not reportable (see Table A.70 in the annex to this report).

### Workplace Impacts from Harassment or Discrimination

Potential legal repercussions are one motivation for FEMA leaders to be responsive to employee victimization in these domains. Consequences for work performance and retention provide another (Table 8.6). For an employee categorized as having experienced harassment or discrimination in the preceding year, the survey included an item that asked whether they had taken “a sick day or any other type of leave” as a consequence of the situation. The psychological and employment consequences of harassment and discrimination are various and multifaceted, but use of leave time provides an easy-to-measure and easy-to-quantify loss-of-productivity metric for the organization (that also hints at other unmeasured losses, such as reduced performance at work). The survey also included an item asking whether the upsetting situation made them want to quit. Although this does not assess actual turnover,

#### Table 8.6
Estimated Percentage of Victims Who Used Leave and Wanted to Quit as a Consequence of Harassment or Discrimination in the Preceding Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Incident</th>
<th>Leave Day</th>
<th>Desire to Quit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>性骚扰</td>
<td>18.6 (14.1–24.2)</td>
<td>26.2 (20.7–32.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>基于性别的骚扰</td>
<td>25.9 (21.5–31.0)</td>
<td>43.5 (38.4–48.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>基于性别的歧视</td>
<td>35.7 (31.8–39.7)</td>
<td>59.3 (55.1–63.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>种族/民族骚扰</td>
<td>18.1 (15.3–21.3)</td>
<td>29.6 (26.3–33.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>种族/民族歧视</td>
<td>35.9 (30.6–41.5)</td>
<td>62.7 (57.2–67.9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** The 95-percent confidence interval for each estimate is indicated in parentheses. Individuals responded to two items: “Thinking about the upsetting situation . . . (1) Did it make you want to quit?” (1 = yes, 2 = no) and (2) Did “you take a sick day or any other type of leave because of this situation?” (1 = yes, 2 = no).
it does index distress and another aspect of loss of productivity, and intention to leave is one of the best predictors of actual departure behavior (e.g., Griffeth, Hom, and Gaertner, 2000; Hulin, 1991).

Many victims indicated having used at least one leave day as a result of the situation, varying from 18.1 percent of racial/ethnic harassment victims to 35.9 percent of racial/ethnic discrimination victims. In addition, there is some indication that being targeted by harassment or discrimination might reduce retention and contribute to turnover in the FEMA workforce. About one-third of employees who had experienced harassment (26.2 to 43.5 percent) indicated that the situation made them “want to quit.” Employees who had experienced discrimination were more likely to want to leave their positions; nearly two-thirds indicated that the situation made them “want to quit” (59.3 to 62.7 percent). Findings that negative consequences are incurred for those who experience harassment and discrimination are not unusual, and such consequences can be wider ranging than those we examined here. (See Willness, Steel, and Lee, 2007, for a review that summarizes the body of work on the negative consequences of sexual harassment and Triana, Jayasinghe, and Pieper, 2015, for a similar analytic summary of work on the outcomes of racial/ethnic discrimination.)

Summary

The story of reporting decisions, perceived responses, and barriers to reporting presents both positive and troubling results. First, we observed that one-third to one-half of respondents who had experienced harassment or discrimination told a supervisor/manager or reported it through another official channel. Many victims of harassment indicated that the offender stopped harassing them or that harassment policies were explained to their work groups, which are positive outcomes.

At the same time, more than one-third of victims who reported the incidents indicated that “the person [they] told took no action to improve the situation.” More than a third of employees indicated that they were “encouraged to drop the issue.” Not surprisingly, less than 25 percent of employees were satisfied or very satisfied with the action taken. For those who decided not to report harassment or discrimination, common barriers to reporting were that the employee did not think anything would be done, did not trust that the process would be fair, and was concerned that they would be labeled a troublemaker.

Finally, many employees who had experienced harassment or discrimination and reported it were victims of retaliation. This included a quarter or more who reported harassment and a third or more who reported discrimination. These results suggest that FEMA needs to continue or escalate efforts to ensure that supervisors and managers take appropriate action in response to disclosures of harassment or discrimination. Many of the common barriers to reporting can be alleviated by ensuring that leadership at all levels knows what to do with a report and has the tools at hand to take action, including a familiarity and comfort with lower levels of sanctions, such as talking with an offender about appropriate behavior. Moreover,
leadership at all levels must ensure that those who report these experiences are protected from retaliation.
CHAPTER NINE

The FEMA Climate

In this chapter, we briefly introduce the concept of workplace climate and present FEMA employees’ perceptions of climates for sexual and racial/ethnic harassment, as well as general work environment.¹

Climate Is Perceptions of Leadership

Climate is an organizational variable that typically focuses on employees’ perceptions of organizational policies and practices (e.g., rewards and punishments, incentives for behavior) and on what happens in organizations: It represents an interpretation of the work environment (see James et al., 2008; Ostroff, Kinicki, and Muhammad, 2012; Schneider, Ehrhart, and Macey, 2011; and Zohar and Hofmann, 2012, for some reviews). Leaders play a critical role in establishing and maintaining climate (Ehrhart, Schneider, and Macey, 2014). Leaders not only set appropriate policies; they also influence how those policies are enacted in the organization (i.e., the actual incentives that show what leadership rewards and punishes in a given domain of organizational behaviors) (Zohar, 2002; see also Naylor, Pritchard, and Ilgen, 1980, and Zohar and Hofmann, 2012).

Climate is quite often conceptualized as being climate for something—some strategic organizational goal, such as innovation or safety, or internal organizational processes, such as fairness (Schneider, Ehrhart, and Macey, 2011; Zohar and Hofmann, 2012). Specific climates examined in the literature and of interest here include climate for sexual harassment (e.g., Hulin, Fitzgerald, and Drasgow, 1996; Willness, Steel, and Lee, 2007), for diversity (Hicks-Clarke and Iles, 2000; McKay and Avery, 2015), or racial/ethnic harassment and discrimination (Bergman et al., 2012).

Meta-analyses have shown that relevant climates are related to experiences of sexual harassment (Willness, Steel, and Lee, 2007) and racial/ethnic discrimination (Triana, Jayasinghe, and Pieper, 2015). A strong climate, or one in which a strong situation is created, is a climate that minimizes the effects that individual preferences and personalities have on behavior and promotes uniformity in workplace behavior (Ostroff, Kinicki, and Muham-

¹ A more in-depth review of the literature pertaining to climate in the workplace is provided in Farris et al., 2020, Appendix C.
In this case, the desire would be a workplace in which incentives set by leaders at all levels consistently discourage harassing behavior and the workplace is a safe and civil environment for all.

A strong situation, or strong climate, shows up in individual perceptions of the climate (psychological climate), as well as perceptions aggregated up to the level of the organizational unit (organizational climate). Employees of various groups, such as women or black personnel, are likely to have differing experiences in the workplace. Examination of only overall climate could serve to mask these relevant contrasts in experience. Thus, to examine whether these group differences are found at FEMA, we present (1) climate for sexual harassment broken out by gender and (2) climate for racial/ethnic harassment broken out by race/ethnicity.

### Climate for Sexual Harassment: Employee Perceptions

We assessed the climate for sexual harassment at different levels of leadership: a respondent’s immediate supervisor and senior management. By using this approach, we could assess whether the messages sent by multiple levels of leadership were consistent. Each of the FEMA workplace survey sections on climate for harassment first introduced the two leadership levels before a series of five distinct behavioral items, stating,

Some of the next questions ask about your **current supervisor**. You might have many people who direct your work. Please choose the person who has the most influence on your work activities.

Other questions ask about **FEMA’s leaders**, which include all SES (senior executive service) employees and all FEMA directors.

This introduction was followed by a series of items assessing behavioral incentives at FEMA, asking the respondent to rate the extent to which they agreed with statements describing how each referent, either supervisor or leader, set incentives at FEMA on a scale of –2 (strongly disagree) to 2 (strongly agree). A 0 mean score is a neutral score in which the respondent neither agreed nor disagreed that their supervisor or FEMA’s leaders responded in such a way. We used multiple items to make sure that we covered key aspects of harassment climate (perceptions related to risk for making a complaint, perceptions about sanctions for the perpetrator, and perceptions that a concern would be taken seriously) (Hulin, Fitzgerald, and Drasgow, 1996) and assessed both perceptions of severe behaviors and examples of experiences that happen frequently and sometimes are considered less severe.

The individual items for sexual harassment ask whether a FEMA employees’ current supervisor or FEMA’s leaders

- “demonstrates equal respect for both men and women”
- “makes all reasonable efforts to stop sexual harassment”
“would try to protect someone who made a sexual harassment complaint from retaliation”

(does not let) “people get away with sexually inappropriate comments and behavior”

“would report sexual harassment to the right FEMA authority.”

The individual items can also be seen in Tables A.73 and A.74 in the annex to this report.

The climate assessment was designed to provide an overall perspective on the climate for sexual harassment at FEMA, at the levels of both supervisor and senior leadership. Thus, we combined the items for each referent into two overall sexual harassment assessments to present a global assessment: Climate for Sexual Harassment—Supervisor and Climate for Sexual Harassment—FEMA Leaders. Although it can be helpful to look at scores for individual items to get a sense of where specific leadership behaviors might be falling short, to truly determine whether men and women differ in their perspectives of the climate, it is best to use this global perspective on climate.\(^2\)

This overall assessment showed that, for both immediate supervisors and FEMA senior leaders, men have a more positive perspective than women do of the overall climate for sexual harassment. And for both men and women, perspectives of supervisors are more positive than those for senior leaders.

On a scale of −2 to 2, on which higher scores are more-positive perspectives, men’s average perception of their supervisors (1.33) is more positive than women’s (1.19) (Figure 9.1; Table A.71 in the annex to this report). This overall trend can be seen through scores on individual items as well, and, because it is sometimes helpful to use those as a different way to express these findings, we present an example. One key behavioral item asks, Would your supervisors at FEMA “report sexual harassment to the right FEMA authority?” As discussed in Chapter Eight, doing so is the legally mandated response to a report of harassment. In 2021, 21.6 percent of women indicated that they were neutral about, disagreed with, or strongly disagreed with that statement when applied to supervisors. In contrast, only 15.4 percent of men responded the same way. The average scores on climate for sexual harassment for supervisors evidenced a small but significant improvement in 2021 relative to 2019. Full details on individual items can be found in Table A.73 in the annex to this report.

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\(^2\) We used coefficient alpha to determine whether individual items were sufficiently related to function as a coherent overall assessment of climate. Alpha is a measure that ranges from 0 to 1 and indicates the degree to which the items in a group are measuring the same or similar things, with higher scores indicating greater similarity. Coefficient alpha for Climate for Sexual Harassment—Supervisor is 0.82 and for Climate for Sexual Harassment—FEMA Leaders is 0.87, indicating sufficient similarity to create an overall measure. Using an overall measure is helpful because, when comparing across groups, it enables comparison of the global assessment of climate that includes each of the relevant aspects assessed using each different item. Together, our items ask about a variety of behaviors that have been found to be relevant (Hulin, Fitzgerald, and Drasgow, 1996) and a variety of potential frequency levels of occurrence (e.g., demonstrations of equal respect are likely to be more common than defending a complainant against retaliation). As noted in Messick, 1995, making sure that a measure covers the spectrum of relevant content is essential for any valid score usage.
Men have significantly more-positive perceptions of FEMA leaders as well: an average of 1.04, compared with the average of 0.8 for women (Figure 9.1; Table A.71 in the annex to this report). When asked whether senior leaders at FEMA would report sexual harassment to the right FEMA authority, 37.8 percent of women indicated that they were neutral about, disagreed with, or strongly disagreed with that statement, while only 26.9 percent of men indicated similar disagreement. Average scores on climate for sexual harassment for FEMA leaders evidenced a small but significant improvement in 2021 relative to 2019. Tables A.71 and A.74 in the annex to this report contain additional details.

**Climate for Racial/Ethnic Harassment: Employee Perceptions**

A very similar set of items was used to assess perceptions of climate for racial/ethnic harassment. Level of agreement with the same five leadership behaviors was assessed, and, like with climate for sexual harassment, questions were asked about the respondent’s current supervisor and FEMA’s leaders. The primary change was that the behaviors used in the questions related to racial/ethnic harassment rather than sexual harassment. (The individual items can be seen in Tables A.75 and A.76 in the annex to this report.) We used a scale of −2 (strongly disagree) to 2 (strongly agree), as discussed previously, in assessing the perceptions by gender.

As before, we combined the items for supervisors and senior leaders into two overall racial/ethnic harassment assessments: Climate for Racial/Ethnic Harassment—Supervisor and Climate for Racial/Ethnic Harassment—FEMA Leaders. Although it is helpful to look at individual items to get a sense of where specific leadership behaviors might be falling short,
to better determine whether racial/ethnic groups differ in their perspectives of the climate, it is best to use this overall assessment.3

This overall assessment shows that, with regard to both immediate supervisors and FEMA senior leaders, white employees had a more positive perspective than black employees of the overall climate for racial/ethnic harassment. Perceptions of immediate supervisors were more positive than for FEMA leaders for each group, with significant differences in the perception among the groups.

On a scale of –2 to 2, on which higher scores indicate a more positive perspective with respect to supervisors, white employees averaged 1.31, a significantly more positive perspective than the perspectives of black employees (1.06) and employees who identified as a race/ethnicity other than black, Hispanic, or white (1.12) (Table A.72 in the annex to this report). Hispanic employees (1.29) have more-positive perceptions of supervisors as well, which do not differ significantly from white employees’ perceptions (Figure 9.2).

To consider this finding using the example of one of the included items, when asked whether their supervisors at FEMA would report racial/ethnic harassment to the right FEMA authority, 17.1 percent of white employees and 15.2 percent of Hispanic employees indicated that they were neutral about, disagreed with, or strongly disagreed with that statement, while 26.1 percent of black employees indicated similar disagreement. Table A.75 in the annex to this report shows the full item-level details. On average, perceptions of climate for racial/ethnic harassment with respect to supervisors evidenced a small but significant improvement in 2021 relative to 2019.

**FIGURE 9.2**
*Climate for Racial/Ethnic Harassment at the Supervisor and FEMA Leader Levels, by Race/Ethnicity*

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3 Coefficient alpha for Climate for Racial/Ethnic Harassment—Supervisor is 0.82 and for Climate for Racial/Ethnic Harassment—FEMA Leaders is 0.87, indicating sufficient similarity to create an overall measure.
With respect to FEMA senior leaders, white and Hispanic employees had significantly more-positive perceptions than black and other employees as well: 0.97 for white employees and 1.03 for Hispanic employees, compared with black employees’ average of 0.76 and other race/ethnicity employees’ average of 0.74 (Figure 9.2; Table A.72 in the annex to this report). When asked whether their senior leaders at FEMA would report racial/ethnic harassment to the right FEMA authority, 30.7 percent of white employees and 24.8 percent of Hispanic employees indicated that they were neutral about, disagreed with, or strongly disagreed with that statement, while 39.6 percent of black employees indicated similar disagreement. For all employees, average perceptions of climate for racial/ethnic harassment with respect to senior leaders evidenced a small but significant improvement in 2021 relative to 2019. Tables A.72 and A.76 in the annex to this report contain additional details.

Climate in the General Work Environment: Employee Perceptions

We also examined FEMA employees’ perspectives of incivility in their general work environment. These behaviorally based items did not reference a protected demographic status but instead asked about treatment by FEMA coworkers, described as including “peers, supervisors, and subordinates,” to assess norms for civility in the work environment more generally. Examination of incivility can be particularly relevant to consideration of diversity-related domains, despite its explicitly agnostic, demographically blind focus: Research describes the concept of “selective incivility,” in which the vehicle for racism and sexism in organizations is higher incivility directed at demographically chosen targets, rather than explicitly sexist or racist behavior. Tables A.77 and A.78 in the annex to this report provide item-by-item breakdowns. Respondents rated the extent to which they agree that their coworkers

- “all treat me with respect”
- (do not) “take credit for my work or ideas”
- “never get angry or frustrated with me”
- (do not) “make it hard for me to do my job”
- (do not) “spread gossip and rumors about each other”
- (are not) “insulting in their criticism of my work”
- (rarely) “yell at each other in a hostile manner.”

The best way to get an overall perspective on the general work environment is through examining the overall summary assessment combining all items together. Coefficient alpha for general work environment is 0.86, indicating sufficient similarity to create an overall measure.
assess whether nontargeted climate perceptions varied like those for explicit climate for targeted types of harassment. We found that this was the case.

As can be seen in Figure 9.3, the same pattern observed for perceptions of sexual harassment climate was observed for the general work environment, with men having more-positive average perceptions (1.07) of the norms for civility than women do (0.95). Similarly, previously observed patterns for perceptions of the climate of racial/ethnic harassment can be seen when we examine the general work environment by racial/ethnic group. As can be seen in Figure 9.4, black employees had more-negative perceptions of their general work environments (0.95) than Hispanic employees (1.06) and white employees (1.03). (Tables A.71 and A.72 in the annex to this report contain additional details.)

**FIGURE 9.3**
General Work Environment Average Scale Score, by Gender

**FIGURE 9.4**
General Work Environment Average Scale Score, by Race/Ethnicity

**Summary**

We examined climate at FEMA from several perspectives. When we assessed climate for sexual harassment at the levels of the immediate supervisor and FEMA leadership, men tended to have more-positive perceptions than women did. As for the climate for racial/ethnic harassment, black employees tended to have less positive perceptions than white or Hispanic employees did. For both of these climate types, perceptions were more positive of immediate supervisors than FEMA leadership.
Despite the majority of employees saying that leaders would respond appropriately to negative gender-related or racial/ethnic climates, a fairly substantial proportion of employees perceived leadership behaviors as, at best, neutral, if not actively harmful. For example, just over 20 percent of women indicated that they were neutral about, disagreed with, or strongly disagreed with a statement that their supervisors would report sexual harassment to the right FEMA authority; similarly, about one-quarter of black respondents had similar perceptions of how their supervisors would handle racial/ethnic harassment. Approximately 40 percent of women and 40 percent of black respondents expressed similar sentiments about senior leaders.

Finally, we broadly examined the general work environment, asking respondents about perceptions of their coworkers’ behavior. When this measure was broken out by demographic subgroups, the same patterns emerged: Men had more-positive perceptions than women did, and white employees had more-positive perceptions than black employees did, with Hispanic employees’ perceptions higher still. This suggests that, even when employees do not engage in explicitly sexist or racist behavior, certain demographic groups might be more likely to experience incivility.
Conclusions and Recommendations

Following the 2019 survey of FEMA employees, we recommended that FEMA leadership consider surveying employees again after time had elapsed to assess the impact of its intervention efforts. FEMA recognized the importance of monitoring trends over time and contracted with HSOAC to field the survey again two years after the baseline was assessed. This report summarizes the results of the 2021 survey, which showed a 28-percent decrease in risk for gender-based/sexual and racial/ethnic civil rights violations relative to 2019. Although 2021 prevalence rates are still higher than is desirable, this is a dramatic decline and represents a significantly improved work environment for FEMA employees.

We cannot be certain of the processes that caused this decline, but we can offer three plausible explanations.

- First, the survey time period coincides with national movements against sexual harassment (#MeToo) and police violence against black people (Black Lives Matter). These protest and awareness-raising movements have changed the national discussion of civil rights violations and might have also contributed to changes in the workplace.
- Second, FEMA leaders and employees have undertaken substantial training and policy changes to reduce the prevalence of civil rights violations within the agency (FEMA, 2020b). Nearly three-quarters of the workforce now say that they have participated in anti-harassment/civil treatment training offered by FEMA (71 percent). One-third of FEMA employees (32 percent) have attended a group meeting with their first-line supervisor about preventing harassment and discrimination, one-third (33 percent) attended a town hall hosted by their SES-level office director that was related to employee misconduct and accountability, and 44 percent attended a town hall hosted by the FEMA administrator. Three out of five employees (57 percent) learned where to find the FEMA brochure that serves as an easy reference for where to go for concerns. These training and prevention efforts might have paid off and led to the observed decline in civil rights violations.
- Third, employees were asked to reflect on their workplace experiences from the spring of 2020 to the spring of 2021. That is, they were describing events that happened during a year that was fully disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Two-thirds of FEMA employees had worked entirely from home during the surveyed period and had interacted with their colleagues only by email, telephone, or video conference. FEMA employees
who did spend some time at an office or worksite were working in sparsely populated workplaces under COVID-19 prevention protocols that limited interaction with others. In addition, many FEMA employees were deployed to work directly on the national response to COVID-19, and these deployments might have differed substantially from more-typical disaster deployments. The changes in the modes of communication, physical proximity to colleagues, and the type of work that was being performed during the COVID-19 pandemic might have together reduced offenders’ opportunities to harass and discriminate against their colleagues. We found some evidence in support of this hypothesis in an analysis that showed that the risk of experiencing a civil rights violation increased with the number of days employees worked in person in the year preceding the survey.

These potential explanations for the dramatic improvement in the FEMA workplace relative to results from the 2019 survey are not either-or explanations. Social justice movements, FEMA training, and COVID-19 changes could have collectively contributed to the change. Alternatively, there could be still other explanations that we have not explored. Unfortunately, we cannot say with certainty what caused the decline in civil rights violations at FEMA, but we can be reasonably certain that there was a decline.

Caveats and Considerations for Interpreting Findings

The findings and conclusions described in this report are subject to the limitations of self-report survey research. A full investigation of the experiences described by respondents could reveal that incidents we did not classify as gender-based/sexual or race/ethnicity–based civil rights violations might indeed qualify as violations, and some of those we classified as violations might prove not to be. However, we used behaviorally specific items to alleviate the concern that respondents might not be aware of the boundaries of civil rights violations. If the employee responded truthfully to each item, and an event occurred that matched the item wording, then, by definition, a civil rights violation likely occurred.

Discrimination on the basis of a protected class is more challenging than harassment to measure on a self-report survey. We included items that assessed incidents in which the respondent believed that an unfair workplace experience was due to their gender or race/ethnicity. In doing so, we asked the employee to infer another person’s motivation for causing a career harm, inferences that might not always be accurate. For example, assignment to unimportant tasks might be made on the basis of performance issues unrelated to demographic identity but be perceived by the employee as being due to their gender or race/ethnicity. On the other hand, there are likely other incidents of discrimination in which the individual is never aware that they were discriminated against on the basis of a protected class and, therefore, cannot disclose it on a self-report survey. We cannot estimate how common these hidden cases of discrimination might be.
After discussion with the study sponsor, we focused the survey domains on two protected classes: gender and race/ethnicity. To protect employee time, as well as data completion and accuracy, we limited the survey length so that it could be completed in 30 minutes or less. This limitation meant that we were unable to measure workplace violations on the basis of other protected classes and other areas of potential employee vulnerability. For example, we did not assess harassment or discrimination on the basis of disability status or age. These are important topics for future study.

Another consideration when interpreting our findings, although not a limitation, is that behaviorally based assessment of harassment and discrimination tends to result in prevalence rates that are markedly higher than the rate of official reporting and higher than the prevalence rates for self-reported labeled harassment or discrimination (see, e.g., FEMA, undated a). It is not uncommon for people who have had experiences that can be objectively classified as harassment or discrimination to not label their experiences “harassment” or “discrimination.” Most laypeople are not familiar with laws surrounding Title VII or EEO law and related regulations, and, although they might view their experiences as problematic (and can experience deleterious consequences regardless of how they label their experiences) (see, e.g., Magley et al., 1999), they might therefore be unlikely to be able to label them as civil rights violations (Fitzgerald, Swan, and Fischer, 1995). Labeling an experience as a civil rights violation is a necessary precursor to reporting it as one, leading to a further discrepancy between behaviorally based prevalence rates and actual reporting of harassment or discrimination.

A final issue to consider when interpreting our findings is the lack of available comparators. Factors related to measurement of harassment and discrimination, as described earlier, affect the comparability of samples. Measures that are not the same across organizations make direct comparisons across organizations difficult in the sense that the reason for a finding of difference is unclear: It could be caused by a genuine difference in the prevalence of civil rights violations between organizations, or it could simply be a consequence of different measurement strategies. Moreover, organizations not required to measure prevalence because of specific legal strictures are unlikely to do so and are even less likely to report their findings publicly.

Other than the U.S. military, which is required by law to assess prevalence of these types of experiences, the only organizations—public or private—that assess them tend to be required to do so as part of the evidence-gathering process for class-action lawsuits. Evidence that harassment and discrimination exist is unwelcome to organizations unwilling to do the work to create better working environments for their employees, and FEMA is the only organization, to our knowledge, to do so voluntarily and publicly, demonstrating the agency’s commitment to face issues head on and work to improve. This transparency offers the opportunity to advance the study of these issues in the workplace and highlights FEMA’s commitment to transparency to the public and to its employees as it tackles these issues.
Recommendations

In 2020, FEMA released its “Culture Improvement Action Plan” (FEMA, 2020b) that outlined its response to each of the next steps that we had suggested in response to the baseline survey (Farris et al., 2020). Those recommendations included the following:

- Ensure that prevention efforts address all problematic behaviors.
- Explore differences in culture and climate between offices that had low rates of civil rights violations and those with higher rates.
- Explore interventions with leaders at all levels to ensure that all understand how best to handle harassment and understand their responsibility to address it.
- Reduce barriers to reporting.
- Increase accountability and transparency in dealing with harassment and discrimination reports at all levels of leadership.
- Continue monitoring harassment and discrimination in the workforce.

With the passage of time, and the improvements that are observed in the prevalence of gender-based/sexual and racial/ethnic civil rights violations at FEMA, it might be an opportune time for leadership to review the “Culture Improvement Action Plan,” collect information about the implementation of their plans, identify successes and opportunities for improvement, and if necessary, update the plan moving forward. Although the decline in observed prevalence is notable, civil rights violations at FEMA are still common enough to warrant concern and highlight the need for ongoing efforts to combat their prevalence.

Given the uncertain causal factors for the observed improvements, we recommend that FEMA continue to monitor civil rights violations into the future. Although this report exemplifies FEMA executing a similar suggestion from our report describing the baseline status of civil rights violations at FEMA, it is clear that work on these efforts must continue. As described in the previous section, the clearest comparisons are possible when prevalence assessments are methodologically comparable. Although the decline in prevalence rates represents a success for FEMA, an issue remains that the year prior to our survey entailed a dramatic change to the work situation that could color these findings. If COVID-19–related work-from-home protocols are the main driver of the observed change, it is possible that these events will rebound as FEMA employees return to shared workplaces.

Conclusion

Changing organizational culture and climate is no easy task, and the observed decline in gender-based/sexual and racial/ethnic civil rights violations at FEMA represents a substantial improvement in the workplace for FEMA employees. This change has also been accompanied by small but significant improvements in employees’ perceptions of their front-line and senior leadership’s commitment to a workplace free of harassment and discrimination. A
continued commitment to a comprehensive and holistic set of interventions that incentivize professional and respectful workplace behavior can help leaders ensure that the FEMA work environment suppresses individual proclivities toward negative behavior.
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CI</td>
<td>confidence interval</td>
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<tr>
<td>CORE</td>
<td>Cadre of On-Call Response/Recovery Employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19</td>
<td>coronavirus disease 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCC</td>
<td>direct-charge Cadre of On-Call Response/Recovery Employees</td>
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<tr>
<td>DHS</td>
<td>U.S. Department of Homeland Security</td>
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<tr>
<td>EEO</td>
<td>equal employment opportunity</td>
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<tr>
<td>FEMA</td>
<td>Federal Emergency Management Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>GS</td>
<td>General Schedule</td>
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<tr>
<td>HSOAC</td>
<td>Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IC</td>
<td>incident command</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM</td>
<td>incident management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMAT</td>
<td>incident management assistance team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>incident team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NR</td>
<td>not reportable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>Senior Executive Service</td>
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———, *We Are FEMA: Helping People Before, During, and After Disasters*, Washington, D.C., Publication 1, FP112-01, undated b. As of March 31, 2022: https://www.fema.gov/about/pub-1


———, “Organization,” webpage, last updated October 20, 2021. As of January 5, 2022: https://www.fema.gov/about/organization

FEMA—See Federal Emergency Management Agency.


In 2019, researchers from the Homeland Security Operational Analysis Center (HSOAC) fielded a survey to estimate the annual prevalence of workplace harassment and discrimination at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and assess employee perceptions of leadership and workplace climate. The survey results revealed areas in need of improvement and helped guide FEMA leadership decisions about programming and policy responses. With the results in hand, FEMA published its “Culture Improvement Action Plan,” laying out objectives, programs, and actions intended to create a safe workplace for all employees.

To understand whether this objective had been achieved, FEMA asked HSOAC researchers to repeat the workforce survey two years after the first survey had been administered. The survey was repeated in the spring of 2021, with results indicating a substantial reduction from 2019 of harassment and discrimination in the workplace, albeit still a high prevalence. This report presents the survey results and a discussion about how changes in the workplace during the response period might have influenced the findings. An annex to this report contains detailed tabular data of survey results and the complete survey instrument.

The survey was designed to provide an independent and objective assessment of the prevalence and characteristics of harassment and discrimination at FEMA, whether or not victims chose to elevate incidents to FEMA leadership, and employee perspectives on workplace climate.