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Making the Invisible Visible: Understanding and Combating Violence and Harassment at Work in Three West African Countries



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Making the Invisible Visible: Understanding and Combating Violence and Harassment at Work in Three West African Countries

Insights from research in Burkina Faso,
Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal (2022-2024)

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First published 2026.



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ISBN: 9789220430811 (print); 9789220430828 (web PDF)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54394/BFUY2229>

Also available in French: *Rendre visible l'invisible: comprendre et combattre la violence et le harcèlement au travail dans trois pays d'Afrique de l'Ouest*. ISBN 9789220430835 (print); 9789220430842 (web PDF)

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Printed in Switzerland

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► Acknowledgements

This report was produced as part of the *“Combating violence and harassment in the world of work & Equal pay and careers for men and women”* project (2020–2025), made possible thanks to the financial support of the Government of France, represented by the Ministry of Labour and Solidarity.

It presents a synthesis of the results of four multi-disciplinary research projects carried out between 2022 and 2024 in Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali and Senegal. We are deeply grateful to the research team leaders and their respective teams, whose expertise and commitment made this work possible: Fathi Fakhfakh and his team comprised of Konan Abogni Augustin Kouadio, Koffi Roland Bini, Aya Marie-Clémence Essé-Diby, Abdou Dieng, Bi Tizié Emmanuel Gala, Marie-Pierre Merlateau, Noël Thiombiano, Edwige Somet and Salimata Wade (project led by the University of Paris II); Hugues Kouassi Kouadio and his team comprised of Lewis Landry Gakpa, Boris Baffo, Niava Landry, Rodrigue Maré, Insa Sadio (project led by ENSEA); Elisabeth Hofman and her team comprised of Kontin Marie-Thérèse Dansoko, Fatou Diop Sall, Zeinaba Kane, Jean-Christophe Lepouble, Diabel Ndiaye and Aly Tounkara (project led by the HaFoP team); and Elsa Tapsoba and her team comprised of Yéda Christophe Banaon, Aïssata Dabo and David Ilboudo (project led by ADDA).

This report was prepared by the ILO Gender, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (GEDI) Branch, under the responsibility of Chidi King, Chief of Branch. It was written by Ira Postolachi, with valuable contributions from Valentina Beghini, under the strategic supervision of Emanuela Pozzan. We are also grateful to Loïc Lerouge for drafting the initial version, which served as a solid basis for this synthesis.

Our thanks also go out to our colleagues at the ILO Office in Dakar, Fatime Christiane Ndiaye and Latyr Ndiaye, for their continuous support throughout the research process, as well as to our colleagues in the Statistics Department (STATISTICS), Andonirina Rakotonarivo and Yacouba Diallo, for their key contribution to the design of statistical instruments and their support in data collection and analysis. We also thank Bezawit Kibret for administrative support, Maud Megevand for editorial work, Justin Scherer for English translation and our colleagues in the Publications Production Unit (PRODOC) for their help in producing the report.

We acknowledge the crucial role played by the members of the International Research Network on Violence and Harassment, created as part of this project, who provided support and guidance for the work during their biannual meetings. Each project was enriched by validation workshops, and the synthesis of results was presented at a tripartite subregional event held in Dakar from 26 to 28 November 2024. The main results were also presented at the 9th Conference on Regulation for Decent Work, organized by the ILO in Geneva from 2 to 4 July 2025, allowing for in-depth dialogue with the international research community.

Finally, we express our gratitude to all colleagues, participants, institutions and employers’ and workers’ organizations whose commitment has contributed to deepening understanding of the prevalence, determinants and effects of violence and harassment in the world of work in West Africa, and to providing a solid basis for guiding effective, inclusive and sustainable public policies.

► Executive summary

Violence and harassment in the world of work is a universal phenomenon that remains largely **invisible, underreported or underestimated**. The adoption of the **Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190)** and the accompanying **Recommendation No. 206** marked a major turning point, recognizing for the first time at the international level that this phenomenon constitutes a violation of human rights. These standards also affirm the right of every person to a safe and inclusive world of work free from violence and harassment, regardless of employment status and sector of activity, whether formal or informal.

In this context, France and the ILO launched the first large-scale project *Combating violence and harassment in the world of work & Equal pay and career opportunities for men and women* (2020-2025), aimed at deepening the understanding of this phenomenon and contributing to its elimination. Between 2022 and 2024, four multidisciplinary research projects were carried out in **West Africa**, in close collaboration with French-speaking universities in West Africa and France.

This **synthesis report** consolidates the key insights from the research carried out in **Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire** and **Senegal**. Using quantitative and qualitative approaches, this research documents the magnitude, forms, determinants and effects of violence and harassment in the world of work. It constitutes one of the richest bodies of data on the subject available to date in West Africa. While this phenomenon is universal, the research conducted in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal shows that it is particularly pronounced in those countries, and rooted in social, economic and organizational structures characterized by informality, vulnerability, gender inequality

and weak prevention and protection mechanisms. This synthesis report aims to highlight the **main findings** of the research.

High, persistent and concerning prevalence

The surveys show that more than half of workers have been exposed to violence and harassment in the world of work in Côte d'Ivoire (58 per cent) and Senegal (65 per cent), and nearly half in Burkina Faso (43 per cent). Psychological violence and harassment is the most common form and is often part of a continuum involving physical or sexual violence and harassment, exacerbating workers' position of dependence and vulnerability.

Groups most exposed to violence and harassment

Both young and older people are most exposed to violence and harassment in the world of work. While women are more affected by sexual violence and harassment, men are more at risk of physical violence. The highest prevalence rates are found in the service sector: men primarily in market services and women in non-market services. Conversely, the agricultural sector and skilled agricultural workers have the lowest prevalence rates.

Multiple, structural and interconnected determinants

The research shows that violence and harassment in the world of work arises from a continuum of social, economic, organizational and gender-related determinants: asymmetrical power

Executive summary

relationships, economic dependence, stigmatization, precarious and informal working conditions, lack of awareness of rights, incomplete legal frameworks, and inadequate mechanisms for prevention, reporting and redress. These determinants reinforce each other, leaving all workers structurally at risk of violence and harassment, although certain groups remain particularly vulnerable.

Diverse spaces of vulnerability and multiple perpetrators

The surveys also show that violence and harassment is not limited to the workplace. Interactions with the general public are often associated with psychological violence and harassment, public transport is often associated with physical violence, and digital spaces and remote work are often conducive to sexual violence and harassment. Furthermore, clients, patients, students and members of their families are frequent perpetrators of violence and harassment in the world of work. While men account for the majority of perpetrators across all forms of violence and harassment, women may also perpetrate certain forms of violence and harassment, particularly psychological and physical violence and harassment against other women.

Major effects on health, well-being and work

Violence and harassment in the world of work has a significant impact on workers' well-being and performance at work. The effects on mental health are particularly pronounced: nearly two out of five victims in Côte d'Ivoire (36 per cent) and Senegal (39 per cent) and nearly one in two victims in Burkina Faso (50 per cent) report a deterioration in their mental health. The analyses also show a marked increase in levels of depression, anxiety and stress among victims, who report nearly twice as many symptoms as non-victims. Women and young workers

appear particularly vulnerable, and poor working conditions tend to exacerbate these effects. Violence and harassment in the world of work also has a direct impact on physical health and work performance, including reduced confidence, motivation and productivity, increased absenteeism at work, but also decreased job satisfaction among workers with regard to their income, work or working hours.

Limited reporting and persistently insufficient means of redress

Although legal and institutional mechanisms do exist, their effectiveness remains limited and fragmented, and they are often little known or difficult to access, particularly for the most vulnerable workers. The data collected indicate that 40 per cent of victims never report acts of violence and harassment in the world of work. In Burkina Faso and Senegal, women report acts of violence and harassment more than men, while in Côte d'Ivoire, the trend is reversed. The majority of victims initially turn to informal support mechanisms: family and friends in 75 per cent of cases and colleagues in 20 per cent of cases, while formal structures remain largely unused (less than 5 per cent of cases), due to either a lack of visibility, trust or accessibility. The lack of reporting of violence and harassment can be explained to a significant extent by a perception that the incidents are "not serious enough" — 63 per cent in Senegal, 56 per cent in Côte d'Ivoire and 47 per cent in Burkina Faso — but also as a result of shame, embarrassment and fear of retaliation, including loss of employment or deterioration of professional relationships. As such, a preference for informal means of redress, fear of social or professional consequences and enduring institutional capacity limitations thus constitute obstacles to effective support and protection for victims of violence and harassment in the world of work.

A call to action: advancing towards a world of work free from violence and harassment

The research has led to the formulation of **12 recommendations** structured around three pillars:

- I. An inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach
- II. Prevention and shared responsibility
- III. Protection, support and redress

The analysis highlights substantial room for improvement, particularly with regard to development of legal and institutional frameworks that are fully aligned with Convention No. 190 and its accompanying Recommendation No. 206, strengthening of coordination among the stakeholders, and inclusion of specific prevention clauses in collective agreements. It also stresses the need to step up awareness-raising efforts, strengthen institutional capacities and develop effective

prevention, support and redress mechanisms for victims. These recommendations once again highlight the importance of continuing and scaling up efforts to effectively combat violence and harassment in the world of work, notably through **the ratification and effective implementation of Convention No. 190** and its accompanying **Recommendation No. 206**. This calls for an inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach capable of ensuring real and equitable protection for all workers.

Conclusion: making the invisible visible to enable more effective action

By shedding light on a phenomenon that has been largely invisible and little documented, this research provides a solid basis for guiding public action, strengthening institutional mechanisms for the protection of victims and building a safe world of work free from violence and harassment in **Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal**.

► Introduction

Violence and harassment constitutes a deeply rooted and persistent phenomenon in our societies, including in the world of work. According to the ILO-Lloyd's Register Foundation-Gallup global survey, more than one in five people in employment have experienced at least one form of violence and harassment at work during their professional lives (ILO-Lloyd's Register Foundation 2022). The results of this first global survey highlight significant regional disparities and reveal the magnitude of a phenomenon that is often invisible, underreported and insufficiently measured. Violence and harassment arises from complex dynamics shaped by socio-cultural norms, power relations and legal frameworks, which contributes to their diversity of manifestations and perceptions across contexts. Nonetheless, the literature converges: this phenomenon has negative repercussions on the dignity, health, safety, and equal opportunity and treatment of workers (ILO 2024).

Thus, the International Labour Conference (ILC) of the International Labour Organization (ILO), at its 108th session (June 2019), adopted the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), together with the accompanying Recommendation No. 206. The Convention recognizes "the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment" and "the importance of a work culture based on mutual respect and dignity of the human being". It also defines violence and harassment in the world of work as "a range of unacceptable behaviours and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single occurrence or repeated, that aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, and includes gender-based violence and harassment". These standards

establish an international legal frame of reference and call for an inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach to preventing and eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work (ILO 2021).

In this context, France and the ILO launched the project *Combating violence and harassment in the world of work & Equal pay and career opportunities for men and women* (2020-2025), with the aim of strengthening understanding of the phenomenon and contributing to the prevention and elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work, with a particular focus on West Africa. More specifically, the project aimed to encourage institutionalized research leading to deeper knowledge of the magnitude, forms, causes and effects of violence and harassment in the world of work. To this end, four independent research projects were carried out in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and Senegal. Each project relied on distinct methodologies and survey tools, combining quantitative and qualitative methods, in urban and rural areas, and covering different sectors of activity. In 2024, the project conducted by the École nationale supérieure de statistique et d'économie appliquée (ENSEA) of Côte d'Ivoire, also provided an opportunity – for the first time in West Africa – to pilot the ILO's survey questionnaire and survey protocol on Worker Well-being and Safety (WWS) in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal, using an act-based approach. These three pilot surveys enabled the collection of new data, highlight new findings, and contribute to the development of an international statistical standard to measure violence and harassment in the world of work, which will be presented at the next International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) scheduled for 2028.

Introduction

This synthesis report consolidates the results of four research projects carried out in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal between 2022 and 2024. Although one of the projects also covered Mali, this report focuses on the three countries covered by all four projects, and for which harmonized statistical data were collected. The aim is to deepen understanding of the causes and manifestations of violence and harassment in the world of work, inform the development of appropriate measurement tools, and support social dialogue and public action targeting prevention, protection, and the ratification and effective implementation of Convention No. 190. Based on an approach combining quantitative surveys, qualitative research and co-construction with stakeholders in the world of work, this report presents lessons learned and recommendations derived directly from the analyses carried out in the

context of the aforementioned projects with a view to promoting a safe, inclusive world of work free from all forms of violence and harassment. This report is structured in four chapters:

- ▶ **Chapter 1:** Determinants of violence and harassment in the world of work
- ▶ **Chapter 2:** Prevalence, forms and effects of violence and harassment in the world of work
- ▶ **Chapter 3:** Legal and institutional approaches to preventing and eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work
- ▶ **Chapter 4:** Recommendations for preventing and eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work in West Africa.

Box: Presentation of four research projects carried out in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal, 2022-2024

1. “Violence and harassment at work in the informal sector: the cases of Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal” project (April 2022 - February 2024) led by the University of Paris II - Panthéon Assas (France), in collaboration with Nazi Boni and Thomas Sankara Universities (Burkina Faso), Felix Houphouët-Boigny University (Côte d'Ivoire) and Cheikh Anta Diop University (Senegal).

Countries studied: Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal.

Sector/Area: Informal sector: tailoring, food and beverage, retail / urban.

Methodology: Three surveys on Violence and Harassment at Work (VHW) were conducted simultaneously in the main markets of Ouagadougou, Abidjan and Dakar (June-July 2022), using route-quota sampling. The analysis is based on exploratory statistics and then on non-linear econometric models: Probit-Logit (determinants), ordered models (effects on job satisfaction) and Heckman selection models (effects on depression, anxiety and stress).

Introduction

2. “Harassment and violence at work in the public sector in Mali and Senegal – stakeholder mapping and mobilization strategies for the implementation of Convention No. 190” project (May 2022 - February 2024) led by the HaFoP team, bringing together researchers from the University of Bordeaux-Montaigne (France), the *Centre des études sécuritaires et stratégiques au Sahel* (Mali) and Gaston Berger University in Saint Louis (Senegal).

Countries studied: Mali and Senegal.

Sector/Area: Formal sector: public sector / urban.

Methodology: Qualitative approach prioritized. In both countries, semi-structured interviews were conducted with trade unions, human resources managers, support services and key individuals from four ministries as well as civil society organizations, according to the principles of diversification and saturation. A structured questionnaire, via an online survey, was also used to document the prevalence of violence and harassment at work within the institutions studied.

3. “Violence and inequality in the informal employment: Empirical study of social representations and the conditions of home-based workers and household waste pickers in the cities of Burkina Faso” project (August 2022 - March 2024) led by the association “*Action pour le développement durable en Afrique*” (ADDA) with the participation of researchers from Norbert Zongo and Thomas Sankara Universities (Burkina Faso), with occasional support from the Centre for Comparative Labour and Social Security Law (COMPTRASEC) at the University of Bordeaux (France).

Country studied: Burkina Faso.

Sector/Area: Informal sector: household waste collection, domestic work / urban.

Methodology: Mixed approach using qualitative and quantitative methods. Data collection combined documentary review, field surveys of target populations, and relevant organizations and companies.

4. “Labour market challenges in West Africa: What impacts of violence and harassment?” project (October 2022 - October 2024) led by the National School of Statistics and Applied Economics (ENSEA, Côte d’Ivoire) in collaboration with the National Statistics Agency (ANStat, Côte d’Ivoire), the National Institute of Statistics and Demography (INSD, Burkina Faso), the National Agency for Statistics and Demography (ANSD, Senegal), the Research Institute for Development (IRD, France) and the Population Environment Development Laboratory (LPED, France).

Countries studied: Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire and Senegal.

Sectors/Areas: Formal and informal sectors, comprehensive approach/urban and rural.

Methodology: Three *Worker Well-being and Safety* (WWS) surveys conducted in 2024 among 6,022 households, using a mixed quantitative-qualitative approach to explore the prevalence of violence and harassment in the world of work, the profiles of victims and perpetrators, the places and circumstances in which violence and harassment occur, and effects on worker health and well-being.



▶ 1. Determinants of violence and harassment in the world of work

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► 1.1. The gender dimension

Gender remains one of the main determinants of violence and harassment in the world of work. In the three countries studied, the majority of stakeholders associate the phenomenon with gender-based violence and harassment, with women as the main victims. However, this perception tends to mask the fact that men are also exposed to violence and harassment, although women remain disproportionately affected — particularly in cases of sexual violence and harassment.

This situation reflects entrenched power asymmetries in the world of work, which shape patterns of authority, decision-making and vulnerability to violence and harassment. In many contexts, men are more likely to occupy senior positions, which can encourage violence

and harassment towards women. Abuse of authority, combined with the ability to exert pressure on women in lower hierarchical positions, thus contributes to perpetuating unacceptable behaviours. As such, the more disadvantaged a person's position in society, the greater their exposure to violence and harassment in the world of work.

These power relations are particularly pronounced in sectors dominated by women and associated primarily with the informal economy, such as domestic work, household waste collection, food and beverage, and tailoring, where social gender norms shape the division of labour and accentuate the vulnerability of women workers. Domestic workers, for example, often very young and from disadvantaged backgrounds, are particularly exposed to violence and harassment due to economic dependence and a lack of social protection. In the household waste collection sector, women workers regularly suffer humiliation and verbal abuse in a socially undervalued work environment characterized by low pay.

In the public sector, women workers are once again the most exposed to violence and harassment in the world of work. They often encounter difficulties in having their accounts recognized as credible, in accessing institutional support or in securing sanctions against perpetrators. This reality is also reflected in actions taken by trade unions, which collaborate more often with women's associations and focus primarily on women as the principal victims of violence and harassment in the world of work.

► In the studies we conducted in the world of work as trade unionists working in several countries, we found that women are the main victims of violence and harassment, regardless of occupation. Women are the most vulnerable and exposed group. **This does not mean that there are no cases involving men – there are – but in the majority of situations observed, the effects are borne by women.**

► Vice-President of the UNSAS National Women's Committee (Senegal), HaFoP project

► 1.2. Societal determinants

The influence of relationships of dependence

Violence and harassment in the world of work is also fuelled by poverty, economic and social dependence, and social exclusion. A significant portion of the workforce operates within the informal economy, where access to employment is often based on family or community networks. Access to employment in the household waste collection sector, for example, is often determined by paid membership in an association, co-opting within family or community networks, or through informal placement structures. Similarly, in the domestic work sector, many young girls are recruited and placed in households through community or family networks. Such asymmetrical relationships of dependence limit the ability of these workers to refuse or leave a job, even in unacceptable situations.

Although family or community networks can provide some form of support, in some cases they also reinforce these relationships of dependence through fear of disappointment or fear of not finding a better job. Workers thus find themselves in a paradoxical situation, where the need to maintain an income leads them to accept undignified working conditions. With regard to domestic work in particular, the boundaries become blurred due to psychological and emotional factors affecting both employers and employees. Emotional relationships tend to create confusion between professional and personal ties, obscure the distinction between paid work and services perceived as “natural”, and complicate relationships of subordination.

The “social reproduction” phenomenon that perpetuates structural inequalities also plays a significant role. For example, domestic workers who experience physical violence often choose to flee and change employers rather than file a complaint and confront the perpetrators. Workers rarely object to wage deductions equivalent to one or two days of work, thereby reflecting forced acceptance of unacceptable practices. Similarly, women working in the household waste collection sector often remain in their jobs for lack of viable alternatives, hoping for future improvement. When women workers do leave their jobs in some cases, they are quickly replaced, as such activities remain associated with low social status. This “social reproduction” contributes to perpetuating class and gender inequalities while creating an environment in which violence and harassment tends to be trivialized, even minimized or glossed over.

Stigmatization and labelling: a source of social contempt

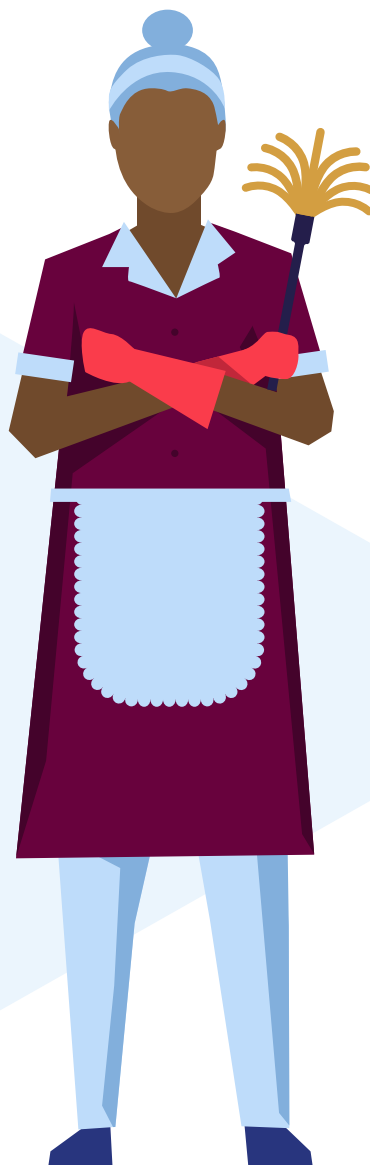
Social and cultural norms are also central determinant of exposure to violence and harassment in the world of work. Labelling mechanisms, which associate certain occupational groups with devalued identities, contribute to the social normalization of violence and harassment, particularly in the informal economy and in sectors characterized by low levels of social recognition.

In many female-dominated, informal or “low-skill” sectors such as domestic work or household waste collection, workers are regularly confronted with derogatory attitudes and insults

Chapter 1

related to the very nature of their work, which are conducive to a hostile and socially stigmatizing work environment. The social perceptions associated with “dirtiness” remain deeply devaluing while waste may be perceived as unclean,

the acts of “cleaning” are neither recognized nor valued. Low levels of remuneration, economic dependence and a lack of professional alternatives all contribute to tolerance of violence and harassment in the world of work.



► 1.3. Organizational determinants and working conditions

Working conditions and organizational practices are an important determinant of violence and harassment in the world of work. In the countries studied, employment relationships are often organized through informal employment arrangements, verbal agreements and individual arrangements, that limit the full guarantees offered by formal protection mechanisms. This structural informality reinforces economic dependence on the employer and, in the absence of viable employment alternatives, leads to tolerance of unacceptable behaviours and practices.

In the domestic work, for example, the employment relationship is less often regulated by a written contract than by a “psychological contract” based on personal trust, loyalty or availability. This type of arrangement tends to blur the boundaries between professional and emotional relationships and makes it more problematic to report violence and harassment. Personal dependence on the employer creates a highly asymmetrical hierarchical relationship, in which reporting cases of violence and harassment entails significant social and economic risks.

Difficult or poorly regulated working conditions also foster violence and harassment in the world of work. With regard to domestic work, for example, excessive workloads, long working hours, insufficient time off and lack of privacy are regularly cited as aggravating factors that can lead to psychological or sexual violence and harassment. Occupational accidents are also common, particularly in the household waste collection and domestic work sectors, where personal protective equipment is often inadequate, inappropriate or paid directly by workers.

Finally, broader economic contexts marked by poverty further exacerbate these vulnerabilities to violence and harassment in the world of work. Although the domestic workers consider their income insufficient, it remains nonetheless if they are to meet their own needs and those of their families and ensuring a minimum level of economic security. This economic dependence, combined with a lack of employment opportunities, helps explain why workers in the informal economy often refrain from reporting situations of violence and harassment, preferring to keep their jobs and the associated sources of income.

► 1.4. Legal and institutional determinants

Training is an option; we need to inform and train people so that they know what violence is, **because you cannot fight something you do not recognize.**

► *Head of the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (Senegal), HaFoP project*

An existing but incomplete legal framework

Legal and institutional frameworks are also key determinants of violence and harassment in the world of work. While relevant legislative provisions exist in the countries studied, they are often incomplete, insufficiently enforced and still poorly understood by workers. Legislation does not always clearly define violence and harassment in the world of work, in all its forms and for all employers, thus failing to grant explicit protection to certain groups of workers, particularly in the informal economy. This reality hinders prevention, reporting and handling of situations of violence and harassment.

Awareness-raising initiatives focused on violence and harassment in the world of work have been carried out in the media (radio and television) and through poster campaigns, at the initiative of trade unions, gender units within ministries, and civil society organizations. Despite these growing efforts, victims all too often fail to immediately recognize situations of violence and harassment or become aware of them only at an advanced stage when such behaviours become unbearable.



Limited access to the courts and often informal remedies

Workers' lack of awareness of their rights, combined with limited access to monitoring mechanisms and courts, constitutes a major obstacle when it comes to reporting situations of violence and harassment in the world of work. Labour inspectorates and labour courts face a lack of material, human, financial and technical resources, which limits their ability to effectively monitor the enforcement of laws on violence and harassment in the world of work. Furthermore, magistrates do not always have sufficient knowledge of the subject, which hinders effective implementation of existing provisions.

Under these circumstances, many workers are reluctant to report incidents to the competent authorities fearing losing their jobs, social stigma, or due to a lack of confidence in existing means of redress. Sanctions against perpetrators remain rare, and the slow pace of proceedings contributes to resignation that leads victims to resort to informal solutions to protect themselves. In this context, it seems essential to establish reliable, accessible and appropriate means of redress to ensure effective protection for workers and guarantee effective enforcement of laws.

Violence and harassment in the world of work occurs as the result of a combination of societal, organizational, legal and gender-related determinants. These determinants include gender-based power relations, situations of economic and social dependency, stigmatization, informal employment relationships, job insecurity, as well as gaps in the legal framework and enforcement limitations. Interaction among these determinants leads to mutual reinforcement, creating an environment in which certain workers — particularly women, young people and workers in the informal economy — suffer from greater structural exposure to violence

▶ I am not saying that informal management mechanisms are bad, but in my opinion, they are not very effective. The absence of sanctions promotes recidivism. It would be advisable to set up anonymous reporting mechanisms to guarantee confidentiality and protection for victims. This would encourage more civil servants to report cases of harassment. **It would also make it possible to collect more accurate data on the magnitude of this phenomenon and develop targeted policies and actions to prevent and eliminate violence and harassment in the world of work.**

▶ Head of a ministerial gender unit (Senegal), HaFoP project

and harassment. This interaction contributes to perpetuating structural discrimination, normalizing certain unacceptable behaviours and reinforcing a level of tolerance of violence and harassment in society, even in contexts marked by a rhetorical focus on solidarity and institutional commitments to eliminating violence and harassment. Understanding these determinants in their interactive dynamic is essential to explaining the persistence of weaknesses in worker protection and the increased vulnerability of certain groups of workers to violence and harassment in the world of work.



► 2. Prevalence, forms and effects of violence and harassment in the world of work

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► 2.1. Prevalence and forms of violence and harassment in the world of work

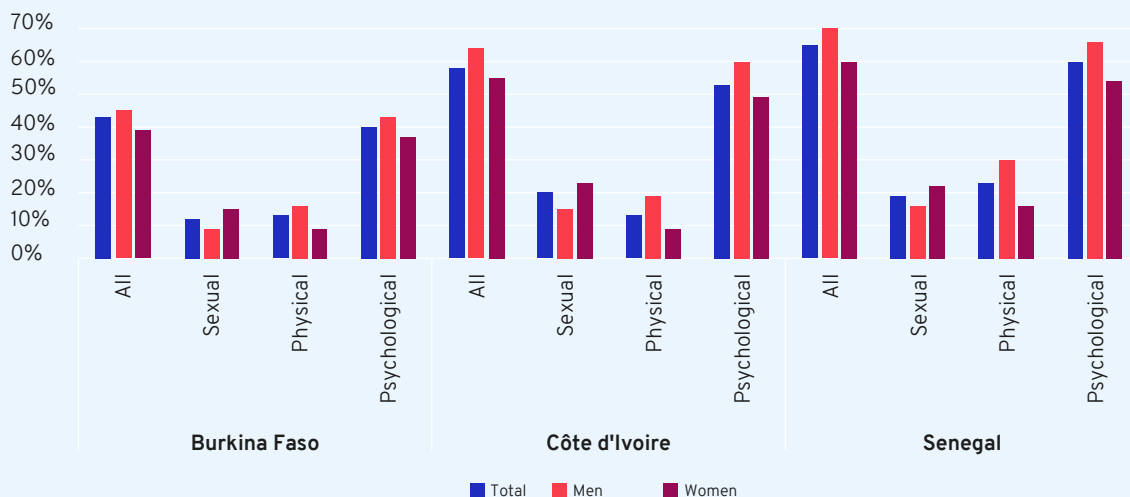
2.1.1. Prevalence: a widespread and persistent phenomenon

Violence and harassment in the world of work is a widespread phenomenon in West Africa, affecting workers of all categories, in formal and informal economy, and in both urban and rural areas. The four studies conducted confirm the magnitude of the phenomenon and show that, despite diverse methodologies and fields of analysis, their conclusions clearly converge.

Quantitative data from the ENSEA project reveal that more than one in two workers have experienced some form of violence and harassment

during their working lives in Côte d'Ivoire (58 per cent) and Senegal (65 per cent), and nearly one in two in Burkina Faso (43 per cent). Men report a higher overall prevalence than women, while women are more exposed to sexual violence and harassment. Psychological violence and harassment stands out as the most common form, followed by physical violence and then sexual violence and harassment (Figure 1). These findings are all the more worrying considering that between 33 and 38 per cent of victims, depending on the country, report having experienced violence and harassment in the previous 12 months, pointing to a phenomenon that is not only widespread but also ongoing, recurrent and persistent.

► **Figure 1: Prevalence of violence and harassment in the world of work**



Source: WWS surveys, conducted by ENSEA (Côte d'Ivoire), ANSD (Senegal), INSD (Burkina Faso), 2024

These findings are confirmed and enriched by surveys conducted within the informal economy (University of Paris II project) and qualitative studies (ADDA and HaFoP projects). Focusing on the informal economy in the capitals of Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal, surveys conducted by University of Paris II reveal that urban markets are spaces where verbal abuse, such as insults and humiliation, are widespread, particularly in the food and beverage, tailoring and retail sectors. ADDA highlights persistent forms of violence in Burkina Faso towards domestic workers and household waste collectors, fuelled by economic domination as much as by the social stigma attached to these occupations. Finally, HaFoP emphasizes that even within the public sector, which is governed by formal rules, moral harassment and abuse of authority remain commonplace and under-reported, often overlooked by management and by cumbersome redress mechanisms.

Forms of violence and harassment are diverse, with multifaceted manifestations. Research shows that psychological violence and harassment often lies at the heart of a continuum of violence and harassment: victims of psychological violence and harassment are also likely to be exposed to physical or sexual violence and harassment. This confirms that violence and harassment in the world of work does not occur in isolation, but is part of a cumulative dynamic, exacerbating the vulnerability of the most precarious workers.

Whether from a salesperson in the market in Abidjan, a domestic worker in Ouagadougou or a public sector worker in Dakar, testimonies converge: violence and harassment is observed throughout the world of work, regardless of status, sector or geographical area. While the forms vary, the evidence remains universal and concerning: violence and harassment in the world of work is a common reality for all

workers, undermining their human dignity and compromising the proper functioning of the world of work in West Africa.

2.1.2. Psychological violence and harassment

Of all the forms documented, psychological violence and harassment appears to be the most widespread and trivialized. According to surveys conducted by ENSEA, more than one in two workers have experienced such behaviours in Senegal (60 per cent) and Côte d'Ivoire (53 per cent), and four in ten workers in Burkina Faso (40 per cent). In these three countries, men report higher prevalence of psychological violence and harassment than women, with a gap of around ten percentage points in Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal, and nearly five percentage points in Burkina Faso. These situations of violence and harassment are neither isolated nor marginal: in each country, more than three-quarters of victims reported having experienced psychological violence and harassment on multiple occasions. These situations are also part of a continuum of other forms of violence and harassment: some 40 per cent of people having experienced psychological violence and harassment also report physical or sexual violence and harassment.

Psychological violence and harassment mainly manifests *as insults, humiliation in private or in public*, and behaviours intended to intimidate or instil fear, such as *shouting, threats, or hitting or breaking objects with the intention of frightening an individual*. Such acts are often accompanied by threats, degrading or discriminatory remarks, or contemptuous attitudes towards the worker.

Qualitative studies confirm and illustrate this reality. They highlight the normalization of such behaviours within the informal economy and shed light on the particularly high exposure to violence and harassment of workers employed in sectors, such as domestic workers and household waste pickers. The testimonies collected refer to humiliating comments, ostracism, mockery related to appearance or smell, and unfounded accusations of theft, often accompanied by corporal punishment or wage deduction.

2.1.3. Physical violence

Physical violence, although less widespread than psychological violence and harassment, remains a disturbing phenomenon in the countries studied. According to data collected by ENSEA, some 23 per cent of workers in Senegal, 13 per cent in Burkina Faso and 13 per cent in Côte d'Ivoire report having experienced physical violence during their working lives. While prevalence appears to be lower overall than that observed for other forms of violence and harassment, the frequency of incidents is striking: more than half of victims report having experienced such acts on several occasions, sometimes more than five times, indicating that these are recurring rather than isolated incidents. In the three countries, men are twice as likely as women to be exposed to physical violence at work.

Qualitative studies provide a better understanding of these practices. They highlight that the use of physical violence against domestic workers, often falsely accused of theft or negligence. In many cases, such acts of violence are perceived in society as a means of educating or disciplining workers, revealing a disturbing level of tolerance towards this type of behaviour in certain employment relationships. This social tolerance reinforces the precariousness and subordination of the most vulnerable workers, particularly in the domestic work sector and within the informal economy.

Physical violence most often manifests as *threats or physical gestures intended to intimidate or frighten, even in the absence of a weapon*. It can also take the form of direct assaults — such as *pushing, shaking, or slapping* — and, to a lesser extent, *threats involving the use of a weapon*.

2.1.4. Sexual violence and harassment

Sexual violence and harassment reveals an equally concerning dimension. According to ENSEA, nearly one in five workers in Côte d'Ivoire (20 per cent) and Senegal (19 per cent), and one in ten in Burkina Faso (11 per cent), report having experienced sexual violence and harassment in their working lifetime. In all three countries, such acts of violence and harassment are recurrent and persistent: more than 80 per cent of victims report having been exposed to them on several occasions, which points to a systemic rather than an isolated incident. There are marked differences between women and men, the phenomenon affecting women disproportionately more — a difference of 8 percentage points in Côte d'Ivoire and 6 percentage points in Burkina Faso and Senegal.

Findings from qualitative studies corroborate the occurrence of such acts of violence and harassment, particularly in vulnerable sectors and within the informal economy. Domestic workers report experiences ranging from unwanted sexual touching and persistent advances to, in some cases, rape that goes unreported and unsanctioned. Housing conditions imposed on workers — such as being forced to sleep in a communal space with no privacy — further exacerbate feelings of subordination and vulnerability.

Sexual violence and harassment most frequently manifests as *sexually suggestive looks or gestures, as well as sexually suggestive comments or questions that made the person targeted feel uncomfortable*. Another type of behaviour also appears among the most prevalent: *touching, caressing, embracing or kissing a person without that person's consent*.

Victims of sexual violence and harassment in the world of work

19 %



Senegal

20 %



Côte d'Ivoire

11 %



Burkina Faso

► 2.2. Profile of victims and perpetrators of violence and harassment in the world of work

2.2.1. Profile of victims

Men report higher overall prevalence, while women report higher prevalence of sexual violence and harassment

In the countries studied, men report a slightly higher overall prevalence of violence and harassment in the world of work than women. They are also more exposed to physical and psychological violence and harassment, particularly in the context of market and non-market services. Women, on the other hand, are more exposed to sexual violence and harassment, with marked differences compared to men and higher levels of recurrence. Young women (aged 18–34) and those with low levels of education are particularly affected.

Young people and older people are particularly exposed

The data collected in the three countries reveal high prevalence of psychological and sexual violence and harassment among older people (aged 65 and over), with such incidents occurring repeatedly during their working life. Young people (aged 18–34) also appear to be significantly affected, particularly by recurrent and recent acts. With regard to physical violence, profiles differ depending on the context: older people are the most affected group in Côte d'Ivoire, while workers aged 25 to 34 are particularly affected in Senegal. In Burkina Faso, the prevalence of physical violence remains low overall across all age groups.

All levels of educational attainment are affected, but with differing dynamics

The relationship between the level of educational attainment and the risk of exposure to violence and harassment in the world of work is complex. While psychological violence and harassment is more prevalent among workers with low levels of education in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, in Senegal workers who have attended vocational training programmes are more exposed. Conversely, sexual violence and harassment is proportionally more prevalent among workers who have attained higher education across all three countries, although prevalence levels remain high in Senegal among workers with low levels of education. Physical violence varies across country context, with a higher prevalence in Senegal among workers with lower levels of education and in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire among workers with higher levels of education.

Certain sectors and occupations are more exposed

Violence and harassment in the world of work varies across sectors of activity and occupations. Workers in the service sector are the most exposed. Men are more affected by violence and harassment in market services (retail, transport, hospitality and business services), while women are more affected in non-market services (public administration and community and social services). All occupational categories are affected by some form of violence and harassment in the world

of work. Administrative support staff, technicians and service sector workers are particularly exposed to psychological violence and harassment, while machine operators and certain occupational categories, which vary from one country to the next, are more affected by physical violence. Workers in the service and sales occupations are among those most exposed to sexual violence and harassment. Conversely, skilled workers in the agricultural sector report lower levels of prevalence.

2.2.2. Profile of perpetrators

Men are the main perpetrators, although women also perpetrate certain forms of violence and harassment

Across all the countries studied, men constitute the majority of perpetrators of violence and harassment in the world of work, both against women and men. However, women are also identified as perpetrators, particularly in cases of psychological and physical violence and harassment against other women. In Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal, nearly 45 per cent of women victims of psychological violence and harassment identified other women as perpetrators, whereas 23 per cent and 30 per cent of them, respectively, experienced this type of violence and harassment mainly from male perpetrators. The remaining share of the victims experienced this type of violence and harassment by male and female perpetrators to the same extent.

Physical violence is mainly perpetrated by men, identified by more than 80 per cent of male victims across all three countries, and over 50 per cent of female victims in Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire. Women are also important perpetrators of physical violence against women, accounting for more than 20 per cent, with the remaining cases involving both men and women perpetrators. Sexual violence and harassment is the form most pronounced by gender disparity in perpetrator profiles. Men are the main perpetrators against women, while women constitute the majority of perpetrators against men. In Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal, male perpetrators account for up to 90 per cent of reported cases of sexual violence and harassment experienced by women, while women account for up to 70 per cent of reported cases experienced by men.

Clients, students and patients are the main perpetrators

Clients, students, patients or their family members are the main perpetrators of violence and harassment in the world of work in the countries studied (Figure 2). They account for up to 40 per cent of perpetrators of psychological and sexual violence and harassment against women across all three countries. Violence and harassment in the world of work perpetrated by unknown individuals is also notable, particularly against women. In all three countries, approximately one in five women report having been victims of psychological violence and harassment, and one in

 **Most often, perpetrators are people who exercise some form of authority over their victims.** That said, violence and harassment can also occur between colleagues, since the workplace remains a space for interaction among adults.

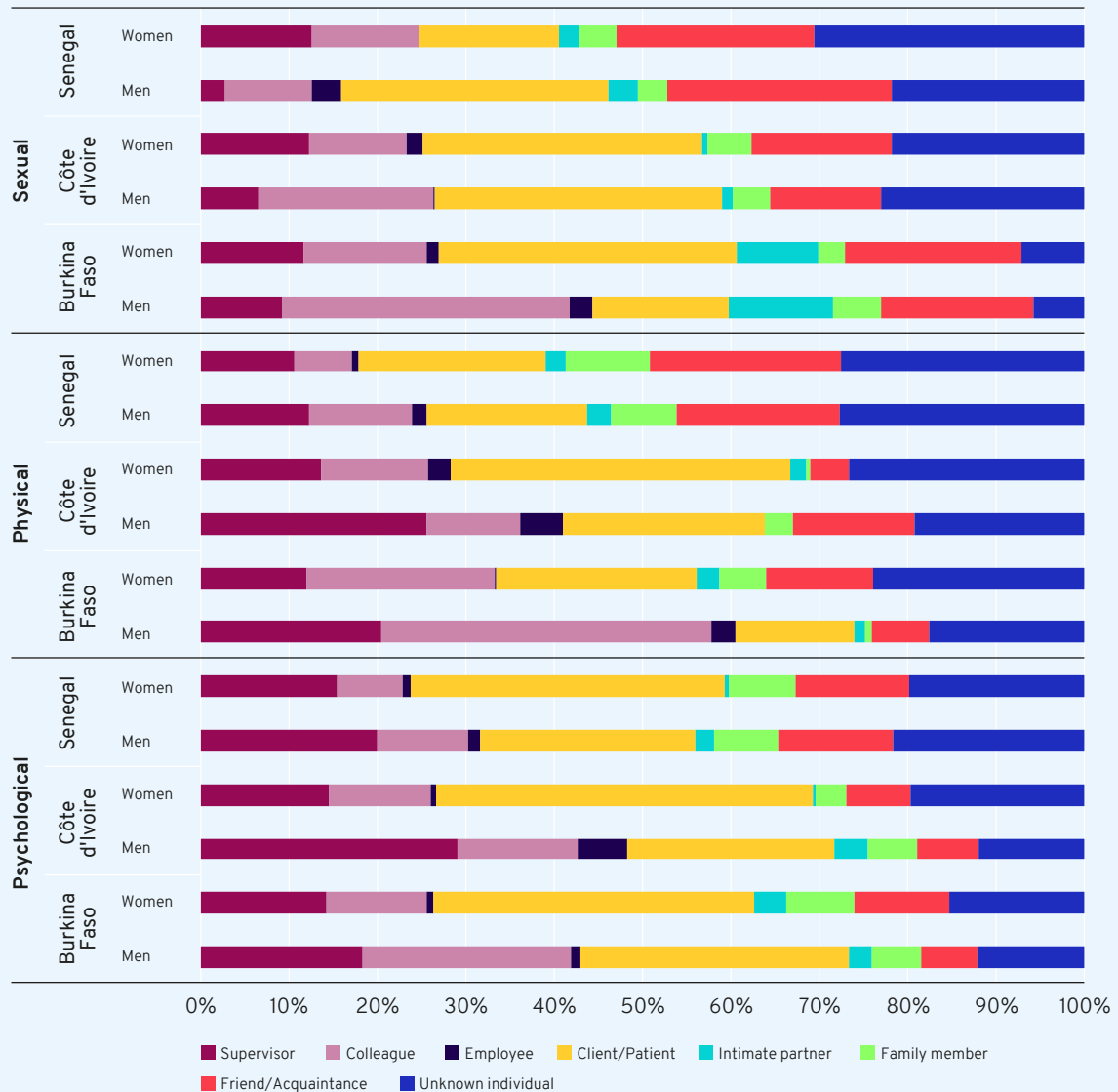
► *Head of a ministerial gender unit (Senegal), HaFoP project*

Chapter 2

three women report having been victims of physical violence, perpetrated by individuals completely unknown to their immediate work

environment. In Senegal, unknown individuals stand out as the main perpetrators of sexual violence and harassment against women.

► **Figure 2: Main perpetrators of violence and harassment in the world of work**



Source: WWS surveys, conducted by ENSEA (Côte d'Ivoire), ANSD (Senegal), INSD (Burkina Faso), 2024

Supervisors and colleagues also stand out as recurring perpetrators, indicating that violence and harassment in the world of work is not limited to hierarchical relations but also occurs among peers. In cases of psychological and physical violence and harassment, the

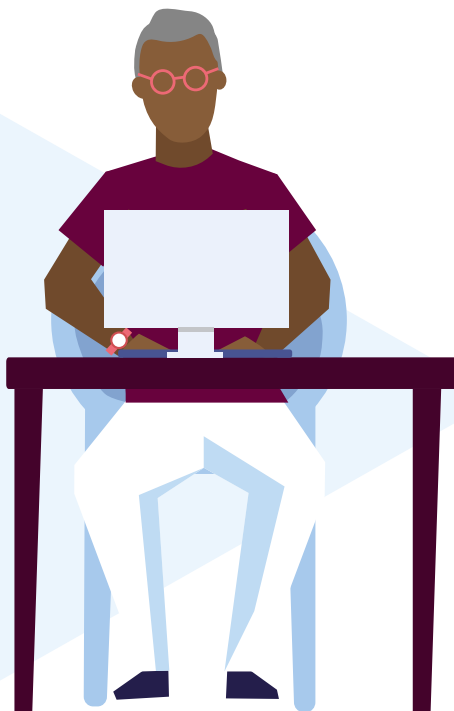
supervisors and colleagues are significant perpetrators, particularly against men. In the case of sexual violence and harassment, colleagues and friends are identified as important perpetrators, while supervisors also remain significant perpetrators, particularly against women.

► 2.3. Places and circumstances of violence and harassment in the world of work

The workplace is the main place for all forms of violence and harassment in the world of work—psychological, physical or sexual. The data collected show that certain factors related to work organization increase the risk of violence and harassment, in particular “pressure at work” and “poor organization at work”. Working with difficult clients, as well as slow periods, also contribute to violence and harassment in the world of work, albeit to a lesser extent.

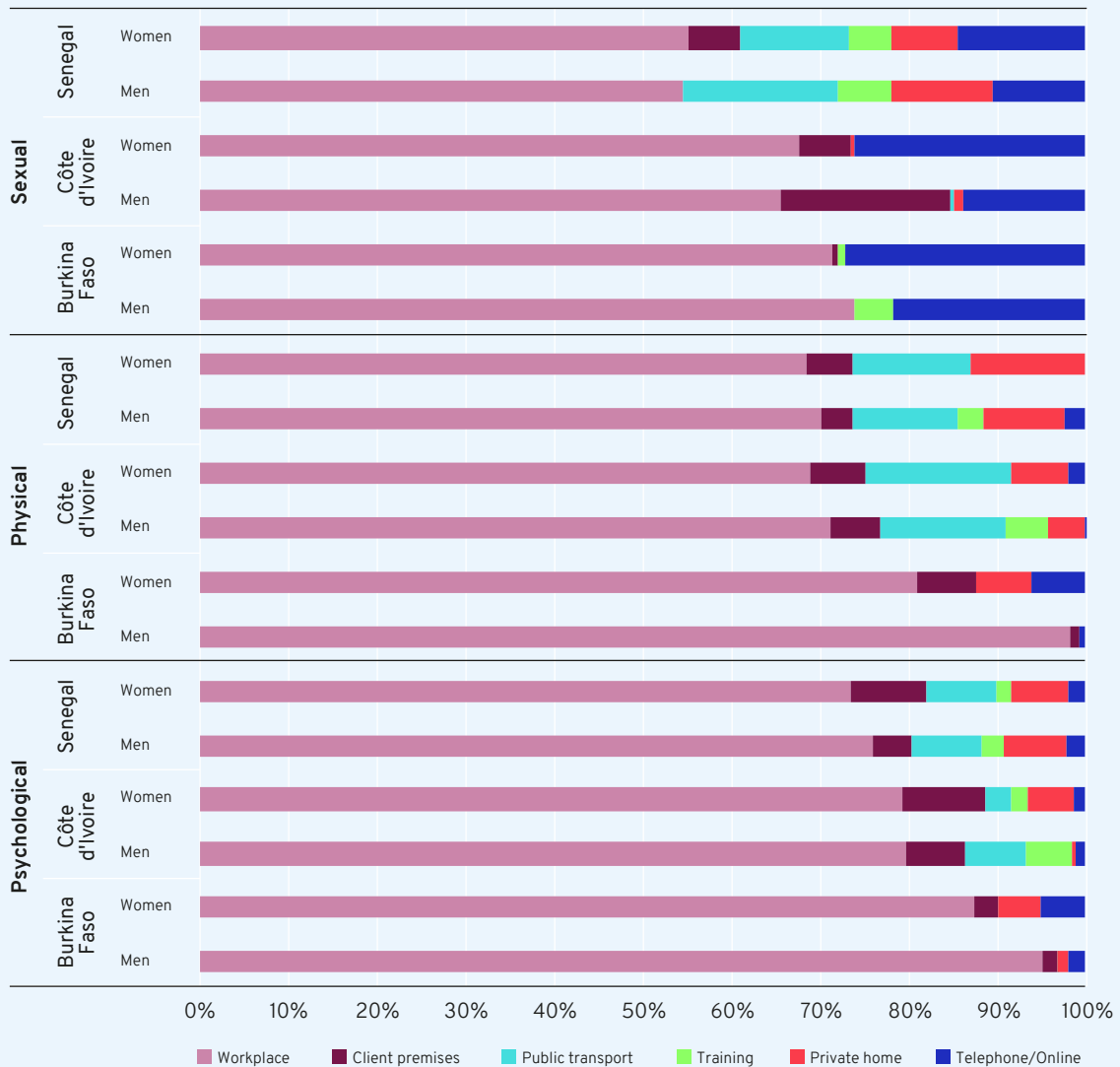
Beyond the workplace: exposure in other spaces

While the workplace remains the main place of violence and harassment, it is not the only one (Figure 3). Public transport is a noteworthy space for physical violence, particularly in Côte d’Ivoire and Senegal. Other places, such as clients’ premises are more often associated with psychological violence and harassment, while victims’ private homes appear to be more closely linked to physical violence, albeit less frequently. With regard to sexual violence and harassment, remote communications (telephone, messages, online interactions) stand out as an important setting.



Chapter 2

► Figure 3: Places of violence and harassment in the world of work



Source: WWS surveys, conducted by ENSEA (Côte d'Ivoire), ANSD (Senegal), INSD (Burkina Faso), 2024

Pressure at work and poor organization are major triggers

Circumstances conducive to violence and harassment in the world of work mainly relate to pressure at work and poor work organization. Pressure at work is the factor most frequently cited by victims of violence and harassment, regardless of the specific form. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in Burkina Faso, where it is identified as a trigger by nearly 79 per cent of victims of physical violence and 62 per cent of victims of psychological violence and harassment. Such pressure appears to affect men to a greater degree, with the exception of cases of sexual violence and harassment, where women are more affected.

Poor work organization is also described as an aggravating factor. Poorly organized work environments, where responsibilities are unclearly defined, workloads are excessive or the pace of work is particularly high, create conditions conducive to violence and harassment, primarily among men.

Finally, interaction with difficult clients stands out as a particularly significant factor for women, especially with regard to psychological or sexual violence and harassment. This observation is recurrent in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal. Conversely, other situations, such as slow periods or episodes of restructuring, appear to have a more limited impact.



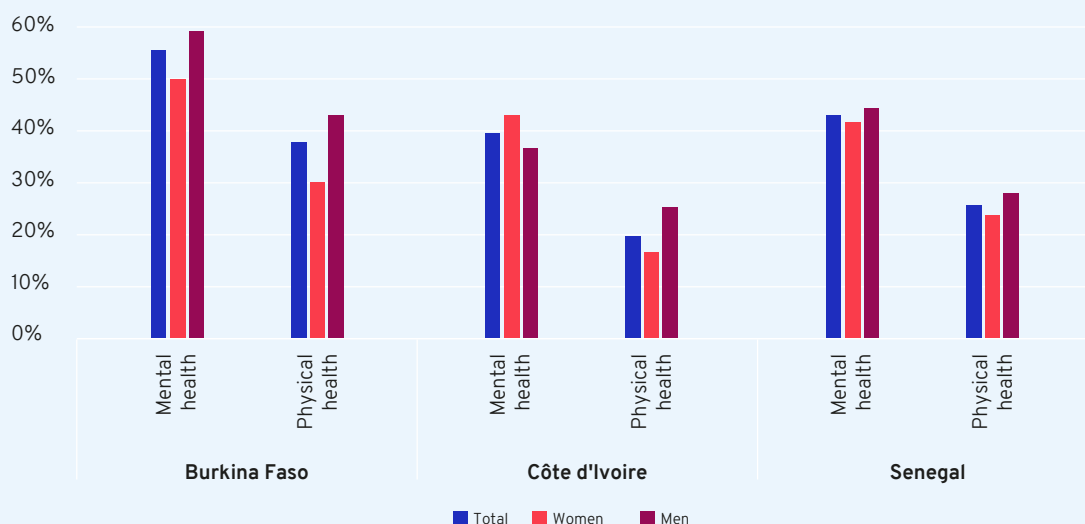
► 2.4. Effects of violence and harassment in the world of work

2.4.1. Effects on mental and physical health

Violence and harassment in the world of work has profound repercussions on victims' mental and physical health, as demonstrated by converging findings across three of the countries studied. According to the ENSEA data, nearly two out of five victims of violence and harassment in Côte d'Ivoire (36 per cent) and Senegal (39 per cent), and around one in two in Burkina Faso (50 per cent), report moderate or severe deterioration in their mental health (Figure 4). These effects are more pronounced in rural areas, where limited access to psychosocial support heightens vulnerability among workers. Women appear to be more affected than

men in Côte d'Ivoire (39 per cent compared to 33 per cent), while in Burkina Faso, deterioration in mental health is higher among men (51 per cent compared to 45 per cent for women). Age-related disparities are limited, with the exception of Burkina Faso, where workers aged 35 to 64 are particularly affected. Impacts on physical health are also substantial. Among those who experienced violence and harassment, 18 per cent of victims in Côte d'Ivoire, 23 per cent in Senegal and 34 per cent in Burkina Faso report having suffered physical harm. Once again, impacts on physical health are more frequent in rural areas and affect men to a greater degree. Workers over the age of 45 are the most exposed to physical effects, suggesting increased vulnerability with age.

► **Figure 4: Effects of violence and harassment on mental and physical health**



Source: WWS surveys, conducted by ENSEA (Côte d'Ivoire), ANSD (Senegal), INSD (Burkina Faso), 2024

The results from University of Paris II project provide further insight into the nature of these impacts by analysing three dimensions of mental health: depression, anxiety, stress. Using standardized scale Lovibond and Lovibond (1995), econometric analyses show that physical violence is the most harmful (Table 1), increasing scores for depression (+4.2), anxiety (+4.1) and stress (+2.8) compared to non-victims. Sexual

violence and harassment follows, with marked effects on depression (+2.4) and anxiety (+1.2). Psychological violence and harassment, although more widespread, shows a more moderate impact, except on depression (+1.9). Women and young workers (under 30) are particularly vulnerable, while poor working conditions systematically amplify harmful effects associated with violence and harassment on mental health.

Table 1: Effects of violence and harassment on mental health

Type of violence and harassment	Effects on depression	Effects on anxiety	Effects on stress
Physical	4.190***	4.092***	2.774***
Psychological	1.935**	-	-
Sexual	2.376***	1.169*	-

Note: ***, **, * indicate significance at the 1 per cent, 5 per cent and 10 per cent levels, respectively.
Source: WWH surveys, led by the University of Paris II, 2022

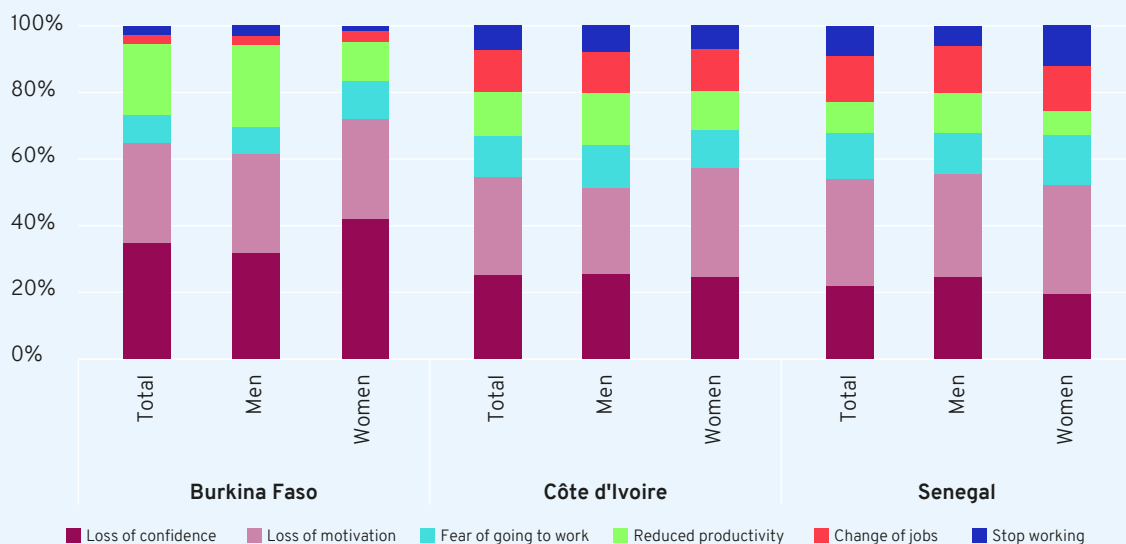
2.4.2. Effects on work performance

Violence and harassment in the world of work also affects workers' confidence, motivation, productivity and absenteeism, as well as their capacity to carry out their professional responsibilities (Figure 5). These effects vary according to the form of violence and harassment, gender, age, place of residence and propensity to report such acts.

Overall, a majority of victims of violence and harassment report no immediate impact on their work (66 to 75 per cent of victims, depending on the country). However, a significant share of workers report negative effects: loss of confidence and motivation (7 to 17 per cent), decreased productivity or apprehension about going to work (3 to 10 per cent), and absenteeism (7 to 8 per cent, with an average duration of between 6 and 12 days). The most severe effects — inability to work or permanent abandonment of employment — remain relatively rare (under 3 per cent) but do nonetheless occur.

The data collected in these studies also show that the effects are more pronounced among victims who reported all acts of violence and harassment experienced, confirming that an accumulation of incidents exacerbates repercussions at work. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, victims who reported all acts of violence and harassment suffered greater loss of motivation (27 per cent) and self-confidence (19 per cent) than those who reported only some acts, or none at all. Differences between men and women are also significant. In Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal, men report slightly higher absenteeism than women, while in Burkina Faso, women are the most affected. Place of residence also matters: the average number of days of absence is higher in urban areas, particularly among women.

► Figure 5: Effects of violence and harassment on work performance



Source: WWS surveys, conducted by ENSEA (Côte d'Ivoire), ANSD (Senegal), INSD (Burkina Faso), 2024

2.4.3. Effects on job satisfaction and working conditions

The results of the University of Paris II project show that exposure to violence and harassment in the world of work systematically is associated with lower levels of job satisfaction, whether in terms of income, work or working hours (Table 2). Workers who experience violence and harassment report lower satisfaction with their income (-3.1 per cent), work (-5.6 per cent) and working hours (-5.9 per cent). These effects vary according to the form of violence and harassment experienced. Psychological violence and harassment—the most common form—leads to a significant decline in satisfaction across all three dimensions. Physical violence has a stronger impact on dissatisfaction regarding working hours and work. The interviews conducted indicate that many such incidents occur at the end of the day, suggesting a possible link between late working hours and heightened exposure

to violence and harassment. Finally, sexual violence and harassment seems mainly associated with dissatisfaction with income, while no significant impact having been observed with regard to other aspects of work.

Age and gender also influence the effects observed. Workers under the age of 30 are more exposed to violence and harassment in the world of work, with notable reduction of job satisfaction with regard to work (-4.4 per cent) and income (-5 per cent). However, they express greater confidence in their future income prospects (+12.8 per cent), suggesting a positive outlook for their career path. Women, on the other hand, show greater dissatisfaction with income, often reflecting a feeling of persistent wage disparities. The number of dependants in the home increases satisfaction with working hours, due to a perceived need for flexibility to balance work and family responsibilities, while also being associated with higher expectations for future income.

Table 2: Effects of violence and harassment on job satisfaction

Type of violence and harassment	Satisfaction with work	Satisfaction with working hours	Satisfaction with income
Overall	-0.056***	-0.059***	-0.031***
Psychological	-0.06***	-0.050***	-0.034***
Physical	-0.05*	-0.137***	-
Sexual	-	-	-0.046*

Note: ***, **, * indicate significance at the 1 per cent, 5 per cent and 10 per cent levels, respectively.
Source: WVH surveys, led by the University of Paris II, 2022

All forms of violence and harassment in the world of work are associated with a deterioration in working conditions, although the magnitude of the effect varies depending on the nature of the acts suffered and the quality of the work environment (good, average or poor). Among individual factors, gender and level of pay play a decisive role, while the occupation, number of dependants or religion remain limited. Sexual violence and harassment can occur even when working conditions are considered favourable — often in connection with implicit expectations regarding the appearance or behaviour of women workers

when dealing with customers. Conversely, psychological violence and harassment tends to lower the overall assessment of working conditions, while physical violence has the most significant impact on job satisfaction and ability to work. This suggests that some workers develop coping mechanisms in environments where violence and harassment is recurrent, and that such mechanisms may contribute to normalizing violence and harassment. This phenomenon must be taken into account when analyzing the effects of violence and harassment in the world of work.



▶ 3. Legal and institutional approaches to preventing and eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work

3.1. Towards an inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach	P34
3.2 Institutional structures and prevention, protection and redress mechanisms	P37
3.3. Reporting procedures a weak and ineffective link	P38

The research conducted in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal provides insight into how existing national legal frameworks address the issues covered by ILO Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206, while highlighting areas for potential improvement towards a more inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach. Although an in-depth legal analysis was not the main objective of the research

projects, this work nevertheless provides a solid foundation for understanding how each country addresses the issue of violence and harassment in the world of work. It reveals both points of convergence and country-level specificities, which shed light on the diversity of responses in West Africa in terms of prevention, protection and access to remedies.

► 3.1. Towards an inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach

Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206 are the first international standards to recognize the right of every person to a world of work free from violence and harassment. This right applies to all sectors, public or private, in the formal and informal economy, and protects all workers and other persons present in the world of work, regardless of their contractual status.

To ensure such protection, Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206 call on States to adopt, “in consultation with representative employers’ and workers’ organizations, an inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach for the prevention and elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work” (Article 4(2) of the Convention). Article 11(a) specifies that “violence and harassment in the world of work is addressed in relevant national policies, such as those concerning occupational safety and health, equality and non-discrimination, and migration.” This integrated approach draws not only on labour law, occupational safety and health law, criminal law, public law and legislation focused on

equality and non-discrimination, but also on national policies, sector-specific regulations and collective agreements. It makes it possible to approach violence and harassment in the world of work from different angles, while recognizing the diversity of realities at work and the people concerned. As such, it helps to ensure comprehensive, consistent prevention and protection covering all work situations. This approach is based on the observation that labour law and occupational safety and health law alone cannot guarantee the comprehensive protection sought by Convention No. 190. It highlights the need to take into account all causes and consequences, particularly those related to gender, to better understand, prevent and address all situations of violence and harassment (ILO 2021).

An examination of the existing legal frameworks in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal reveals multiple pre-existing legal bases in these countries, derived from different branches of law. These bases serve as an initial foundation for efforts to prevent and eliminate violence and harassment in the

world of work. However, these legal frameworks are still evolving and must be strengthened if they are to fully meet the requirements of Convention No. 190, whose ratification and full implementation are still under discussion in the countries studied.

In **Burkina Faso**, the *Labour Code* (2008) explicitly prohibits physical and psychological violence, as well as abuse, including sexual harassment.¹ A draft reform of the Labour Code is underway to strengthen these protections. Certain forms of violence and harassment, particularly those that violate physical or psychological integrity, are also punishable under the *Penal Code* (2018).² This legal framework is supplemented by the *Law on Prevention and Punishment of Violence against Women and Girls* (2015), which extends protections against various forms of gender-based violence.³ The *Civil Code* (1804) provides an additional level of protection, particularly by allowing for the nullification of employment contracts for defect of consent, a useful tool in contexts where pressure or abuse taint the employment relationship, particularly in the field of domestic work. Finally, several public policies, notably the *National Gender Policy* (2009), aim to promote women's empowerment and reduce inequalities, thereby indirectly contributing to the prevention of violence and harassment in the world of work.

In **Côte d'Ivoire**, the *Labour Code* (2015) defines psychological harassment and sexual harassment.⁴ It ensures protection for any person having refused to endure such behaviour, as well as third parties who report such behaviour.⁵ The *Penal Code* (2019) complements this framework by providing for punishment of violations of physical or psychological integrity liable to affect ability to work, and more broadly criminalizes psychological harassment, sexual harassment and rape.⁶ In addition, Côte d'Ivoire draws on regional and international instruments, such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Maputo Protocol, to strengthen legal protections, particularly with regard to violence against women. At the institutional level, implementation of the *National Plan to Combat Gender-Based Violence* (2021-2025) has served to strengthen institutional coordination and promote gender mainstreaming in public policies.

In **Senegal**, the *Constitution* (2001) and *Penal Code* (1965) constitute the current legal basis for protection against violence and harassment. A reform of the *Labour Code* (1997) is underway to explicitly include harassment in the world of work. The Penal Code establishes sexual harassment as a criminal offence and provides for imprisonment of between six months and three years for abuse of

1 According to the provisions of Article 36(6) of the *Labour Code* of Burkina Faso: "The employer must: [...] prohibit any form of physical or psychological violence or any other abuse, including sexual harassment". In addition, Article 37 of the Labour Code states that: "Sexual harassment at work is prohibited. [...] Sexual harassment means obtaining sexual favours from another person by means of orders, words, intimidation, acts, gestures, threats or coercion".

2 See Articles 512-18 to 512-23 of the *Penal Code* of Burkina Faso on acts of intentional violence affecting physical integrity, as well as Articles 533-1 to 533-18 on indecent assault and sexual assault.

3 See Law No. 061-2015/CNT of 6 September 2015 on the prevention, punishment and redress of violence against women and girls and the care of victims.

4 Article 5, paragraph 4, of the *Labour Code* of Côte d'Ivoire defines sexual harassment as "sexually connotated abusive behaviour, threats, attacks, spoken or written communication, intimidation, attitudes, repeated actions against an employee, intended to obtain sexual favours for oneself or for a third party". Similarly, Article 5, paragraph 5 defines psychological harassment as: "abusive behaviour: threats, attacks, verbal abuse, intimidation, written communications, attitudes, repeated actions against an employee, with the purpose or effect of degrading said employee's working conditions and which, as such, are liable to undermine his/her rights and dignity, alter his/her physical or mental health or compromise his/her professional future". Article 5, paragraph 6, adds that any means may be used to prove harassment.

5 Article 5, paragraph 3, of the *Labour Code* of Côte d'Ivoire specifies that: "For employment decisions, particularly with regard to hiring, compensation, training, assignment, qualification, classification, promotion, transfer, termination, renewal of employment contracts or disciplinary sanctions, no consideration shall be taken of the fact that the party concerned has refused to submit to acts of harassment, or that a witness has reported such acts".

6 See Articles 403 and 404 of the *Penal Code* of Côte d'Ivoire.

authority.⁷ The 1999 law amending the Penal Code introduced specific provisions providing for punishment of violence against women,⁸ including rape, paedophilia, domestic violence, female genital mutilation and sexual harassment. This framework also protects individuals against physical violence (assault and battery) liable to compromise their ability to work, while taking into account the particular vulnerability of those exposed to domestic violence.⁹ A major reform was adopted in January 2020, fully criminalizing rape and paedophilia,¹⁰ with penalties of up to life imprisonment. This legislation is reinforced by cross-disciplinary initiatives, such as training for civil servants and awareness-raising activities carried out by gender units within ministries and trade unions, with a view to preventing high-risk behaviour and supporting victims.

All countries studied have also adopted provisions to address the root causes of violence and harassment in the world of work, particularly when they stem from violations of fundamental principles and rights at work, such as the right to equality and non-discrimination, including on the basis of sex or family status. In Burkina Faso, for example, legislation provides specific protections for pregnant workers and young women, as well as measures relating to equal pay, prevention of all forms of discrimination in employment and occupation, and reconciliation of work and family responsibilities.¹¹

Effective implementation of these provisions is crucial; their mere existence is no guarantee

of enforcement or effectiveness. A legal and institutional framework that fails to address discrimination—in law and in practice—cannot guarantee a world of work free from violence and harassment. Discrimination, in addition to being a form of violence and harassment in itself, is also a risk factor, as it increases the likelihood of falling victim to such behaviour.

An analysis of these various instruments shows that they aim not only to punish unacceptable behaviour, but also to establish prevention and protection measures, while taking into account local realities and the specific needs of women. However, although these legislative frameworks lay the foundations for comprehensive protection, their actual scope remains limited. In practice, awareness and enforcement remain inadequate, particularly in the informal economy, where the majority of workers in these three countries are employed. Lack of information among workers about their rights, the absence of effective remedies, weak institutional capacity and enduring social norms that tolerate violence and harassment in the world of work severely hamper the effectiveness of legal frameworks. This situation underscores not only the need to strengthen enforcement of existing laws, but also the importance of promoting a truly integrated approach that combines prevention, protection, awareness-raising and support for victims, with a view to transforming legal standards from mere theoretical principles into effective and accessible guarantees of protection for all.

7 See Article 319 bis of the *Penal Code* of Senegal.

8 Law No. 99-05 of 29 January 1999, amending certain provisions of the Penal Code.

9 See Articles 200 and 202 of the *Penal Code* of Senegal.

10 Law No. 2020-05 of 10 January 2020, amending the *Penal Code* of Senegal..

11 The provisions of the *Labour Code* of Burkina Faso prohibit and punish any discrimination in employment and occupation, in particular on the basis of sex (Article 4). The *Labour Code* also sets out the principle of equal pay for equal work, professional qualifications and performance (Article 182) and provides for appropriate working conditions for pregnant and breastfeeding women. See also Law No. 81-2015/CNT of 24 November 2015 on the general status of the national civil service, and the *Personal and Family Code* (2025), which provides that each spouse has the right to pursue a profession without the consent of the other (Article 295).

► 3.2. Institutional structures and prevention, protection and redress mechanisms

In accordance with the principles set out in Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206 calling on Member States to ensure easy access to appropriate and effective remedies and safe, fair and effective reporting and dispute resolution mechanisms and procedures — the countries studied feature a variety of relevant institutional arrangements and practices. These mechanisms, both formal and informal, reflect heterogeneous yet complementary implementation of legal frameworks aimed at preventing and eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work.

In **Burkina Faso**, several institutions contribute to enforcing legislation in this area. The labour inspectorate monitors compliance with legislation, informs and advises workers, and acts as a conciliation body in the event of disputes. The police and gendarmerie record complaints, conduct investigations, establish the facts and can intervene immediately in cases of violence. Finally, labour and criminal courts have jurisdiction to prosecute and punish perpetrators.

In **Côte d'Ivoire**, the institutional response to violence and harassment in the world of work is based both on public structures and an active network of civil society organizations. The Ministry of Women, Family and Children coordinates a multisectoral system comprising a toll-free number, emergency numbers, multisectoral platforms to combat gender-based violence, and gender-specific reception offices in police stations. Several specialized non-governmental organizations (NGOs) work to complement and enhance this system by offering victims attention and psychosocial support, providing legal assistance and conducting awareness-raising

activities. Examples include *Cœur à Cœur contre les violence basées sur le genre*, *Overcome Women*, *Stop au Chat Noir* and *La Ligue*.

In **Senegal**, support is organized around the police and gendarmerie, specialized brigades, social structures within the Ministry of Women, Family and Child Protection, as well as civil, social and criminal courts. Gender units established within government agencies play an essential role in listening to victims and providing guidance.

In these three countries, employers' and workers' organizations play a complementary role in preventing and combating violence and harassment in the world of work. They carry out awareness-raising, training and advocacy activities, conduct information campaigns on violence and harassment and promotion of ratification and implementation of Convention No. 190. Workers' organizations regularly offer support and guidance to victims, while employers' organizations encourage companies to adopt internal policies and promote the establishment of sector-wide prevention guidelines. In Burkina Faso, the priority areas are focal points and mediation in the public service, education and health sectors. In Côte d'Ivoire, workers' organizations are actively involved in legislative reforms and support for victims both in the private and public sectors. Finally, in Senegal, awareness-raising and advocacy actions, particularly in the education, health, tailoring and retail sectors, are carried out in the context of a tripartite dialogue process, alongside measures to strengthen corporate compliance with national and international standards.

▶ **The trade union stands by workers whenever the need arises.** It has always fought against all forms of violence and discrimination to defend the shared moral and material interests of all workers. But it cannot address problems if they are not reported.

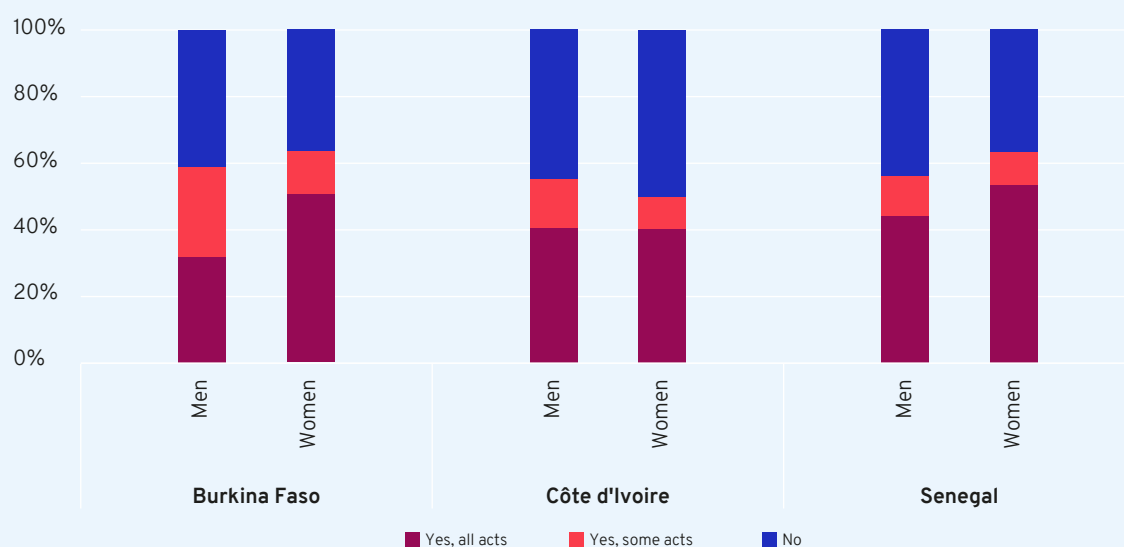
▶ Trade union representative for healthcare and social welfare workers (Senegal), HaFoP project

▶ 3.3. Reporting procedures: a weak and ineffective link

Reporting cases of violence and harassment in the world of work is essential to protect victims, ensure accountability of perpetrators and prevent recurrence of such behaviours. However, data collected in the countries studied reveal a prevalent pattern of under-reporting of such incidents. More than 40 per cent of victims never report acts of violence and harassment at work in Burkina Faso and Senegal, with particularly high non-reporting rates in Côte d'Ivoire (48

per cent). Furthermore, women are more likely than men to report such unacceptable incidents in Burkina Faso and Senegal (nearly 64 per cent compared to 59 per cent), while the trend is reversed in Côte d'Ivoire, where more than one in two women do not report incidents. Women are also more likely to report all acts of violence and harassment, except in Côte d'Ivoire, while men are more likely to report only certain acts of violence and harassment experienced.

▶ **Figure 6: Reporting of cases of violence and harassment**



Source: WWS surveys, conducted by ENSEA (Côte d'Ivoire), ANSD (Senegal), INSD (Burkina Faso), 2024

A rare action, hindered by social norms, shame and fear of retaliation

In all of the countries studied, the subject of violence and harassment in the world of work seems to be perceived as taboo. A significant percentage of victims consider incidents not serious enough to report (62 per cent in Senegal, 56 per cent in Côte d'Ivoire and 47 per cent in Burkina Faso), which discourages recourse to reporting procedures. Negative social perceptions, shame and fear of retaliation at work are consistently cited as additional reasons for non-reporting. In Côte d'Ivoire, men who experienced violence and harassment are more likely to refrain from reporting mainly for fear of losing their jobs (15 per cent) or escalation of the situation (10 per cent), while women are more concerned about negative social perceptions (10 per cent) or the ineffectiveness of procedures (10 per cent). In Senegal, the majority of men and women cite shame and embarrassment as the second most common reason for non-reporting (13 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively). Finally, in Burkina Faso, men are particularly concerned about negative social perceptions (24 per cent), while shame and embarrassment is a significant reason for both men and women (11 per cent and 22 per cent, respectively).

Women may be afraid of losing their jobs, suffering retaliation at work or seeing their reputation tarnished if they report sexual harassment or gender-based violence. Men, on the other hand, sometimes fear being seen as “weak” or being ridiculed if they admit to being victims of sexual harassment or gender-based violence. **In both cases, the fear of not being taken seriously can lead to silence.**

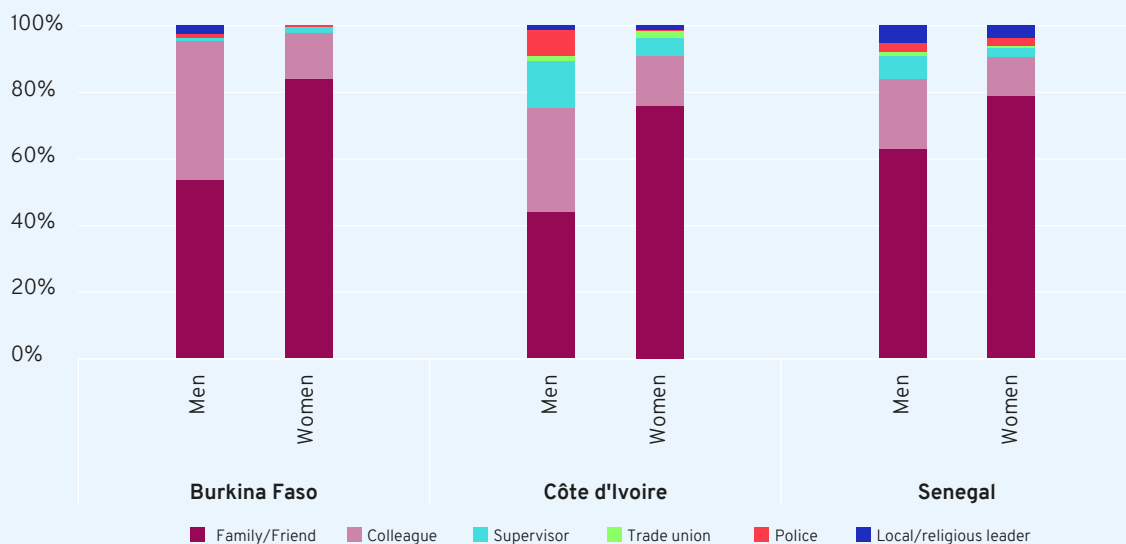
► Head of a ministerial gender unit (Senegal), HaFoP project

Research in the public sector shows that violence and harassment in the workplace are rarely reported and seldom discussed openly. Several factors may explain this reluctance to report incidents: the stigma attached to the status of victim, fear of retaliation and limited awareness of available remedies. Public servants often hesitate to speak out due to fear of being stigmatized or fired. Obstacles such as the threat of retaliatory transfers or even potential termination effectively discourage reporting. These perceived risks reinforce a tendency to remain silent, leading victims to refrain from testifying or filing complaints against perpetrators. This tendency to downplay the incidents, combined with limited knowledge of support mechanisms and difficulty identifying appropriate means of redress, foster a culture of silence and impunity, contributing to an environment in which unacceptable behaviours remain unreported, unrecognized and unpunished, and as such can persist.

Informal support as the norm

The results of the ENSEA project indicate that the majority of victims first turn to family or friends (75 per cent), followed by colleagues (20 per cent) (Figure 7). Women are more likely than men to seek support from family or friends (for instance, 87 per cent compared to 62 per cent in Côte d'Ivoire), while men are more likely than women to turn to colleagues (44 per cent compared to 18 per cent in Côte d'Ivoire). In contrast, victims contact the appropriate institutions (police, trade unions, labour inspectorate, human resources department, social or medical services) in less than five per cent of cases. When victims do seek formal support, they are generally satisfied with the support received. Nonetheless, the concrete effects remain mixed: less than half of victims report a tangible improvement in their situation after reporting, while the remainder observe no change and a very small share report an aggravation of the situation (less than four per cent). This highlights the current limitations of support mechanisms and its potential.

► **Figure 7: Source of support upon reporting violence and harassment**



Source: WWS surveys, conducted by ENSEA (Côte d'Ivoire), ANSD (Senegal), INSD (Burkina Faso), 2024

The prevalence of informal working arrangements and the absence of written contracts significantly limit access to effective remedies. Labour inspectorates, courts and social services are rarely seen as competent bodies for dispute resolution. Due to this limited visibility, victims seldom address these institutions and instead resort to self-censorship or informal support.

In the public sector, victims generally turn to gender units or human resources departments to report cases of violence and harassment. However, they hesitate to initiate formal procedures, often for fear of retaliation. Formal legal complaints remain rare, as victims generally confide in colleagues, family members or trade union representatives.

Witnesses rarely intervene. In Senegal, the University of Paris II project revealed that nearly a third of workers surveyed reported having witnessed physical assault, yet only one-third of these witnesses intervened. This low rate highlights the isolation victims of violence and harassment often face in the world of work.

► Cases of violence are frequently reported to me. At my level, I receive a lot of information, but the real problem is the lack of official reporting due to the taboo surrounding these situations... **Victims are advised to refer the matter to the competent authority, but they refuse for fear that it will end their career or compromise their professional advancement.** They are afraid that different inspectors will head about their case, which makes the process even more difficult.

► Head of a ministerial gender unit (Senegal), HaFoP project

Overall, research shows that while legal, institutional and social mechanisms may exist, their scope and effectiveness remain limited. Prevention, protection and redress mechanisms are often fragmented, little known or difficult to access, particularly for vulnerable individuals. Under-reporting, the predominance of informal remedies, fear of retaliation and the lack of sufficient resources for the relevant institutions are all major obstacles to ensuring that victims of violence and harassment

in the world of work receive effective support. These findings point to significant room for improvement, particularly with regard to awareness-raising, training and capacity-building, but also concerning coordination among the various actors and support for victims. In this context, it appears essential to sustain and reinforce ongoing efforts aimed at making prevention, protection and redress mechanisms more effective and accessible, thereby ensuring meaningful protection for all workers.





▶ 4. Recommendations for preventing and eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work in West Africa

Pillar I. An inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach	P44
Pillar II. Prevention and shared responsibility	P45
Pillar III. Protection, support and redress	P46

The following recommendations are based on the four research projects carried out in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal. They draw on the findings of quantitative and qualitative research, alongside a process of stakeholder consultation and co-creation, through qualitative

focus groups, participatory workshops and validation seminars to ensure their relevance, effectiveness and alignment with the institutional, cultural and socio-economic contexts of the three countries studied.

► Pillar I. An inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach

Recommendation No. 1: Accelerate the ratification and effective implementation of Convention No. 190

Accelerate the ratification and effective implementation of ILO Convention No. 190 and the accompanying Recommendation No. 206 to affirm a clear political and legal commitment by States to a world of work grounded in dignity, safety and respect for all. Ratification of this Convention would provide an essential normative basis for preventing and eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work, thereby harmonizing national legislation, guiding public policy action and strengthening social dialogue by involving all stakeholders in an integrated, inclusive and gender-responsive approach.

Recommendation No. 2: Adopt a holistic approach to decent work

Incorporate measures to prevent and combat violence and harassment in the world of work into a holistic approach to decent work that takes into account gender, occupational safety and health, and the specific characteristics of the informal economy. Such an approach would ensure coherent, inclusive and effective protection for all workers, including the most vulnerable.

Recommendation No. 3: Broaden the legal scope of protection

Incorporate into national legislation — in particular the Labour Code — a comprehensive, harmonized and operational definition of violence and harassment, covering all forms, places and situations in the “world of work”, regardless of workers’ employment status, in accordance with Convention No. 190. To ensure equitable and universal protection consistent with international labour standards, this definition should explicitly include workers in the informal economy.

Recommendation No. 4: Systematically mainstream the gender dimension

Explicitly include gender equality in laws and public policies to more effectively prevent gender-based violence and harassment, protect vulnerable groups, reduce structural discrimination, combat gender stereotypes and transform social, cultural and behavioural norms that perpetuate inequalities, tolerate violence and reinforce impunity, with a view to promoting a safe, respectful and inclusive world of work.

► Pillar II. Prevention and shared responsibility

Recommendation No. 5: Promote a culture of zero tolerance

Promote a culture of zero tolerance towards violence and harassment in the world of work, through education, communication and advocacy strategies with the participation of the media, traditional authorities, as well as community and religious leaders. The aim is to deconstruct social norms that trivialize or legitimize such behaviour, break the silence surrounding it and encourage reporting of violence and harassment in the world of work.

Recommendation No. 6: Strengthen awareness-raising and training for all stakeholders

Develop awareness-raising and capacity-building programmes, in accessible formats as appropriate, for all stakeholders to identify hazards and risk factors of violence and harassment in the world of work and the associated prevention and protection measures, in order to ensure timely, informed and coordinated responses. Strengthening awareness and training contribute to a workplace culture conducive to preventing and reducing the risk of violence and harassment and enable workers to become familiar with reporting mechanisms and appropriate avenues for redress.

Recommendation No. 7: Improve coordination among relevant institutions and stakeholders in the world of work

Ensure structured coordination among the national government, employers, workers and their respective representative organizations, as well as with local authorities and civil society, with a view to ensuring coherent, inclusive and effective implementation of prevention, awareness-raising and reporting measures. This coordination should enable to adapt strategies to local contexts and the needs of the most vulnerable groups.

Recommendation No. 8: Promote shared responsibility and social dialogue

Strengthen the capacity of employers' and workers' organizations to effectively design, implement and monitor measures intended to prevent and eliminate violence and harassment in the world of work. Employers' and workers' organizations should incorporate prevention of violence and harassment, as well as protection and support of victims, into their social dialogue agendas, and more specifically into collective agreements, in order to anchor these commitments in formalized and sustainable frameworks. National governments should also support employers' and workers' organizations, in implementing these commitments, in particular through the development of practical tools, training programmes, information campaigns, and regular and inclusive social dialogue mechanisms.

► Pillar III. Protection, support and redress

Recommendation No. 9: Establish accessible, safe and confidential reporting and mediation mechanisms

Establish confidential, safe and accessible reporting mechanisms suited to local realities (hotlines, mobile applications, community relay points) to ensure that victims can report situations of violence and harassment without fear of retaliation. Develop mediation or alternative dispute resolution mechanisms suited to both the formal and informal economy to ensure real accessibility for rural, informal or isolated workers. Legal and functional protection against retaliation should be systematically guaranteed in order to ensure credible, safe and effective redress mechanisms.

Recommendation No. 10: Provide psychosocial support and appropriate assistance to victims

Establish accessible psychosocial support, legal assistance and medical and social care services, as well as appropriate support mechanisms for victims (psychologists, social workers, community listening spaces), particularly in rural areas and localities with poor public services. Particular attention should be paid to the needs of victims of gender-based violence and harassment, ensuring gender-responsive support services.

Recommendation No. 11: Strengthen labour inspectorates and means of redress

Enhance the human, technical and logistical resources of labour inspectorates, as well as independent investigation and unannounced

inspection mechanisms, to ensure more effective monitoring of and compliance with laws and regulations addressing violence and harassment in the world of work. Sanctions must be clear, dissuasive and effective, and accompanied by enhanced protection for victims. Operational coordination between labour inspectorates, the judiciary, the police and social services is essential to reduce processing times, ensure systematic follow-up of complaints and guarantee effective access to remedies.

Recommendation No. 12: Establish a National Observatory on violence and harassment in the world of work

Establish a national observatory in charge of collecting, analysing and disseminating timely, comprehensive and reliable data on violence and harassment in the world of work, disaggregated by sex, form of violence and harassment, and sector of economic activity, among others. This institution would serve to inform government policies, strengthen prevention and improve protection and redress mechanisms. Its work should be public and accessible so as to support research and advocacy initiatives, strengthen the actions of social partners and decision-makers, and enhance understanding and visibility of the phenomenon.



► Conclusion

This report sheds light on a reality that has long remained largely invisible: the phenomenon of violence and harassment in the world of work in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal. This visibility stems from four research projects combining quantitative and qualitative approaches, which provides groundbreaking new evidence that this phenomenon is not only widespread but also deeply rooted in persistent structural discrimination. The studies covered a variety of contexts, including the informal and formal economies, and broke new ground by generating unprecedented nationally representative data across all sectors. Psychological, physical and sexual violence and harassment were systematically analysed, with attention focused on determinants, the profiles of victims and perpetrators, the places and circumstances in which violence and harassment occurs, and the effects on health, well-being and productivity at work.

Research conducted in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal between 2022 and 2024 reveals the pronounced magnitude and persistence of violence and harassment in the world of work, which affects more than one in two workers. Psychological violence and harassment emerges as the most widespread forms, often occurring on a continuum with physical or sexual violence and harassment. Young and older people, women and workers in vulnerable situations are particularly exposed to violence and harassment, while the service sector accounts for a substantial proportion of such incidents. Violence and harassment extends beyond the workplace: it occurs in public transport, in contact with the general public and in digital spaces. Their impact on mental and physical health, confidence, motivation and productivity is significant, leading to increased levels of anxiety, depression and stress.

This research also reveals significant limitations with regard to the implementation and

effectiveness of prevention, protection and redress systems. Existing mechanisms, although provided for in legislation, remain fragmented, little known and difficult to access, particularly for the most vulnerable groups. Some 40 per cent of victims of violence and harassment in the world of work never reported such incidents, as victims often perceive them as not “serious enough” or fear social stigma and retaliation. Victims rely primarily on informal support networks — family, friends, colleagues — while institutional mechanisms are rarely used due to a lack of visibility, trust or tangible results. These findings underscore the urgent need to strengthen prevention, improve coordination among stakeholders, provide greater protection for victims and witnesses, and make reporting mechanisms accessible, safe and effective.

In light of these findings, this report calls for structured, coordinated and sustained action. The recommendations put forward are intended to serve as a roadmap for preventing and eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work, strengthening the protection of victims and promoting shared responsibility. Their implementation would also contribute to fostering a political, social and institutional environment conducive to the ratification and effective implementation of ILO Convention No. 190 and accompanying Recommendation No. 206, which constitute key instruments for advancing a safe, respectful and inclusive world of work free from violence and harassment.

By making the invisible visible, this research paves the way for transformative change and action: better-informed public policies, strengthened protection mechanisms, and the promotion of a world of work grounded in dignity, equality, non-discrimination and zero tolerance for all forms of violence and harassment.

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