International Labour Organization

ILO Curriculum on Building Modern and Effective Labour Inspection Systems

Module 18

Labour Inspection and Violence and Harassment

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▶ Introduction and rationale

Violence and harassment (V&H), including gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH), in the world of work undermine human dignity and the effective enjoyment of fundamental principles and rights at work. They can cause profound and lasting harm to mental health and well-being, including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress symptoms and, in extreme cases, suicide (ILO, 2020). Beyond individual harm, V&H erode productivity, increase absenteeism and staff turnover, and weaken social cohesion in the workplace. Evidence also confirms the scale of the problem: the ILO's global survey reports that around one in five people in employment have experienced at least one form of violence and harassment at work during their working life (ILO, 2022c).

Recognising the scale and impact of V&H, the International Labour Conference adopted the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) and Recommendation No. 206, affirming everyone's right to a world of work free from V&H, including GBVH (C190, Art. 4(1); R206, Paragraph 1). Convention No. 190 further Member States to monitor and enforce national laws and regulations on V&H (Art. 10(a)), requiring that inspectorates and other competent authorities be empowered to enforce V&H laws, including through immediate orders and work stoppages where there is imminent danger (Art. 10(h)), while Recommendation No. 206 calls for V&H to fall within the mandates of labour inspection, OSH and equality bodies (Paragraph 21). Labour inspection therefore plays a central implementation role, by securing the enforcement of legal provisions, providing technical advice, and reporting gaps/abuses not covered by law (C81, Art. 3(1); C129, Art. 6(1)). Although the ability of labour inspectorates to intervene in cases of violence and harassment (V&H) depends on the scope of their mandate under national law and on whether the relevant legal provisions are enforceable by labour inspectors, the ILO Guidelines on General Principles of Labour Inspection explicitly recognize the prevention and elimination of V&H as falling within the remit of labour inspection where permitted by the applicable legal framework (ILO, 2022d, Paragraph 1.3.1.(b)). The inclusion of a safe and healthy working environment in the ILO's framework of fundamental principles and rights at work[1] further consolidates this normative foundation.

Addressing V&H through labour inspection is a natural extension of inspectors' traditional preventive and corrective functions. Where national law prohibits or regulates V&H and empowers inspection (as promoted by C190 and R206), inspectors are well placed to prevent, detect and remedy non-compliance by checking whether workplace prevention systems are in place and effective (e.g., policies, psychosocial risk assessment and control), assessing complaint and investigation procedures, safeguarding confidentiality and protection against retaliation, advising employers and workers, reporting regulatory gaps, and securing compliance through proportionate enforcement and referrals. Effective delivery of this expanded mandate, however, depends on inspectors' legal competence, independence, resources, cooperation arrangements, and training. Conventions Nos. 81 and 129 set minimum requirements on inspectors' status, powers, professional secrecy, resourcing and cooperation. Convention No. 190 calls for guidance, resources, training and tools on V&H (including gender-based V&H) for employers, workers and competent authorities (Art. 11(b)), and Recommendation No. 206 specifically urges gender-responsive training for labour inspectors and other officials so they can identify and address V&H, psychosocial risks and discrimination (Paragraph 20).

As the "world of work" expands to cover work-related communications, travel and other contexts (C190, Art. 3) and protects all persons regardless of contractual status (C190, Art. 2), inspection strategies and capacity-building become essential to make this mandate operational and thus must evolve accordingly.

In this context, strengthening inspectors' capacity to prevent, detect and respond to V&H is essential to translating international labour standards into concrete workplace realities. This module contributes to that objective by clarifying the international legal and policy framework on V&H, outlining the mandate and functions of labour inspectors in prevention, investigation and enforcement activities, and providing practical tools and strategies for coordinated, holistic, gender-responsive and effective inspection practice.

[1] ILO's 2022 Resolution on the inclusion of a safe and healthy working environment in the ILO's framework of fundamental principles and rights at work (ILO, 2022a).

By equipping inspectors with the knowledge and operational guidance required under Conventions Nos. 81, 129 and 190 and Recommendation No. 206, the module supports the realization of the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment.

▶ Objectives

By the end of this module, participants should be able to:

1. Explain the key international labour standards on V&H in the world of work—especially Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206—and their implications for labour inspection mandate and practice.
2. Apply the "world of work" approach (persons and contexts covered) to inspection planning, evidence gathering and enforcement.
3. Operationalize labour inspectors' roles across the compliance cycle: prevention and outreach, proactive risk-based inspections, complaint handling and investigation, enforcement and referrals, and feedback to policy and prevention systems.
4. Assess employer prevention systems for V&H as a psychosocial risk: workplace policy, worker consultation and participation, risk assessment and control, complaint and investigation procedures, confidentiality and anti-retaliation safeguards, training and information.
5. Use inspection tools and methods effectively: checklists, questionnaires, interviews and evidence collection, documentation review, proportionate inspection procedures, follow-up and reporting.
6. Design coordination and collaboration arrangements for V&H cases, including multi-agency cooperation and engagement with social partners.
7. Record, analyse, use and report V&H-related data to improve targeting, accountability, normative development and continuous improvement in inspection planning and practice.

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Abbreviations list

ACT	Portuguese Authority for Working Conditions (*Autoridade para as Condições do Trabalho*)
CBAs	Collective Bargaining Agreements
CCTV	Closed-Circuit Television
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
EU	European Union
EU-OSHA	European Agency for Safety and Health at Work
GBVH	Gender-Based Violence and Harassment
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
ILO	International Labour Organization
INSST	Spanish National Institute for Safety and Health at Work (*Instituto Nacional de Seguridad y Salud en el Trabajo*)
ITSS	Spanish Labour and Social Security Inspectorate (*Inspección de Trabajo y Seguridad Social*)
MoUs	Memoranda of Understanding
MSMEs	Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
OiRA	Online interactive Risk Assessment
OSH	Occupational Safety and Health
OSHMS	Occupational Safety and Health Management System
PRIMA-EF	Psychosocial Risk Management – European Framework
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
SLIC	Senior Labour Inspectors’ Committee
V&H	Violence and harassment
WEA	Danish Working Environment Authority
WHO	World Health Organization

▶ 1. International legal and policy framework on V&H

The international normative basis for preventing and addressing violence and harassment (V&H) in the world of work rests on a network of complementary instruments. At its centre are the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) and the Violence and Harassment Recommendation, 2019 (No. 206).

1.1. Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190)

Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), adopted by the International Labour Conference on 21 June 2019, constitutes the first international treaty to explicitly recognize the right to a world of work free from V&H (Art. 4(1)). Before the adoption of C190, protection against V&H could be derived from existing OSH and equality/non-discrimination standards, while C190 made the right to a world of work free from V&H explicit and specific. It affirms that such behaviours are incompatible with decent work and constitute violations or abuses of human rights (Preamble).

Box 1 – Definition of V&H and gender-based V&H

V&H is understood 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;* whereas the latter *means violence and harassment directed at persons because of their sex or gender, or affecting persons of a particular sex or gender disproportionately, and includes sexual harassment.*

Source: C190, Art. 1.

Convention No.190 establishes a broad and inclusive scope of protection, that transcends employees. It extends protection to *all workers and other persons in the world of work*, irrespective of their contractual status, including “persons in training, including interns and apprentices, workers whose employment has been terminated, volunteers, jobseekers and job applicants, and individuals exercising the authority, duties or responsibilities of an employer” (Art. 2). In addition, it applies to all sectors, public and private, formal and informal, and urban and rural (Art. 2).

The “world of work” extends beyond the physical workplace to include work-related locations and situations such as pay and break areas and sanitary facilities; work-related travel, training, events or social activities; Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) enabled communications; employer-provided accommodation; and commuting to and from work.

Under C190, each Member State must, in consultation with representative employers’ and workers’ organizations, adopt “an inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach” to prevent and eliminate V&H, including laws and regulations, policies, enforcement mechanisms, and access to remedies and support services (Art. 4), and must adopt laws and regulations prohibiting V&H in the world of work (Arts. 4 and 7). It also requires constituents to establish or strengthen enforcement and monitoring mechanisms, to provide for sanctions and to ensure effective means of inspection and investigation of cases of V&H, including through labour inspectorates, to secure compliance (Art. 4).

They are also required, under Article 8, to implement appropriate measures to prevent V&H, including recognizing the important role of public authorities in the case of informal economy workers; identifying, in consultation with worker’s and employers’ representatives, the sectors, occupations and work arrangements where workers are more exposed to V&H; and implement adequate measures to effectively protect such persons.

Under Article 9, laws and regulations shall require employers to adopt and implement a workplace V&H policy; integrate V&H and associated psychosocial risks into OSH management; identify hazards and assess V&H risks with worker participation and implement prevention and control measures; and provide information and training on identified V&H hazards/risks and the related preventive and protective measures.

In addition, under Article 10, each Member State shall take appropriate measures to: monitor and enforce V&H laws; ensure access to effective remedies and safe, fair reporting and dispute-resolution mechanisms (e.g., workplace procedures, external mechanisms and courts or tribunals), including protection against retaliation and access to support services; protect privacy and confidentiality; provide for sanctions; ensure gender-responsive complaint mechanisms and remedies for gender-based V&H; recognize and mitigate the impact of domestic violence at work; guarantee workers' right to withdraw from situations posing an imminent and serious danger due to V&H without retaliation; and empower labour inspectorates and other competent authorities to address V&H, including through immediately enforceable orders and stop-work orders in cases of imminent danger to life, health or safety.

Each Member , in consultation with representative employers' and workers' organizations, must also ensure that V&H is addressed in relevant national policies (including OSH, equality and non-discrimination, and migration) and provide accessible tools, training and guidance (including on gender-based V&H) to employers, workers and authorities, while promoting awareness-raising campaigns (Article 11).

1.2 Violence and Harassment Recommendation, 2019 (No. 206)

The Violence and Harassment Recommendation, 2019 (No. 206) is a non-binding instrument that complements Convention No. 190. It translates Convention's binding obligations into detailed guidance for national implementation, offering a practical blueprint for governments, employers, workers, and particularly for labour inspectorates tasked with prevention and enforcement.

It calls for an inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach embedding V&H, including GBVH, across labour and employment, OSH, equality and non-discrimination, and, where appropriate, criminal law (Paragraph 2), emphasizing the imperative of freedom of association and collective bargaining, particularly in higher-exposure sectors and work arrangements (Paragraph 3), encouraging States to promote collective bargaining as a prevention and mitigation tool (Paragraph 4).

National laws, regulations and policies on V&H should align with ILO equality and non-discrimination standards, notably the ILO's Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100) and Recommendation (No. 90), 1951, and the ILO's Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111) and Recommendation (No. 111), 1958, and other relevant instruments (Paragraph 5).

Building on the binding obligations set out in Convention No. 190, particularly Articles 5 and 9, R206 also situates V&H prevention within OSH systems, linking national OSH provisions on V&H to C155 and C187 (Paragraph 6) and calls for worker and their representative's participation in designing, implementing and monitoring workplace V&H policies (Paragraph 7). Such policies should state zero tolerance to V&H; set prevention programmes (with measurable objectives where appropriate); define rights and responsibilities; establish complaint and investigation procedures ensuring incidents are acted on; protect privacy and confidentiality while balancing workers' right to know hazards; and protect complainants, victims, witnesses and whistle-blowers against victimization and retaliation (Paragraph 7).

R206 specifies that the workplace risk assessment referred to in Art. 9(c) of C190 should consider factors increasing the likelihood of V&H, including psychosocial hazards and risks arising from working conditions and arrangements, work organization and human resource's management; third parties (e.g., clients, customers, patients and the public); and discrimination, abuse of power relations, and gender, cultural and social norms supporting V&H (Paragraph 8).

It also provides examples of sectors, occupations and work arrangements in which workers and other persons are more exposed to V&H (referred to in C190, Art. 8) that may warrant targeted action (night work, work in isolation, and sectors such as health, hospitality, social services, emergency services, domestic work, transport, education and entertainment) (Paragraph 9), calls for protective measures for migrant workers, particularly women, regardless of status (Paragraph 10) and for V&H prevention support in the informal economy and during formalization transitions (Paragraph 11), cautions against using "prevention" to restrict women's participation or exclude them from work (Paragraph 12) and clarifies that "vulnerable groups" should be understood consistently with international labour standards and human rights instruments (Paragraph 13).

R206 lists remedies supporting enforcement and compliance outcomes, including resignation with compensation, reinstatement, damages compensation, orders with immediate effect to stop conduct or change policies/practices, and legal fees/costs under national law (Paragraph 14), and emphasizes access to compensation for injury or illness, including of psychosocial nature, resulting in incapacity to work (Paragraph 15). For gender-based V&H, it sets out features of complaint/dispute mechanisms (specialized expertise, timely processing, legal advice/assistance, accessible guides and resources in the languages that are widely spoken in the country, and, where appropriate, shifting the burden of proof in non-criminal proceedings) (Paragraph 16) and identifies forms of victim support (e.g., counselling, hotlines, emergency services, medical care and psychological support, shelters, and specialized police units or specifically trained officers) (Paragraph 17). It also specifies measures to mitigate domestic violence impacts at work, including leave, flexible work arrangements, temporary protection against dismissal (except on unrelated grounds), inclusion in workplace risk assessments, referral systems, and awareness-raising (Paragraph 18).

In addition, it provides that the mandate of bodies responsible for labour inspection, OSH, and equality and non-discrimination (including gender equality) should cover V&H (Paragraph 21) and that labour inspectors and officials of other competent authorities should receive gender-responsive training to identify and address V&H, including psychosocial hazards and risks, gender-based V&H, and discrimination against particular groups (Paragraph 20).

Moreover, it encourages States to collect and publish V&H statistics disaggregated by sex, form of V&H and sector of economic activity, including for vulnerable groups or groups in situations of vulnerability disproportionately affected (Paragraph 22). It also calls on Members to fund and disseminate programmes addressing risk factors such as discrimination, abuse of power relations and supportive norms (Paragraph 23(a)); develop gender-responsive guidelines and training programmes to assist labour inspectors (and other officials) and to support employers, workers and their organizations (Paragraph 23(b)); provide model codes of practice and risk-assessment tools (Paragraph 23(c)); and promote awareness campaigns and educational materials to convey the unacceptability of V&H and prevent stigmatization (Paragraphs 23(d)–(g)).

1.3. Other relevant instruments supporting action on V&H

Beyond C.190 and R.206, a number of existing ILO instruments reinforce and inform the role of labour inspection in combating V&H.

1.3.1. Labour inspection conventions and guidelines

Labour Inspection Convention, 1947 (No. 81), Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129), set out the core functions and powers of labour inspectors.

The main functions of labour inspection are outlined in Article 3(1) of Convention No. 81 and Article 6(1) of Convention No. 129:

Box 2 – Main functions of the labour inspection system

1. To secure enforcement of legal provisions on conditions of work and the protection of workers, insofar as enforceable by labour inspectors.
2. To provide employers and workers with technical information and advice on compliance.
3. To report to the competent authority defects or abuse not covered by existing legal provisions.

Sources: Adapted from Article 3(1) of Convention No. 81 and Article 6(1) of Convention No. 129

While these functions are complementary and indivisible, the primary responsibility of labour inspection remains the effective enforcement of legal provisions, which underpins its credibility and deterrent effect.

The ILO's Guidelines on General Principles of Labour Inspection list "the prevention and elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work" alongside other areas within the remit of labour inspection (Paragraph 1.3.1), including wages, working time, OSH and other fundamental rights, reflecting that addressing abusive behaviour is integral to worker protection and safe and healthy working environments.

Labour Inspection Conventions Nos. 81 and 129 empower labour inspectors with several prerogatives to ensure they can discharge their duties effectively.

Box 3 – Labour inspectors' powers

1. Enter freely, without prior notice, at any hour of the day or night, any workplace subject to inspection.
2. Enter by day premises reasonably believed to fall under their authority.
3. Visit workplaces as often and as thoroughly as necessary.
4. Question employers or workers, privately or with witnesses.
5. Require, examine and copy documents/records.
6. Enforce the posting of notices.
7. Issue warnings or advice instead of initiating or recommending proceedings.
8. Require corrective measures where workplace conditions pose a threat to workers' safety or health.
9. Order specified changes to installations, equipment or processes within a time limit to ensure compliance with OSH legislation.
10. Issue orders with immediate executory force in the event of imminent danger to the health or safety of the workers.

Sources: Adapted from Arts. 12, 13, 16 and 17 of C81; and Arts. 16, 18, 21 and 22 of C219

Moreover, to ensure the proper application of legal provisions enforceable by labour inspectors and prevent obstruction, labour inspection conventions provide that non-compliant duty holders may be subject to prompt legal proceedings without prior warning, and that national law must establish and effectively enforce adequate penalties for violations and for obstruction of inspectors' duties (C81, Arts. 17 and 18; C129, Arts. 22 and 24).

For enforcement to be effective in practice, sanctions must be adequate, proportionate and dissuasive, and must be applied consistently. Without credible sanctions, the preventive and protective framework established under Convention No. 190 risks remaining ineffective.

In addition, labour inspection Conventions set minimum requirements on inspectors' recruitment, status, training and resources, along with incompatibility requirements, professional secrecy and confidentiality regimes, to ensure competence, integrity, independence, authority and impartiality. They provide that labour inspectors shall: be public officials, whose status and conditions ensure stable employment and independence; include both women and men; be recruited solely on qualifications and adequately trained; be sufficient in number and provided with accessible, equipped local offices, transport (where needed) and reimbursement of necessary travel expenses; have no direct or indirect interest in supervised undertakings; keep manufacturing/commercial secrets and working processes confidential; treat complaint sources as absolutely confidential; and not indicate to employers that an inspection resulted from a complaint (C81 , Arts. 7-11 and 15; C129, Arts. 8-10, 14, 15 and 20). In the context of violence and harassment cases—often involving sensitive power relations—these guarantees of independence are particularly critical. Inspectorates must ensure that inspectors can carry out investigations free from undue influence, including political, economic or organizational pressure, while maintaining impartiality and objectivity.

Labour Inspection Conventions Nos. 81 and 129 require labour inspectorates to cooperate with other government services and with relevant public or private bodies, and to collaborate with employers, workers and their organizations (C81, Art. 5; C129, Art. 12). They also establish reporting duties: labour inspectors and local offices must submit periodic reports to the central inspection authority on inspection results (C81, Art. 19; C129, Art. 25). The central authority must then publish an annual general report within 12 months of the end of the year and transmit it to the ILO (C81, Art. 20; C129, Art. 26), covering, among other matters, applicable laws, inspection staff, the workplaces and workers covered, inspection visits, violations and penalties, and statistics on occupational accidents and diseases (C81, Art. 21; C129, Art. 27).

ILO's Guidelines on General Principles of Labour Inspection further emphasize that inspection reports are essential for measuring results and improve efficiency: each visit should be documented and consolidated to build the inspectorate's "institutional memory." (ILO, 2022d, 3.4). They also highlight modernization through information technology—electronic case-management, digital reporting and data analytics—to support timely, valid and reliable inspection data and better detect patterns (e.g., clustering of V&H complaints, V&H emerging forms) and target resources (ILO, 2022d, 5.2.5–5.2.7). This kind of modernization strengthens labour inspection's capacity to respond to emerging risks, and helps align traditional inspection functions with the requirements of C190 and R206 in pursuing a world of work free from V&H.

The alignment of traditional labour inspection functions with the requirements of C190 and R206 is crucial for achieving a world of work free from V&H. Labour inspection should be understood as an integral component of the broader labour administration system, as defined under ILO Convention No. 150. Within this system, labour inspectorates operate under the direction and coordination of a central authority responsible for labour policy, ensuring coherence between legislation, enforcement, and national strategies on decent work. Effective prevention and elimination of violence and harassment therefore depend not only on inspection activities, but also on the capacity of labour administration systems to coordinate policies, allocate resources, and ensure consistent application of the law across sectors and regions.

1.3.2. ILO fundamental conventions on OSH

The Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155) applies to all workers[2] and all branches of economic activity, including the public service, and sets the framework for a coherent national policy on OSH and working environment aimed at preventing accidents and injury to health arising out of, linked with or occurring in the course of work, by minimizing, so far as is reasonably practicable, the causes of hazards in the working environment (Arts. 1(1), 2(1), and 4(2)). This policy must be formulated, implemented and periodically reviewed in consultation with the most representative employers' and workers' organizations, and shall clarify the OSH functions and responsibilities of public authorities, employers, workers and others, reflecting their complementarity and national conditions and practice (Arts. 4(1) and 6).

Importantly, C155 defines "health" to include both physical and mental elements Art. 3(e)), thereby covering V&H psychosocial risk factors in the world of work.

To implement the national OSH policy, Convention No. 155 calls on Member States to adopt a set of measures, including: ensuring effective enforcement through an adequate inspection system and penalties for their violations (Art. 9); providing advice and guidance to employers and workers (Art. 10); regulating the design, construction, organization, operation and modification of undertakings and work equipment (Art. 11(a)); as regards occupational accidents and diseases, requiring their notification, investigation, and annual publication of statistics (Arts. 11(c)–11(e)); protecting workers from undue consequences when they withdraw from a work situation which they have reasonable justification to believe presents an imminent and serious danger to their life or health (Art. 13); integrating OSH into education and training at all levels (Art. 14); and ensuring coordination among competent authorities and bodies with functions and responsibilities on OSH, including—where appropriate—through a central body (Art. 15).

Convention No. 155 also underscores workplace-level cooperation between management and workers and/or their representatives as a core enabling condition for OSH governance (Art. 20), complementing the set-out duties of employers (Arts. 16–18, 19(c), 19(d), 19(e), 19(f), and 21) and workers (Arts. 19(a), 19(b), and 19(f)), including through workers safety delegates, workers' safety and health committees, and/or joint safety and health committees, as foreseen in Paragraph 12(1) of ILO's Occupational Safety and Health Recommendation, 1981 (No. 164).

Convention No. 155 also sets out the core OSH duties of employers and workers.

[2] The term "workers", as provided for in Article 3(a) of Convention No. 155, "covers all employed persons, including public employees".

Box 4 – Main obligations on OSH of employers and workers

Employers:

1. Ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, that workplaces, machinery, equipment, processes, substances and agents are safe and without risk to health.
2. Collaborate with other employers at the workplace, whenever two or more perform activities simultaneously at the same workplace.
3. Coordinate with other undertakings operating at the same workplace to ensure compliance with OSH requirements.
4. Establish appropriate measures to deal with emergencies and accidents, including first-aid arrangements.
5. Consult workers and their representatives on OSH issues and provide them with the necessary information and training.
6. Do not require workers to return to work where there is a continuing imminent and serious danger to life or health until corrective action is taken.
7. Abstain from charging workers or their representatives for any costs related to OSH measures.
8. Provide the necessary protective equipment where risks cannot otherwise be adequately controlled.

Workers:

1. Workers cooperate with their employer in fulfilment of their employer's obligations.
2. Workers report forthwith to their immediate supervisor any situation in which they have reasonable justification to believe presents an imminent and serious danger to their life or health.
3. Workers' representatives in the undertaking cooperate with the employer in OSH.

Source: Articles 16-21 of ILO C155

The Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187) establishes a and progressive framework for the continuous improvement of OSH, with the goal of preventing occupational injuries, diseases and deaths (Art. 2). It requires Members, in consultation with the most representative employers' and workers' organizations, to develop and progressively implement a promotional framework combining: a national OSH policy (aligned with Art. 4 of Convention No. 155), a national OSH system, and a national OSH programme (Arts. 1 - 5).

Convention No. 187 calls on Members to promote key preventive principles: assessing occupational risks, combating risks at source, and building a national preventive safety and health culture grounded in information, consultation and training (Art. 3). It also requires that national OSH system be progressively developed and composed of key elements, as follows:

Box 5 – Main components of a National OSH System

1. *Laws, regulations, collective agreements, and other relevant instruments on OSH;*
2. *Authority(ies) or body(ies) responsible for OSH;*
3. *Mechanisms for ensuring compliance, including systems of inspection;*
4. *Arrangements to promote cooperation between management, workers and their representatives at workplace level;*

Where appropriate, it should also include:

1. *National tripartite advisory body(ies) on OSH;*
2. *Information and advisory services on OSH;*
3. *Provision of training on OSH;*
4. *Occupational health services;*
5. *Research on OSH;*
6. *Mechanism for collection and analysis of data on occupational injuries and diseases;*
7. *Collaboration arrangements with relevant insurance or social security schemes covering occupational injuries and diseases; and*
8. *Support mechanisms improvement of OSH in MSME and in the informal economy.*

Source: Article 4 of ILO C187

Finally, national OSH programmes shall set priorities, timelines, means of action and performance-assessment procedures, with the aim of strengthening a preventive safety and health culture and protecting workers by eliminating or minimizing work-related hazards and risks—thereby preventing occupational injuries, diseases and deaths and advancing a safe and healthy working environment (Art. 5).

By virtue of these two OSH Fundamental Conventions, many States should already have in place a coherent policy, infrastructure and programmes for identifying workplace hazards, assess and control their risks, providing information and training, consulting workers and employers, enforcing compliance, and promoting a culture of prevention – all of which are indispensable for the effective implementation of Convention 190 and Recommendation 206.

1.3.3. Equality and non-discrimination fundamental conventions

ILO's Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) establishes the principle of equal remuneration for women and men for work of equal value. It defines "remuneration" broadly to include basic wages or salaries and any additional benefits, paid directly or indirectly, in cash or in kind (Art. 1(a)), and specifies that "equal remuneration" means rates set without sex-based discrimination (Art. 1(b)).

Each ratifying Member must promote and ensure this principle for all workers through law, wage-setting machinery, collective agreements, or a combination of these means (Art. 2). To operationalize it, Members shall promote objective job appraisal based on the work performed (Art. 3(1)), and not the characteristics of the worker performing the job, in particular sex or gender, and may allow pay differentials only where they reflect objectively determined differences in work and are applied without regard to sex (Art. 3(3)). Implementation, as appropriate, must be pursued in cooperation with the employers' and workers' organizations concerned (Art. 4).

ILO's Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) defines discrimination as any distinction, exclusion or preference based on race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin that nullifies or impairs equality of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation (Art. 1(1)(a)). It also covers additional grounds determined nationally after consultation with representative employers' and workers' organizations (Art. 1(1)(b)), and clarifies that "employment and occupation" includes access to training, employment and occupations, as well as terms and conditions of work (Art. 1(3)).

Each ratifying Member must declare and pursue a national policy to promote equality of opportunity and treatment, with a view to eliminating discrimination (Art. 2). Implementation requires cooperation with employers' and workers' organizations, legislative and educational measures, the repeal or modification of discriminatory laws and practices, and ensuring the policy is applied in public employment and in vocational guidance, training and placement services (Art. 3).

In this context, sexual harassment should be understood not only as a form of violence and harassment and an OSH concern, but also as a serious form of sex-based discrimination. Under the ILO supervisory approach to Convention No. 111, it may include both quid pro quo sexual harassment[3] and hostile work environment sexual harassment[4]. Labour inspectors should therefore consider both dimensions when assessing workplace policies, complaints, preventive measures and enforcement options. For further guidance on labour inspection and non-discrimination, including gender discrimination and harassment, see Module 13 - Labour inspection and non-discrimination of this Curriculum.

ILO Conventions Nos. 100 and 111 establish the normative equality framework that is indispensable for the effective implementation of ILO Convention No. 190. Together, they provide the structural equality guarantees without which the rights, protections, and preventive measures required by C190 and detailed in R206 cannot be effectively realized in practice.

The key link between V&H and equality and non-discrimination is that the former often targets individuals because of who they are (e.g. women, migrants, LGBTQI+ persons, ethnic minorities, etc.). Therefore, fighting V&H and eliminating their discriminatory root causes often becomes, simultaneously, part of

[3] Where a job benefit or employment-related decision is made conditional on accepting conduct of a sexual nature.
[4] Where conduct of a sexual nature creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive working environment.

advancing equality at work. In fact, certain forms of V&H, particularly gender-based violence and harassment and other forms of discrimination-based violence and harassment, may therefore constitute not only occupational hazards affecting workers' safety and health, but also serious forms of discrimination.

Labour inspectors should be attentive to this dual dimension when assessing complaints, workplace policies, risk assessments, preventive measures and enforcement options, while recognizing that not every form of V&H is necessarily discrimination-based. For further guidance on labour inspection and non-discrimination, see Module 13 of this ILO Curriculum on Building Modern and Effective Labour Inspection Systems.

1.3.4. Social dialogue

Social dialogue encompasses negotiation, consultation and information exchange among representatives of governments, employers and workers on issues of common interest. It may be bipartite (employers' and workers' organizations) or tripartite (including government), and can occur at national, sectoral or enterprise level (ILO, 2012a, 2015).

From a normative standpoint, ILO Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144) requires Member States to hold effective consultations with employers' and workers' organizations, notably in the development and review of labour laws and policies. The Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948 (No. 87) and Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98) form the foundational legal base for meaningful social dialogue, by ensuring that independent, representative organizations can participate freely and effectively.

Freedom of association, collective bargaining and tripartite consultation—anchored in ILO Conventions Nos. 87, 98 and 144—are key enabling conditions for preventing and eliminating V&H under ILO Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206, by operationalizing the social dialogue architecture on which C190 explicitly relies, when requiring Members to adopt an inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach "in consultation with representative employers' and workers' organizations" (Art. 4(2) and recognizing the "different and complementary roles" of governments and social partners (Art. 4(3)).

Workers' and employers' rights to establish and join organizations of their choosing without prior authorization (C87, Art. 2) and to organize their activities, elect representatives and define programmes free from interference by public authorities (C87, Art. 3), are essential to enable workers raise collective concerns—including on V&H—without fear of repression or dissolution (C87, Arts. 3–4), thus supporting Convention No. 190's requirement that prevention and elimination of V&H at all levels should be carried out in consultation with workers, employers and their representatives (C190, Arts. 4(2) and 9(a)).

Moreover, Convention No. 98 strengthens the preconditions for effective action on V&H by requiring protection against anti-union discrimination (including dismissal or other prejudice linked to union membership or activities) (Art. 1), safeguarding workers' and employers' organizations from interference in their establishment, functioning or administration (Art. 2), and promoting voluntary collective bargaining to regulate terms and conditions of employment (Art. 4). These guarantees are directly operational for V&H prevention and response, since collective bargaining offers a structured channel to negotiate workplace policies, reporting/complaints procedures, protection against retaliation, and remedies, as confirmed by the Recommendation No. 206's call on Members to ensure that all workers fully enjoy freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, consistent with Conventions Nos. 87 and 98 (Paragraph 3), and to promote collective bargaining at all levels to prevent and address V&H (Paragraph 4(a)).

At national level, Convention No. 144 complements these mechanisms by institutionalizing tripartite consultation on the implementation of international labour standards (Arts. 2(1) and 5), with freely chosen and equally represented social partner delegates (Art. 3). Through consultations on measures to give effect to ratified Conventions and on unratified instruments and their implementation (Arts. 5(1)(b)–5(1)(c)), tripartite dialogue becomes the governance platform for shaping and updating national laws, policies, inspection strategies and guidance to implement C190 and R206 in ways that reflect sector-specific risks and workplace realities.

Labour Inspectors should therefore recognize worker representation—including trade unions, elected worker representatives and joint OSH committees—as key actors in the prevention, identification and remediation of V&H, consistent with the participatory approach required under C190 (Arts. 4(3), 9(a), 9(c)). Inspectors must also be alert to retaliation, victimization or anti-union discrimination linked to reporting V&H, participating in investigations or organizing collectively around such issues, which is prohibited under C98 (Art. 1) and must be prevented through effective protection mechanisms under C190 (Art. 10(b)(iv)).

Translating these foundational rights into operational practice, the *Guidelines on General Principles of Labour Inspection* emphasize that structured collaboration between labour inspectorates and employers' and workers' organizations is a key condition for effective inspection. Such cooperation enhances the legitimacy and impact of inspection policies and actions—including on V&H—and should extend to the design, adoption and review of inspection policies, strategies and programmes, through mechanisms such as tripartite consultative bodies, coordination agreements, joint committees, consultations and campaigns (Paragraph 2.2.7). It should be operationalized at national, territorial and enterprise levels, including through workplace contacts during inspection visits, while safeguarding inspectors' impartiality, authority and safety (Paragraphs 2.2.8–2.2.9).

Social dialogue is central, to building legitimate, enforceable and sustainable systems for preventing and addressing violence and harassment in the world of work, and to enabling labour inspectorates to carry out their mandate effectively under C190 and R206.

1.4. Main impact of V&H framework on labour inspection

The main impact of the V&H legal and policy framework on labour inspection, with variations depending on the jurisdiction concerned, may include, *inter alia*, the following:

Box 6 – Main impact of V&H framework on labour inspection

1. ***Expanded inspection mandate and scope of protection*** *– requires the inclusion of V&H, including gender-based V&H, within the remit of labour inspection mandate, extends protection beyond the physical workplace to all work-related contexts (e.g. commuting, ICT communications, employer-provided accommodation, work-related trips, travel, training, events or social activities), broadens its coverage to all persons in the "world of work", regardless of contractual status (e.g. trainees/apprentices, volunteers, jobseekers, dismissed workers, persons exercising employer authority), and applies to the informal economy. Although some OSH standards already embrace a broad notion of the workplace[5], the wider scope introduced by Convention No. 190 may, in some jurisdictions, call for legal frameworks and inspection powers to be adapted to ensure effective enforcement in non-traditional work-related contexts, including digital environments and work-related activities beyond the physical workplace.*
2. ***V&H as an enforceable labour, OSH and, where relevant, discrimination issue*** *- treats V&H as a labour law/OSH compliance issue and, where applicable (e.g., in cases of GBVH and discrimination-based V&H), as a discrimination issue, not merely interpersonal misconduct, requiring inspectors to monitor compliance on prevention and protection obligations and to take the necessary corrective action.*
3. ***Preventive, systems-based inspection*** *- shifts focus from individual incidents to employer prevention systems (including policies/programmes, responsibilities, risk assessment and control – including psychosocial risks -, reporting and investigation mechanisms, and corrective and follow-up measures), and integrates psychosocial risk management into inspection planning and tools.*
4. ***Psychosocial risk management and risk-based targeting*** *- requires assessment of psychosocial hazards linked to V&H (work organization, HR practices, discrimination, power imbalances, harmful norms) and supports targeted strategies for higher-risk sectors and work arrangements (e.g. night/isolated work, domestic work, transport, health, education, hospitality, high client-contact services).*

[5] Under the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), the term "workplace" includes *all places where workers need to be or to go by reason of their work and which are under the direct or indirect control of the employer* (Art. 3(c)). The Protocol of 2002 to the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 further broadens the scope by defining occupational accident as *an occurrence arising out of, or in the course of, work which results in fatal or non-fatal injury* (Art. 1(a)) and reporting on occupational accidents and health issues arising "in the course of or in connection with work" (Preamble (e)). It also defines a "dangerous occurrence" as any event—per national law—with potential to cause harm at work or to the public (Art. 1(c)), and a commuting accident as *an accident resulting in death or personal injury occurring on the direct route between the place of work and a worker's home, meal location, or place of payment* (Art. 1(d)). Likewise, the Occupational Safety and Health Recommendation, 1981 (No. 164) reinforces this by requiring employers to keep records of *all notifiable occupational accidents and injuries to health which arise in the course of or in connection with work* (Paragraph 15(2)) (ILO, 2020).

5. ***Gender-responsive and non-discriminatory practice*** *- requires gender-responsive inspection and attention to intersecting vulnerabilities (e.g. migrant workers, women migrants, informal economy workers), without legitimizing exclusionary “protective” measures.*
6. ***Confidentiality, anti-retaliation and victim-centred approaches*** *- requires checks that complaint mechanisms protect confidentiality and prevent retaliation against complainants, victims, witnesses and whistle-blowers, and links enforcement with accessible remedies and dispute-resolution pathways.*
7. ***Close collaboration with social partners*** *– requires structured cooperation with employers, workers and their representative organizations to strengthen prevention and inspection effectiveness, including joint work on inspection policies, strategies and programmes and appropriate workplace engagement during inspections, investigations and follow-up actions with their representatives, if exist and appropriate (e.g., relevant line managers, trade union representatives, workers’ delegates, workers' safety delegates, workers’ OSH representatives, members of workers' safety and health committees, members of joint OSH committee, occupational physician, OSH specialists, etc.).*
8. ***Coordination and referral*** *- reinforces coordination across labour inspection, OSH, equality bodies and other competent institutions, including referral pathways to support services.*
9. ***Inspectorate capacity and tools*** *- requires provision of adequate guidance, training, and resources to inspectors on V&H, including gender-based violence and harassment, and calls for the development of operational tools (e.g. checklists, sector-specific guidance, risk assessment instruments, protocols).*
10. ***Accountability, monitoring and data*** *- strengthens recording/classification of V&H findings, encourages disaggregated data collection (e.g. by sex, sector, form of violence, where feasible), and reinforces follow-up, trend analysis, and public reporting to inform prevention strategies and policy adjustments.*

Source: Own elaboration, based on C190, R206, C81 and C129.

▶ 2. Role and mandate of labour inspectors on V&H

Labour inspectors are central to translating the above standards into workplace reality. While their role on V&H broadly mirrors their mandate to promote compliance with labour and OSH regulations, the often sensitive and concealed nature of V&H requires tailored safeguards, including extending confidentiality beyond complainants to victims, witnesses and whistle-blowers; adopting a victim-centred approach; and, where necessary, coordinating with and referring cases to other competent authorities and to public or private support services.

This section outlines the inspector’s mandate and duties, from prevention, awareness-raising, and information and advice, through receiving and investigating complaints, to enforcement actions and improvement of legal and policy framework.

2.1. Preventive role of labour inspection

Prevention is always preferable then the cure. As with OSH, labour inspectors should promote proactive measures, so V&H are addressed before incidents occur.

Convention No. 190 underscores prevention through comprehensive national strategies and employer duties to identify hazards and assess and control V&H risks (C190, Arts. 4–5). Given inspectorate resource constraints and rising expectations of effectiveness, and in line with Article 8(b)–(c) of Convention No. 190 and Paragraph 9 of Recommendation No. 206, inspection resources should be targeted where they can deliver the greatest systemic impact—particularly in sectors, occupations and work arrangements with the highest exposure to V&H. Their identification must be carried out in consultation with the employers’ and workers’ organizations concerned and through other means, and might include, depending on national specificities, the following:

1. Sectors with the highest exposure levels to V&H, including:

Sector	Most frequent psychosocial risk factors
Hospitality	Excessive workload, long working hours, conflictual relations among colleagues or with customers, emotional burden in dealing with difficult customers, poor communication, inadequate allocation of tasks.
Healthcare	High emotional demands and physical workload, conflicts between colleagues and with patients and their families, bullying, and sexual harassment, violence and traumatic incidents, work overload, time pressure, conflicting demands, role conflicts and inadequate allocation of tasks, lack of influence on own work, lack of support and compensation, poor communication, right to disconnect issues.
Social Work	High emotional burden, conflictual relations with service users or third parties, role conflicts, lack of support and compensation, poor communication.
Education	Work overload and conflicting or unclear demands, conflictual relations with students and families, bullying between teachers, violence and traumatic incidents, emotional burden, role conflicts, lack of influence on own work, lack of support and compensation, lack of social support, poor communication.
Public Administration	Conflictual relations with colleagues or third parties, role conflicts and inadequate task allocation, lack of support and compensation.
Call Centres	Conflictual relations with customers or third parties, night or shift work, lack of support and compensation, high emotional burden, monotonous work.
Transport	Excessive workload, shift or night work, long working hours, conflictual relations with clients and third parties, tight schedules, lack of support and compensation, exposure to traffic hazards.
Construction	Excessive workload, shift or night work, long working hours, physical overload, lack of influence on own work, tight deadlines and time pressure, lack of information about major changes related to work, inadequate task allocation, lack of support and compensation, lack of social support, bullying and sexual harassment, traumatic incidents, poor professional career prospects, poor work-life balance, exposure to adverse weather conditions.

Sector	Most frequent psychosocial risk factors
Commerce/Retail	Work overload, time pressure, conflictual relations with customers and third parties, bullying, sexual harassment, thefts, violence, threats, and traumatic incidents, lack of autonomy and influence on own work, monotonous work, lack of predictability at work, lack of support and compensation, inadequate task allocation, long working hours, irregular schedules (including night work and during weekends), compromised right to disconnect, poor work-life balance, high emotional burden, career stagnation.
Offices	Work overload and time pressure, meaningless work and lack of variety, lack of influence on own work, lack of support, poor human–computer interaction, conflicts, bullying, and sexual harassment in contacts with clients, violence and threat of violence, job insecurity, career stagnation.
Industry	Shift and night work, excessive workload, poor task allocation, lack of autonomy and control.

Table 1 - Highest exposure sectors and their most frequent psychosocial risk factors
Sources: Adapted from ITSS (2021) and SLIC (2018a).

2. Occupations and work arrangements with higher exposure to V&H, *inter alia*:

Occupations & work arrangements with higher exposure to V&H
1. *Handling cash, drugs or valuables.*
2. *Interacting with customers and member of the public including face-to-face, on the phone or online.*
3. *Working alone, working in isolation, and working in the community (e.g., home visits, outreach work, domestic work, driving passenger transport vehicles) and working at night.*
4. *Providing services or treatment to people with potentially unpredictable behaviour, such as those who are distressed, angry, intoxicated, incarcerated, confused, or ill (e.g. health workers).*
5. *Conducting enforcement activities (e.g., parking inspectors, security guards).*
6. *Working in high-crime areas.*
7. *Working in a hazardous physical environment (e.g., with excessive noise, poor lighting or visibility).*
8. *Service methods or policies that cause or escalate frustration, anger, misunderstanding or conflict (e.g., low staffing levels, customer service policies, setting unreasonable expectations of the services an organization or workers can provide).*
9. *In relation to gender-based violence, low worker diversity, power imbalances along gender lines, and a workplace culture which accepts and tolerates gender-based violence*

Table 2 - Occupations & work arrangements with higher exposure to V&H
Source: ILO (2022b).

Within this preventive framework, labour inspectors can support prevention by raising awareness, providing guidance and technical advice, and monitoring compliance. Where needed, they can enforce laws, regulations and collective agreements through warnings and improvement or stoppage notices, sanctions and referrals—to support services and, where appropriate, for remedial action and/or for criminal prosecution.

2.1.1. Technical information and advice

A practical first step in prevention is providing clear, accessible guidance on what V&H is, why it is unacceptable, and the respective rights and duties of workers and employers.

Labour inspectors should also explain that, depending on national legislation and on the facts of each case, V&H may be addressed through different and sometimes overlapping areas of law, including labour law, OSH law, equality and non-discrimination law, criminal law, migration law and sector-specific legislation.

They can disseminate this information through training, outreach seminars, and materials shared during inspections, as well as through consultations at inspectorate offices, workplace visits, and toll-free information hotlines.

In line with the need for labour inspectorates to leverage information and communication technologies to expand access and improve effectiveness and efficiency (Guidelines, Paragraph 1.2.6), advice can also be delivered via inspectorate websites and social media, including interactive tools such as chatbots and online FAQ platforms.

Box 7 – Information and guidance materials on V&H

Australia:

- SafeWork (New South Wales), provides free advisory visits to small enterprises employing up to 50 full-time equivalent workers. During these visits, a SafeWork inspector attends the workplace and delivers tailored, practical guidance on OSH matters relevant to the business's activities, including on V&H.
- Work Safe BC (British Columbia), developed a webpage on bullying and harassment, include key information, books, guides, reporting and investigation procedures, worker checklists, training tools, posters and videos.

Denmark:

- The Working Environment Authority (WEA) provides individualized guidance to employers through a dedicated hotline on how to prevent and manage abusive acts and V&H in the workplace.

Sources: ILO (2020) and ILO (2024b).

2.1.2. Awareness-raising

In some countries, labour inspectorates have led or participated in national awareness-raising campaigns on workplace V&H, showing how proactive communication and education can complement enforcement and help drive cultural change at work.

Box 8 – Denmark's Campaign "Where do we draw the line?"

The WEA collaborated with unions and employers' organizations to launch the awareness-raising campaign "Hvor går grænsen?" ("Where do we draw the line?"). In addition to a film, describing sexual harassment and where to draw the line, dialogue cards, based on fictitious dilemmas, depict different situations, where the players are required to decide how to respond. The dialogue cards help to talk about sexual harassment and individual boundaries in the workplace and give an understanding of what sexual harassment is.

Source: ILO (2024a).

Such partnerships combine the inspectorate's authority with the social partners' reach, helping to shift workplace culture. The ILO's *Guidelines on General Principles of Labour Inspection* encourage labour inspectorates to cooperate with social partners through several mechanisms including joint campaigns (Paragraph 2.2.7).

2.1.3. Proactive inspection visits

Inspection visits are among labour inspectors' core activities. They connect inspectors directly with workplace realities and with employers and workers, enabling them to monitor conditions on the ground, assess employers' capacity to comply with the law, provide technical advice, and, where necessary, enforce compliance. For this reason, the ILO *Guidelines on General Principles of Labour Inspection* note that most inspectors' time should be devoted to workplace visits (ILO, 2022d, Paragraph 5.2.3).

Proactive inspections are typically planned under the labour inspection policy, strategy and annual workplan, and guided by defined priorities.

These priorities usually draw on previous inspection findings, consultations with social partners, and available statistics (e.g., inspection data, complaints, OSH indicators, and accident and disease data), as well as identified serious regional or sectoral problems, emerging risks, and wider labour-market trends—including the identification of sectors, occupations and work arrangements where workers and other persons are more exposed to V&H (C190, Art. 8(b)).

Reactive inspection visits will be specifically addressed under Subsection "2.2.3. Reactive inspection visits", under Subsection "2.2. Handling complaints".

Whether proactive or reactive, inspection visits should be well planned, carefully prepared and properly conducted.

The figure below summarizes the main steps of a typical inspection action.

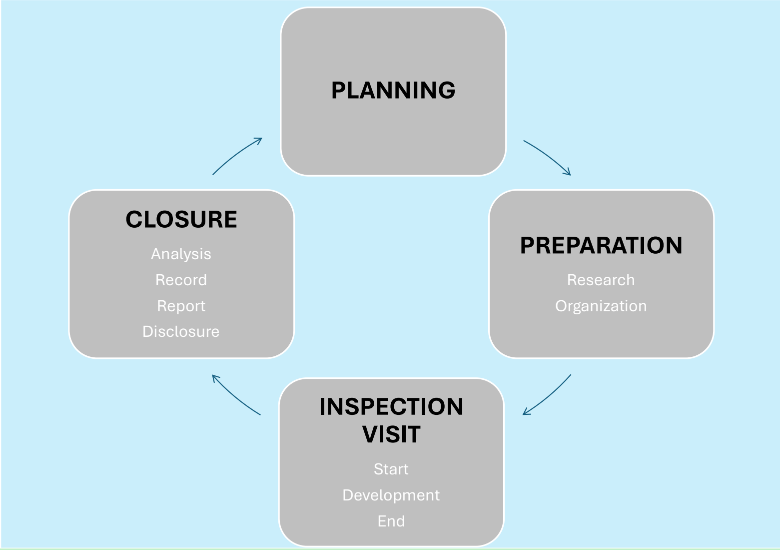

Figure 1 – Inspection action main phases
Source: Own elaboration, based on ACT (2014).

2.1.3.1. Planning

Inspection planning should be conducted within a centrally coordinated national framework, ensuring alignment with labour administration priorities, national labour policies and strategic objectives. This central coordination is essential to ensure consistency, efficient resource allocation and equal protection of workers across jurisdictions.

Planning an inspection visit typically involves:

1. Defining its objectives and scope, which may include:
    - Assessing how V&H is integrated into the employer's Occupational Safety and Health Management System (OSHMS) (C190, Art. 9(b)).
    - Verifying the adoption and implementation — in consultation with workers and their representatives — of a workplace policy on V&H, whether as a stand-alone policy or integrated into an OSH policy, equality and non-discrimination policy, code of conduct, HR policy or other workplace instrument, provided that the required elements are covered (C190, Art. 9(a)).
    - Evaluating the employer's capacity to identify V&H hazards, assess risks, and implement appropriate preventive and protective measures (C190, Art. 9(c)).
    - Reviewing the effectiveness of complaint-handling, investigations, and (where relevant) internal grievance and dispute-resolution mechanisms (C190, Art. 10(b)(i)).
    - Checking safeguards for privacy, confidentiality and protection against retaliation for complainants, victims, witnesses and whistle-blowers (C190, Arts. 10(b)(iv) and 10(c)).
    - Confirming that workers and other persons concerned receive accessible information and training on V&H risks, control measures, and their rights and duties under the workplace policy (C190, Art. 9(d)).
    - Assessing and enforcing compliance with relevant laws, regulations and applicable collective agreements on V&H (C190, Arts. 10(a), 10(h) and 12).
    - Providing technical advice and information as part of broader information actions or awareness-raising initiatives (C190, Arts. 11(b) and 11(c)).
2. Deciding the inspection format: whether to conduct a stand-alone visit, integrate it into a broader systemic national/regional/sectoral or thematic campaign (e.g., healthcare, sexual harassment, third-party violence), or implement it under a specific programme targeting deregulation. In all cases, planning should prioritize sectors, occupations and work arrangements with higher exposure to V&H (C190, Art. 8(b)–(c); R206, Paragraph 9).

3. Deciding operational resources allocation: how many inspectors to involve and from which territorial units, based on resource needs and the chosen approach.
4. Deciding cooperation needs: whether to coordinate with other authorities or public/private entities, including through joint visits, considering the subject matter, required legal competencies, resources, and foreseeable risks.
5. Deciding the timing: when and where to conduct the visit, considering available means, the best moment to observe facts and secure evidence, and the intended outcomes.

Labour inspection planning should also incorporate measures to safeguard labour inspectors. In their capacity as workers, labour inspectors are covered by Convention No. 190 and benefit from its protection against violence and harassment in the world of work. Their employer must therefore take appropriate steps to identify, prevent and respond to risks of violence and harassment that may arise in connection with inspection duties, including during inspection visits, engagement with employers and workers, and other situations occurring in the course of, linked with or arising out of work, as set out in Article 3 of Convention No. 190. The ILO *Guidelines on General Principles of Labour Inspection* underline that labour inspectors need a safe and healthy working environment to carry out their mandate effectively. In particular, inspectors should be protected from threats, abuse, intimidation, violence and harassment encountered in the performance of their duties. Inspection work may expose them to a range of occupational risks, including chemical, physical and biological hazards, as well as verbal or physical aggression and the possibility of legal action. Labour inspectorates should therefore assess these risks in light of national circumstances and put in place suitable preventive and protective measures. Such measures may include targeted training, clear reporting and response procedures, psychosocial support, cooperation arrangements with police and legal services, and, where appropriate, legal immunity for inspections carried out in good faith or civil liability coverage (Guidelines, Paragraphs 4.1.16 and 4.6.4–4.6.8).

2.1.3.2. Preparation

2.1.3.2.1. Research

This phase consists of collecting and analyzing available information on the employer, its operations, labour practices and workforce.

Nature of information to gather	Potential sources of information
• Employer identification (e.g., tax, social security numbers), legal representatives, (e.g. owners, board), and turnover or budget. • Addresses (HQ and worksites). • Organizational chart and employer's policies. • Number and workforce disaggregation (e.g., women, men; employees, self-employed; temporary, fixed-term, permanent; nationals, migrants; formal, informal). • Relevant interlocutors (line managers, worker's representatives, and, where applicable, complainants, victims, witnesses and whistle-blowers). • Sector of activity and production inputs, outputs, processes, typical occupational risks, and relevant control measures. • Business practices (e.g., subcontracting, seasonal or temporary work, use of foreign workers, overtime, dismissals). • Applicable laws, regulations and, where exist, collective agreements. • Available information on working time arrangements and other psychosocial factors (e.g., Jobs content, workload and work pace, work schedule, control and participation, environment and equipment, organizational culture and functions, interpersonal relationships, roles in the organization, career development prospects, home–work interfaces) • Prior complaints, interventions and their outcomes, especially in the areas of V&H. • Previous inspection results (violations, measures taken, compliance follow-up), especially in the areas of V&H.	• Information from the complainant. • Inspectorate records (case management system/archives) and colleagues' knowledge. • Data held by other authorities or entities (e.g., equality bodies, OSH authorities, social security, tax, employment and border services, business registers, insurers). • Trade unions and employers' organizations. • Open sources (websites, media, social media). • Mandatory notifications, declarations, or reports (e.g., occupational accidents and diseases, opening of workplaces or sites, licensing, foreign workers, high-risk activities or agents, OSHMS reports).

Table 3 – Preparation of an inspection visit – information and sources
Source: Own elaboration.

2.1.3.2.2. Organization

Based on the information collected, this step usually involves:

1. Refining the inspection scope: Confirming or adjusting the issues to be examined, the territorial units involved, and any other authorities or public/private entities to be associated.
2. Decision on interlocutors (to accompany the visit and/or be interviewed): This should reflect the intervention's objectives and sensitivity. Where the presence of employer's or workers' representatives accompanying labour inspectors—or conducting interviews on-site—could undermine the inspection (e.g., by hindering evidence collection, intimidating or constraining workers, complainants or witnesses, or compromising privacy and confidentiality), inspectors may carry out the visit unaccompanied and interview relevant persons confidentially at a later stage, at the inspectorate's office or another appropriate location. Trade union representatives, workers' delegates, workers' safety delegates, and workers' OSH representatives should be heard during inspection visits. Subject to the safeguards above and where strategically appropriate, inspectors may be accompanied by relevant line managers, members of workers' safety and health committees or of joint OSH committee, occupational physician, or by workers with specific functions on OSH, equality or V&H (e.g., equality manager, harassment officer, OSH expert).
3. Inspection route and coverage: Decide the route to follow and what to examine (departments, processes, workstations and situations), which legal provisions will be checked, and which documents will be reviewed.
4. Tools and templates: Prepare practical tools to structure the visit and avoid omissions, such as questionnaires and worker's identification sheets; checklists and risk-assessment tools; registers to log irregularities and documents to request; and standard forms for inspection measures (e.g., warnings or improvement notices), as appropriate.
5. Resources and logistics: Determine the resources required, namely the number and skills of inspectors, any partner authorities to involve (e.g., tax, social security, border services, police), and the necessary equipment (e.g., vehicles, PPE, IT devices and connectivity for database access), considering the workplace's size, layout and dispersion; number/type of workers; number of employers sharing the same workplace; and number and complexity of occupational risks foreseen and legal provisions to monitor.
6. Team debriefing: Brief the inspection team (and any participating authorities/experts) on the employer profile, inspection objectives and strategy, tools to be used, and task allocation.

2.1.3.3. Conducting the inspection visit

2.1.3.3.1. At the beginning of the inspection visit

At the start of an inspection visit, inspectors should:

1. Identify themselves (and the team) and, if necessary, recall their legal authority to enter freely and without prior notice at any hour any workplace liable to inspection.
2. Unless doing so would prejudice the inspection, they should inform the employer or their representative and workers' representatives of their presence, explain the purpose and context of the visit, and outline the intended route, any accompaniment needed, and the documentation to be reviewed.
3. In all cases, inspectors must treat the source of any complaint as strictly confidential and not disclosing that the visit resulted from a complaint (C81, Art. 15(c); C129, Art. 20(c)).

At the beginning and throughout the visit, inspectors should:

- Remain polite, respectful, and professional—friendly but assertive and firm.
- Act within the principle of legality (do only what the law allows).
- Monitor their own verbal/non-verbal communication and read that of interlocutors; adapt language to the audience.
- Avoid assumptions, watch for indicators, seek evidence, and ask clear questions.

- Prioritise team safety and security: park for rapid exit (preferably outside the premises), avoid being alone in isolated rooms, and keep track of colleagues' whereabouts.
- Maintain integrity and de-escalation: refuse gifts politely, avoid fuelling conflict, stay calm.
- Be operationally ready: keep emergency contacts readily accessible and, if necessary, request police support.

In cases of refusal of access, obstruction, or any V&H against inspectors (e.g., threats, insults, aggression or assault), inspectors should apply a graduated response:

1. Restate legal authority: to enter and carry out the inspection without hindrance and request immediate cooperation.

2. Warn of consequences: if obstruction continues, inform the employer/representative that such conduct may entail criminal liability.

3. If the situation persists or becomes unsafe: stop the visit, if necessary, call the police, leave the site, and inform the supervisor.

4. Proceed or reschedule: where safe and appropriate, continue the inspection (including with police support); otherwise return to the office, draft a detailed incident report for the supervisor/relevant services, and plan a new inspection.

5. Further action: where appropriate, and depending on the jurisdiction, initiate or refer the case to the public prosecutor for potential criminal proceedings.

2.1.3.3.2. During the inspection visit

2.1.3.3.2.1. Process

During an inspection visit on V&H, and depending on its objectives and on-site findings, inspectors may follow this approach:

1. Proceed through departments and workstations according to the planned route—adapting it as needed—while identifying and interviewing (confidentially, or with witnesses where appropriate) relevant workers, the employer, and their representatives.

2. Collect evidence, as appropriate to the visit's objectives and confidentiality concerns, by:

    - Interviewing workers, worker representatives, the employer/representatives and other relevant persons (privately or with witnesses, as appropriate), using questionnaires and/or obtaining written statements. While participation of workers' and employers' representatives can enhance inspection effectiveness, inspectors must retain full control over inspection procedures and may limit participation where it risks compromising evidence collection, confidentiality or the integrity of the inspection
    - Documenting the situation through photographs and, where appropriate, video recordings.
    - Observing work in practice, including requesting demonstration of processes and requesting samples, when necessary, in accordance with national legislation.
    - Requesting and reviewing records (digital and paper), which may include, *inter alia:*

Records to request and review	
• List of workers (disaggregated, depending on national legislation, by race, colour, sex, religion, contract type or other relevant discriminatory factor).	• Disciplinary proceedings conducted, workers involved, facts, circumstances and results.
• Working-time records (including overtime, work shifts, night work, etc.).	• Records of internal grievance or dispute resolution processes and outcomes.

Records to request and review	
• Register of employers and self-employed at the workplace.	• Records of complaints received, investigations carried out and results.
• Organizational chart.	• OSH service recommendations.
• Occupational accidents and diseases list, notifications and reports.	• Evidence of workers' consultation, participation, information and training.
• Sick leave list and records.	• Workplace V&H policy.
• OSH prevention plan or programme and risk assessments reports (including psychosocial risks).	• Salary slips.
• Fitness-for-work certificates relating to workers' medical examinations	

Table 4 – Example of potential records to request and review
Source: Own elaboration.

3. Maintain the planned scope (issues to assess, areas/processes to verify, persons to interview, and documents to collect and analyse), while adjusting it when warranted by evidence by: expanding the scope to cover unanticipated but serious violations identified during the visit; or narrowing it where overall compliance is high or to focus resources on a particularly serious breach detected.

4. Observe, verify and assess—as relevant to the inspection's purpose:

    - Work and workplace conditions: material elements of work; the working environment (including physical); working conditions; and working arrangements (working time, shifts, night work, workload, work pace).
    - Work organization and management: job content and control (tasks and how they are performed); work design and management (including leadership style); and interpersonal relations (manager–worker and peer relations).
    - External interactions and culture: engagement with third parties (clients, patients, users, the public, etc.); and organisational culture, including gender, cultural and social norms.
    - Prevention and response systems for V&H: the effectiveness of the OSHMS (and integration of V&H); workplace V&H policy (adoption and implementation); employer capacity to identify hazards, assess risks and control them; complaint and investigation procedures; internal grievance/dispute-resolution mechanisms; safeguards for privacy, confidentiality and protection against retaliation; and the information and training provided to workers and other persons concerned on V&H risks, measures, and rights and obligations.

5. Assess and enforce compliance with applicable laws, regulations and collective agreements on V&H.

6. Provide technical guidance and share good practices on how to meet legal requirements.

7. Use concrete workplace examples to illustrate compliant and non-compliant practices (SLIC, 2024).

8. Record the findings clearly: *what, who*, *where*, *when*, and *under what circumstances*.

9. Promote compliance using the most appropriate procedures, including (ACT, 2014; SLIC, 2024): technical advice; recommendation/advice notices; notices to produce documents/records/samples; warning notices; improvement notices; infraction notices or referral of sanction proceedings to the courts (for imposition of fines/penalties) where labour inspectors cannot initiate sanction proceedings (often after the visit); ancillary sanctions/accessory penalties; remedial orders; referrals to other authorities (e.g., public prosecutor's office, courts, equality bodies, OSH authority, etc.), often after the visit; orders with immediate executive force (e.g., suspension/prohibition notices); and follow-up inspection visits.

2.1.3.3.2.2. Risk management

Risk management is a continuous improvement cycle: systematically monitor hazards and exposed persons, assess the associated risks, implement controls, and regularly review and adjust measures based on results—creating an ongoing feedback loop. In scheme:

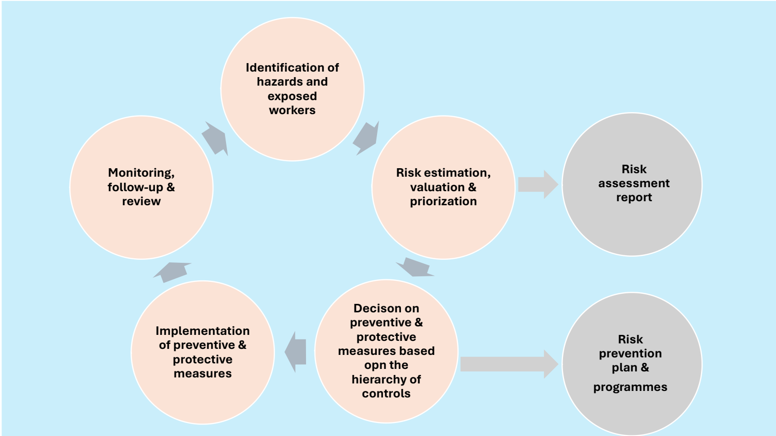

Figure 2 - Risk management continuous cycle
Source: Own elaboration, based on SLIC (2018a).

Within this context, a key focus of OSH inspections—including those addressing V&H—is to verify whether an OSHMS is in place and whether it is fit for purpose and effective. In that context, inspectors should assess whether the employer, with the participation of workers and their representatives, systematically identifies occupational hazards (including psychosocial hazards), identifies who may be exposed, assesses the related risks (including V&H), and implements appropriate preventive and protective measures as required by Convention No. 190 (C190, Art. 9), to eliminate or reduce them to acceptable levels.

In some jurisdictions, OSH legislation expressly require employers to assess and control risks linked to work-related stress, bullying, or third-party violence.

Box 9 – Employer's obligation to assess V&H risks factors in Canada

In Canada, the Workplace Harassment and Violence Prevention Regulations (2020) require the employer and the applicable workplace partner to jointly identify internal and external risk factors that may contribute to V&H. The workplace assessment must consider: (i) workplace culture, working conditions, activities and organizational structure; (ii) external circumstances (including domestic/family violence) that could affect the workplace; (iii) existing reports, records and data on workplace V&H; (iv) the physical design/design of the workplace; and (v) existing measures to protect psychological health and safety.

Source: ILO (2021).

Labour inspectors should not replace employers fulfilling their obligations of identifying hazards, assessing risks and implementing controls. Instead, in this respect, and although depending on national legislation, labour inspector's role should be to verify and drive compliance by:

- Monitoring and enforcing employer duties on risk assessment and control.
- Assessing the quality and sufficiency of the employer's risk assessment.
- Evaluating the appropriateness and effectiveness of preventive and protective measures (including their alignment with the hierarchy of controls) in eliminating or reducing risks to an acceptable level.
- Providing technical advice and sharing good practices with employers and workers to improve prevention and secure compliance.

To do this credibly, inspectors need the competence to identify hazards and exposed groups, assess risks, and judge controls—and, during a visit, to make their own independent assessment and compare it against the employer's risk assessment report and, where appropriate, with employer's occupational risk prevention plan.

In this context, the SLIC guide on psychosocial risks assessment and management is a key reference, as it was developed to help inspectors evaluate the quality of employers' psychosocial risk assessment and management.

Box 10 – SLIC guide on psychosocial risks assessment & management

In 2018, the Senior Labour Inspectors' Committee (SLIC) issued a non-binding guide to help labour inspectorates assess the quality of employers' risk assessments and risk-management measures for psychosocial risks—including harassment, bullying, workplace violence and work-related stress. It offers practical examples and concrete guidance on conducting inspections using a preventive approach to psychosocial risks, including V&H.

Source: SLIC (2018a).

2.1.3.3.2.2.1. Risk assessment

Risk assessment—the core element of risk management—can be defined as *the process of evaluating the risks to safety and health arising from hazards at work* (ILO, 2001). In a broader sense, it is a systematic review of all aspects related to work, to identify hazards and to estimate (qualitatively and quantitatively), evaluate and prioritize risks to workers' safety and health. The figure below illustrates the risk assessment process within the risk-management cycle and its main phases.

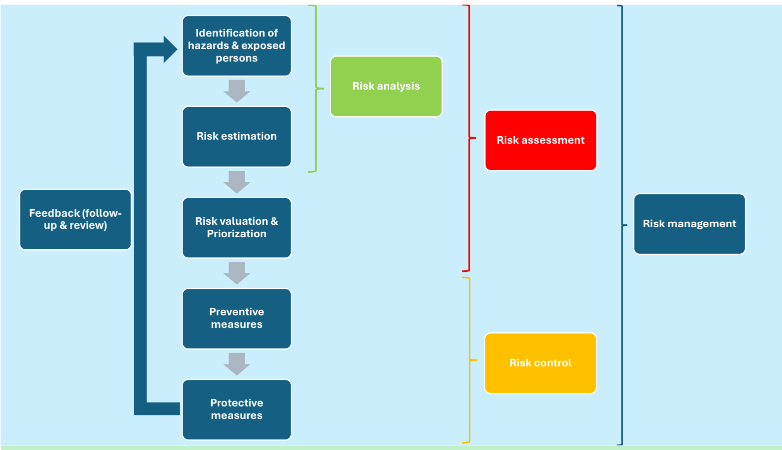

Figure 3 - Risk assessment process
Source: Own elaboration.

To ensure quality, coverage and ownership, a risk assessment should:

1. Be properly planned.
2. Be carried out with consultation and participation of workers and their representatives including, where appropriate, workers' safety delegates, workers' OSH representatives, "harassment officer", members of workers' safety and health committees, members of joint OSH committee, occupational physician, OSH specialists, external OSH experts, OSH service providers, middle managers, suppliers, other employers (and workers) sharing the same workplace, members of the public, etc.
3. Cover all workplaces/workstations and what really happens in practice, including non-routine tasks, interruptions, changes in conditions, interacting risk factors, and controls for equipment/materials during installation and use.
4. Address all relevant hazards and risks, including physical, chemical, biological and psychosocial risk factors, as well as their interactions, and identify who may be exposed.
5. It should be grounded in relevant data collected through appropriate methods, such as individual or group discussions, document review, observation and surveys—including, where useful, through the questionnaires described in Subsection 3.1.2.
6. It should apply the most suitable and up-to-date risk assessment methods and techniques, including some of the tools outlined in Subsection 3.1.4.
7. Focus on group-level conditions (not individual profiling) and seek consensus in expert judgements.
8. Consider exposure and context factors (e.g., number of workers and other persons potentially exposed, workplace characteristics, processes, tasks, and technical complexity).
9. Build on previous assessments and on the results of implemented control measures.
10. Enable risk prioritization, including clear identification of serious and imminent risks.

11. Where applicable, follow relevant legal requirements and recognized national and international standards and guidance, codes of practice, sectoral prevention manuals, equipment instructions, safety data sheets, etc.).
12. Be documented in a risk assessment report and, where appropriate, a prevention plan.
13. Be reviewed and updated to reflect changing circumstances and the effectiveness of implemented measures.

2.1.3.3.2.2.1.1. Hazard identification

An occupational hazard is an intrinsic property of a work situation or element—such as an installation, activity, equipment, agent or other material element of the work—that has the potential to cause injury or harm. Put simply, it is *the inherent potential to cause injury or damage to people's health* (ILO, 2001).

To identify hazards, causal agents and exposure conditions, it is essential to gather all relevant and available information relating to each work activity, including:

Information to collect and analyse	
• Places where work is done. • Facilities. • Work equipment and tools used. • Energies used. • Who does the work (permanent or occasionally). • Work equipment manufacturer instruction manuals • Support activities (maintenance, cleaning, loads, downloads ...). • Other people involved (e.g., visitors, subcontractors, clients, public, maintenance crews, ...). • Experience, qualification and training of workers for tasks execution. • Written work procedures and/or work authorizations • Composition of raw materials, sub-products and final products.	• Content/recommendations of safety labels. • Organization of work. • Methods and work processes. • Subcontracted activities. • Chemical agents' safety data sheets. • Biological agents' safety and health information sheets. • Sequencing of activities of the productive process. • Statistical data and reports on occupational accidents, occupational diseases, and incidents, including on V&H. • Applicable law, regulations and collective agreements. • Previous risk assessment reports and prevention plans. • Reports and recommendations of the employer's OSH service

Table 5 – Hazard's identification
Source: Own elaboration.

For V&H hazards (e.g., violence, bullying and harassment), and provided privacy, confidentiality and protection against retaliation are fully ensured, it is also useful to examine:

- Psychosocial factors: aspects of work organisation, content and performance that can influence workers' well-being and health (physical, psychological and social).
- Psychosocial risk factors: psychosocial working conditions (or factors) that, because they are poorly designed or managed, are likely to harm workers' health and well-being.

The table below lists the most common psychosocial factors and associated psychosocial risks factors:

Psychosocial factors	**Psychosocial risk factors**
Job content	Lack of variety or short work cycles, fragmented or meaningless work, underuse of skills, high uncertainty, continuous exposure to people through work.
Workload & work pace	Work overload or underload, machine pacing, high levels of time pressure, continually subject to deadlines.
Work schedule	Shift work, night shifts, inflexible work schedules, unpredictable hours, long or unsociable hours.
Control and participation	Low participation in decision making, lack of control over workload, pacing, shift working, etc.

Psychosocial factors	Psychosocial risk factors
Environment & equipment	Inadequate equipment availability, suitability or maintenance; poor environmental conditions such as lack of space, poor lighting, excessive noise.
Organizational culture & function	Poor communication, low levels of support for problem solving and personal development, gender and social norms that tolerate or normalize sexist, discriminatory or harassing conduct, lack of definition of, or agreement on, organizational objectives.
Interpersonal relationships at work	Social or physical isolation, poor relationships with superiors, unequal power relations and rigid hierarchical control that enable abusive behaviour and discourage reporting, interpersonal conflict, lack of social support.
Role in organization	Role ambiguity, role conflict, and responsibility for people.
Career development	Career stagnation and uncertainty, under promotion or over promotion, poor pay, job insecurity, low social value to work.
Home–work interface	Conflicting demands of work and home, low support at home.

Table 6 - Psychosocial hazards
Sources: PRIMA-EF (2008) and ITSS (2021).

2.1.3.3.2.2.1.2. Identification of workers and other persons exposed

This phase identifies who may be exposed to the hazards and under what exposure patterns. It involves:

1. Ensuring that all relevant groups are considered—such as office staff, night cleaning crews, maintenance workers, guards, visitors, customers/clients, users and even nearby populations—while also paying particular attention to potentially vulnerable groups (e.g., new recruits, temporary and fixed-term workers, night-shift and isolated workers, those especially sensitive to certain risks, and groups more exposed to discriminatory behaviour (e.g., women, including pregnant, post-partum or breastfeeding; young workers; migrants; informal workers; and persons with disabilities).
2. Determining the frequency, duration and (where relevant) dose of exposure for each group.

2.1.3.3.2.2.1.3. Risk estimation

Occupational risk is *a combination of the likelihood of an occurrence of a hazardous event and the severity of injury or damage to the health of people caused by this event* (ILO, 2001). Therefore, this combination of the likelihood (probability, chance, or frequency) of a hazardous event causes harm with the severity (gravity or seriousness) of that harm, can be expressed as follows:

Risk = Likelihood X Severity

Occupational risk is mainly shaped by exposure conditions—how work is performed and the frequency, duration and dose of exposure—as well as by the interaction between material elements of work (e.g., workplace and working environment, tools, machinery and equipment, substances and agents, and work processes) and psychosocial factors (including job content, workload and pace, work schedules, control and participation, organisational culture and functioning, interpersonal relationships, role in the organisation, career development, and the home–work interface). It is also strongly influenced by how effective the preventive and protective measures are in eliminating or reducing the risk.

In this context, risk estimation can be understood as the process of determining, for each identified hazard, the level (or magnitude) of the associated risk, by combining the likelihood that a hazardous event will occur with the expected severity of the resulting harm or damage. It can be done using various established methods. A simple, practical approach is to rate both (i) the likelihood of the hazardous event (probability/frequency) and (ii) the severity of its consequences on an increasing numerical and/or qualitative scales (with the same or different scales and number of levels), as follows:

Weight	Likelihood Level	Description
1	Rare	No cases in last 3 years or isolated exceptional event.
2	Occasional	1–2 incidents per year.
3	Frequent	Several incidents per year or monthly occurrences.
4	Very Frequent	Ongoing pattern, weekly or persistent behaviours.

Table 7 - Likelihood of occurrence scale
Source: Own elaboration

Weight	Severity Level	Description
1	Minor	Transient stress reactions, irritability, mild anxiety, sleep disturbance (short duration), temporary emotional discomfort, no sick leave or ≤ 3 days.
2	Moderate	Persistent anxiety or stress symptoms, psychosomatic disorders (e.g., headaches, gastrointestinal problems, muscular tension, sleep disturbance), emotional exhaustion, short-term medically certified absence (sick leave up to several weeks).
3	Serious	Clinically diagnosed anxiety or depressive disorder, burnout syndrome, post-traumatic stress symptoms, chronic psychosomatic conditions, cardiovascular stress-related symptoms, long-term sick leave.
4	Very Serious	Severe major depressive episode, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suicide ideation or attempt, severe physical aggression resulting in injury, permanent psychological damage, occupational disease recognition or permanent incapacity, death.

Table 8 - Severity of the consequences scale
Source: Own elaboration

To support risk estimation, the likelihood and severity ratings can be recorded and visualised in a table, such as the one below:

<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">Employer:</th><th colspan="3">Establishment:</th><th colspan="2">Date:</th></tr>
<tr><th colspan="5">Risk assessment responsible:</th><th colspan="3">Signature:</th></tr>
<tr><th rowspan="2">Workstation
Department
Work process</th><th rowspan="2">Hazard</th><th rowspan="2">Exposed workers</th><th rowspan="2">Risks</th><th rowspan="2">Damage or effect</th><th colspan="3">Risk estimation</th></tr>
<tr><th>Likelihood</th><th>Severity</th><th>Risk level</th></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
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</table>

Table 9 - Risk mapping and estimation
Source: Own elaboration.

The results may also be presented in a risk matrix, in which the estimated risks are positioned within the matrix cells according to their respective scores for severity (y-axis, vertical axis) and likelihood (x-axis, horizontal axis).

As shown in the risk matrix below, estimated risk levels range from 1 to 16. A score of 1 (1×1) represents a rare event with minor consequences (bottom-left of the matrix), while 16 (4×4) reflects a very frequent event with very serious consequences (top-right). Risk levels increase as likelihood, severity, or both increase.

Once risks are estimated and plotted in the matrix, their relative importance becomes easy to see: risks positioned higher (greater severity) and further right (greater likelihood) represent higher overall risk.

Colour coding can further highlight this gradient, with the highest risks typically clustered in the upper-right quadrant. In the example shown, scores 12–16 indicate the highest-risk zone, and the maximum score 16 reflects a very frequent event (4) combined with very serious consequences (4). In scheme:

Likelihood / **Severity**	**Rare** (1)	**Occasional** (2)	**Frequent** (3)	**Very Frequent** (4)
Very Serious (4)	High (4)	Very High (8)	Critical (12)	Critical (16)
Serious (3)	Medium (3)	High (6)	Very High (9)	Critical (12)
Moderate (2)	Low (2)	Medium (4)	High (6)	Very High (8)
Minor (1)	Low (1)	Low (2)	Medium (3)	High (4)

Figure 4 – Risk matrix
Source: Own elaboration

2.1.3.3.2.2.1.4. Risk valuation and prioritization

While risk estimation indicates the magnitude of each risk and helps signal priorities, final prioritization usually requires an additional step: risk valuation and ranking.

Risk valuation determines whether a risk is acceptable by comparing it with predefined criteria set in legislation, technical standards, organizational policies or other recognized benchmarks.

A risk is considered acceptable when it falls within those limits and is knowingly tolerated by relevant stakeholders (e.g., employers, workers and labour inspectorates), even if further reductions are technically possible, often because of legitimate constraints such as cost, feasibility, productivity, quality, efficiency, workforce capabilities or the risk of creating new hazards.

If a risk exceeds the accepted threshold, it is unacceptable and must be addressed through control measures until it is eliminated or reduced to an acceptable level.

Once risks have been valuated, those judged unacceptable should be ranked through a structured prioritisation process that sets the order for control.

Beyond severity and likelihood, this ranking can consider the number of risks identified and of workers exposed, the frequency and intensity of exposure, and the urgency of action.

It may also consider practical constraints (e.g., available resources, incompatibility between measures) and potential operational, financial, legal or reputational consequences for employer.

Taken together, risk ranking is a multidimensional exercise that aims to balance worker protection, legal compliance and organizational sustainability.

The results of risk valuation and prioritization can then be summarized in a table, as follows:

Employer:					**Establishment:**			**Date:**	
Risk assessment responsible:						**Signature:**			
Workstation Department Work process	**Hazard**	**Exposed workers**	**Risks**	**Damage or effect**	**Risk estimation**			**Risk valuation & prioritization**	
					Likelihood	**Severity**	**Risk level**	**Acceptable risk? (y/n)**	**Risk hierarchy**

Table 10 - Risk mapping and assessment
Source: Own elaboration.

2.1.3.3.2.2.2. Risk control

Risk control addresses risks assessed as unacceptable. It involves selecting preventive and protective measures to eliminate or reduce risks to acceptable levels—following the hierarchy of controls—implementing them through an occupational risk prevention plan (and related programmes), and then monitoring and reviewing results, feeding lessons learned back into the ongoing risk assessment process.

In scheme:

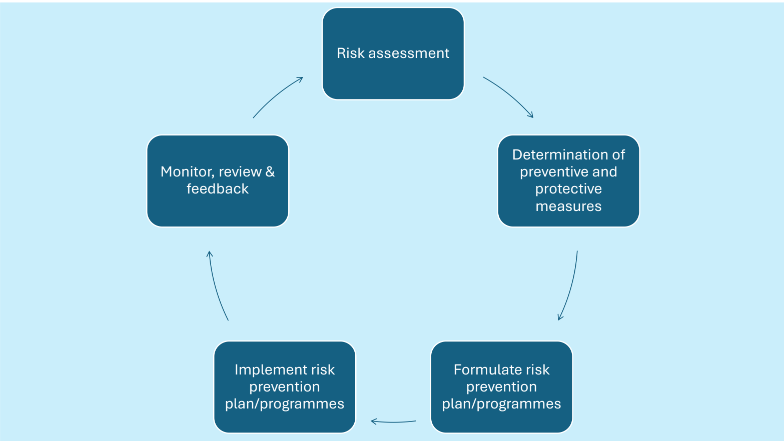

Figure 5 - Risk control cycle
Source: Own elaboration.

2.1.3.3.2.2.2.1. Preventive and protective measures

Preventive measures aim to avoid a hazardous event from arising in the first place—by tackling root causes, reducing exposure, or improving organizational and environmental conditions. Protective measures, in contrast, are aimed at minimizing the severity of the harm once an incident occurs.

Risk control should therefore prioritize prevention, because addressing risks at source is generally more effective and sustainable. For V&H, preventive actions—such as redesigning work arrangements and processes, strengthening organizational culture, and correcting power imbalances—reduce the likelihood of V&H incidents to occur. Protective measures (e.g., complaint mechanisms, support services, alarms and post-incident responses), while remaining necessary, are largely reactive and focused on mitigating consequences.

Besides minimizing human suffering and health damage, a prevention-led approach also reduces legal exposure, operational disruption and long-term costs.

In practice, and in line with sound OSH practice and international preventive principles (e.g., Articles 4(2) and 16 of C155 and Articles 1(d) and 3(3) of C187), the choice and implementation of the measures to eliminate or reduce occupational risks should follow strictly the hierarchy of controls that ranks measures by their level of effectiveness in eliminating or reducing risks at source. Applied to V&H risks, the hierarchy may be articulated as follows (from most to least effective):

Level	Control Type	Objective	Description	Examples	Observations
1	Elimination ***If not possible, then…*** ↓	Remove the source of V&H risk entirely	Eliminate situations, structures or practices that create exposure to violence or harassment.	Discontinuing isolated night work where serious third-party violence has occurred and cannot be adequately controlled. Abolishing hierarchical practices or incentive systems that foster abusive supervision or bullying. Removing customer-facing tasks from particularly vulnerable workers where risk cannot be otherwise mitigated.	Most effective measure – removes the hazard itself.
2	Substitution ***If not sufficient, then…*** ↓	Replace hazardous arrangements with safer alternatives	Redesign activities or organizational models to reduce exposure where elimination is not feasible.	Replacing in-person high-conflict service by digital or remote channels. Substituting single-worker service points with team-based service models. Replacing commission-based pay systems that foster aggressive competition with balanced performance systems. Replace cash-only or cash-handling transactions with cashless or prepaid payment systems Replacing open public access points with appointment-based or pre-screened service delivery arrangements.	Reduces inherent risk by altering exposure conditions.
3	Engineering (Technical) Controls ***If not sufficient, then…*** ↓	Isolate workers from the hazard	Use physical or technological measures to reduce exposure without relying primarily on worker behaviour.	Installation of shatter-resistant barriers, reinforced doors, protective screens or secure counters in high-risk service areas. Controlled access systems, panic buttons & CCTV. Acoustic insulation and soundproof interview/reporting rooms to ensure privacy and reduce the risk of intimidation or retaliation during the reporting of incidents. Environmental improvements (lighting, temperature, noise, layout). Workstation layout redesign to ensure safe distancing and unobstructed escape routes.	Particularly relevant for third-party violence risks.
4	Administrative (Organizational) Controls ***If not sufficient, then…*** ↓	Modify work organization and management practices	Address psychosocial and organizational determinants of violence and harassment.	Anti-V&H policies, codes of conduct & behavioural standards. Confidential reporting & investigation procedures. Election by workers of a workers' representative or focal point for issues related to violence and harassment, with clearly defined functions in prevention, support, reporting and follow-up. Digital reporting platforms ensuring secure documentation of complaints. Workload management and adequate staffing. Leadership training (e.g., on respectful management and V&H). Staff rotation in high-risk posts.	Essential but dependent on effective implementation and enforcement.

Level	Control Type	Objective	Description	Examples	Observations
				Early conflict-resolution mechanisms.	
5	PPE & Individual Protective Measures	Mitigate impact of exposure	Provide individual tools to reduce consequences when exposure occurs.	Personal alarms. Body-worn cameras (where lawful). Defensive training for high-risk roles.	Least effective – just minimizes consequences (only after all measures have been exhausted).

Table 11 – Example of preventive and protective measures against V&H risks following the hierarchy of controls
Source: Own elaboration

The hierarchy of controls embodies the prevention principle that risks should be controlled at their source, giving priority to structural, collective and organisational measures over reactive or individual-level responses. In the V&H context, this means addressing underlying drivers—such as power imbalances, deficient work organisation, permissive attitudes toward abusive conduct, or unsafe models for interacting with clients or the public—rather than relying mainly on complaints procedures or individual "resilience" training.

2.1.3.3.2.2.2.2. Occupational risk prevention plan

Once the most appropriate preventive and protective measures to control the risks have been selected according to the hierarchy of controls, they need to be translated into an implementation framework—typically an occupational risk prevention plan, supplemented where necessary by specific action programmes.

The plan should set out at a minimum: the measures to be implemented; timelines; required resources; responsible persons; objectives, indicators and targets; means of verification; the schedule for follow-up risk assessments; and arrangements for monitoring and review.

A simple example is provided below.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="6">Employer:</th><th colspan="3">Establishment:</th><th>Date:</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="7">Prevention plan responsible:</td><td colspan="3">Signature:</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Hazard</td><td rowspan="2">Risk</td><td rowspan="2">Risk level</td><td rowspan="2">Risk priority ranking</td><td rowspan="2">Preventive & protective measures</td><td rowspan="2">Respons. person</td><td rowspan="2">Deadline</td><td colspan="2">Monitoring</td><td rowspan="2">Risk controlled? (y/n)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Frequency</td><td>Dates</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
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Table 12 – Occupational risk prevention plan
Source: Own elaboration.

2.1.3.3.2.2.3. Monitoring, review and feedback

Effective monitoring of an occupational risk prevention plan is essential to ensure that measures are not only implemented, but actually controlling identified risks. The ILO-OSH 2001 Guidelines call on employers to establish procedures for regular performance monitoring and measurement (Section 3.11), including checking whether OSH policy and objectives are being met and whether day-to-day arrangements for hazard identification, prevention and control are functioning effectively (Sections 3.11.4–3.11.5). Where monitoring shows that measures are inadequate or deficient, they should be reviewed and adjusted in line with the hierarchy of prevention and control and documented in a timely manner (Section 3.15.2).

In addition, the results of monitoring, along with the findings from inspections, incident investigations, audits and management reviews, should then feed back into the risk assessment process to drive continual improvement (Sections 3.14 and 3.16). In practice, this creates a closed loop: risk assessment informs planning; implementation is monitored; effectiveness is reviewed; corrective action is taken where needed; and the updated evidence strengthens subsequent risk assessments. This cyclical approach keeps risk prevention dynamic, evidence-based and increasingly effective over time.

2.1.3.3.3. At the end of the inspection visit

At the end of the visit, and when doing so does not undermine the inspection and does not compromise the privacy, confidentiality and anti-retaliation protection of complainants, victims, witnesses and whistle-blowers, inspectors should debrief the key parties (SLIC, 2024):

- Employer (or their representatives): main findings, inspection procedures applied (or to be applied), and next steps.
- Workers' representatives (e.g., trade union representatives, workers' delegates, workers' OSH representatives): key results and expected follow-up.
- Other relevant actors (e.g., safety coordinator, OSH expert, occupational physician): findings, inspection procedures applied and anticipated action.

The information shared, subject to the same safeguards, may include: verified good practices (and permission to disseminate them); an overview of compliance level verified; detected irregularities, their legal basis and consequences; practical steps to remedy them and technical solutions to support compliance; and the inspection procedures applied during the visit (e.g., recommendations, warnings, improvement or stoppage/suspension notices) and those envisaged afterwards (e.g., infraction notices, referrals), with brief justification .

2.1.3.4. Inspection action closure

2.1.3.4.1. Analysis

After the visit, inspectors typically complete tasks that could not be done on-site, including:

- Consolidating and analyzing the facts, evidence and the applicable legal framework.
- Determining further steps, such as requesting additional documents or issuing procedures that could not be notified during the visit (e.g., infraction notices, referrals to other authorities).
- In serious cases, depending on their mandate and legal prerogatives and subject to informed consent, coordinating victim-centered follow up with relevant institutions.
- Deciding on a follow-up visit to verify compliance with required measures, clarify issues identified during analysis, or collect additional evidence.

2.1.3.4.2. Record

After the visit, inspectors should promptly record the inspection in the relevant system (e.g., database/information system/electronic case management system). For example, in Portugal:

Box 11 – Record requirements in ACT
According to the *Inspection Activity Guidelines*, labour inspectors are required, after an inspection visit, to record as soon as possible at least the following information: 1. Employers inspected;

2. Number and types of workers covered;
3. Topics verified;
4. Irregularities detected;
5. Inspection procedures applied; and
6. Next steps.

Source: ACT (2014).

Inspectors should also ensure that all evidence and supporting documents—complaints/referrals triggering the visit, collected records (or copies/extracts), statements, questionnaires, photos/videos, measurements and any test results—are securely filed in the employer's physical and/or digital inspectorate file, together with inspectors' notes, for further processing, analysis and reporting (ACT, 2014).

Where relevant, data should be disaggregated by potential or known discriminatory factors (e.g., sex, race/colour, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin, nationality, immigration status, and contract type, such as permanent/temporary/fixed term/part-time/telework/internship/training) to help detect possible discrimination patterns.

These records feed into inspectorate reporting and performance systems (including annual reports and statistics on labour inspection, OSH, V&H, and equality/non-discrimination) and inform future planning. They support strategy-setting, compliance analysis, decision-making, evaluation of interventions, service and staff performance, policy assessment and improvement, and better preparation for future inspections by providing inspectors with relevant employer history.

2.1.3.4.3. Report

After the visit, the inspector should draft an inspection report, which documents the information underpinning decisions and follow-up. The report should be clear, factual and succinct, describing the context, observations, evidence, measures taken and their rationale, and the outcomes. In Portugal, for example:

Box 12 - Inspection visit report in the Portuguese labour inspectorate

According to the *Inspection Activity Guidelines*, this report should align with the case-management/information system and include:

1. Identification: inspection visit/action code and date (and linked visits, where applicable).
2. Trigger: inspection plan/programme reference (for proactive inspection) or the complaint, referral, request, or other event that prompted the visit (in case of reactive inspection).
3. Objectives and scope: objectives of the inspection and its field (e.g., OSH, conditions of work) and subject matter (e.g., working time, wages, equality/non-discrimination, V&H, etc.).
4. Employer and workplace identification.
5. Description of the intervention: method, key interlocutors, situation found, checks performed and analysis undertaken.
6. Irregularities identified, including those voluntarily corrected.
7. Procedures applied (or not) and reasons.
8. Conclusion and overall assessment: results against objectives, including the extent of workplace improvement achieved.

Source: ACT (2014).

2.1.3.4.4. Disclosure

In many jurisdictions, until a final decision is taken and the case is closed, the inspection report should not be released. In Portugal, for example:

Box 13 – Disclosure of inspection visit/action reports in ACT

Once archived, the inspection visit/action reports can only be accessed with due consideration for:

- Applicable rules on access to administrative documents;
- Compliance with protection of personal data legislation;

• Safeguard of the privacy and confidentiality of all persons concerned and their protection against retaliation; and
• Protection of business, manufacturing, commercial or trade secrets.

Source: ACT (2014).

Moreover, at the end of the inspection process, or earlier if justified, and provided the aforesaid safeguards are observed, written information may be issued: (i) to the employer: confirmation that the inspection has been completed/closed and, where relevant, notice of any additional coercive measures foreseen and how they will be processed; (ii) to the whistle-blower/complainant: information on the outcome of the inspection visit/action (ACT, 2014).

2.2. Handling complaints

Complaint mechanisms are a fundamental component of labour inspection enforcement systems. They provide a direct channel for detecting violations, particularly in areas such as violence and harassment that may otherwise remain hidden.

Notwithstanding preventive efforts, inspectors will inevitably encounter cases of V&H that have occurred or are ongoing, often brought forward through complaints or referrals from other agencies, unions or whistle-blowers. Handling these cases is a core inspection function and calls for objectivity, timely action, tact, thoroughness, strict confidentiality and impartiality.

2.2.1. Complaints' initial assessment

Upon receiving a complaint, labour inspectorates usually conduct an initial screening and prioritize it based on the reliability of the source, the complainant's legitimacy, and the relevance and seriousness of the issues raised.

A credible complaint alleging serious V&H violations is typically treated as high priority and assigned for urgent investigation. Beyond falling within labour inspection mandates in many jurisdictions—particularly when addressed as an OSH issue under Convention No. 190 (Arts. 9(b), 10(h), 11(a) and 12)—preventing and eliminating V&H is generally regarded as a priority enforcement area.

2.2.2. Guidance and support services

Once a V&H complaint is assigned, the inspector should ensure the complainant is heard safely and confidentially, in a trusted setting, recognizing that many victims may feel traumatized, embarrassed, or afraid of retaliation or stigma. This may involve meetings off-site or outside working hours if needed, signaling that the complaint is taken seriously and will be handled promptly, reaffirming the inspector's duty to protect the complaint's source, and explaining the safeguards available to ensure privacy, confidentiality and protection against retaliation.

Because some V&H cases may also amount to criminal offences (e.g., assault, sexual violence, sexual harassment, credible threats), inspectors should inform victims of their rights and options, including the possibility of filing a criminal complaint where applicable—without prejudice to the inspector's eventual obligation, under national law, to refer such cases to competent public authorities for prosecution.

Where a victim comes directly to the inspectorate instead of using internal grievance or dispute-resolution mechanisms, inspectors should accept the choice but explore the reasons (e.g., lack of awareness, fear of reprisals, the alleged perpetrator being a supervisor, or lack of trust in internal processes). Inspectors should then verify whether such mechanisms exist and assess whether they effectively protect the privacy and confidentiality of complainants, victims, witnesses and whistle-blowers and guard against retaliation.

When advising complainants or victims, inspectors should also point them to available support services, including those referenced in Recommendation No. 206 (Paragraph 17), such as counselling and information services, hotlines, emergency assistance, medical care and psychological support, social protection, crisis centres/shelters, external dispute-resolution mechanisms, specialised police support, legal aid, trade union support and specialised Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). While inspectors do not usually provide these services themselves, they should help victims access them through appropriate referrals, as part of a victim-centred approach.

More broadly, addressing V&H requires a victim-centred approach: actions should be guided by the victim's needs, with informed consent sought as the case progresses; safety, privacy and confidentiality must be protected; and victims should be empowered through clear information on available procedures, possible risks and the safeguards to reduce them—so they can make informed decisions about how the case should proceed (ILO, 2023a).

2.2.3. Reactive inspection visits

Reactive inspection visits are typically initiated by an external trigger rather than by prior planning. Common triggers include complaints from workers or employers (or their representatives), notifications of occupational accidents or diseases, requests for OSH authorisations for high-risk activities or substances, requests from judicial or other competent authorities, and requests for opinions linked to industrial or commercial licensing.

While the general approach used for proactive inspection visits (see Subsection "2.1.3. Proactive inspection visits") can also guide complaint-based reactive inspection visits on V&H, cases involving very serious V&H violations often require adjustments to ensure privacy, confidentiality and protection against retaliation. These adjustments usually affect the scope of the visit and the fact-finding and evidence-gathering strategy (notably interviews and the documents and records to be requested).

2.2.3.1. Scope of the reactive inspection visits

Whether proactive or reactive, inspection visits may be narrowly focused or more comprehensive. Reactive visits usually concentrate on the complaint's subject matter. In V&H cases, however, a too-narrow scope can inadvertently identify complainants, victims, witnesses or whistle-blowers and expose them to retaliation.

To protect privacy and confidentiality, inspectors may need to broaden the scope by also examining unrelated issues, additional departments/processes, interviewing a wider set of persons, and/or requesting additional documentation. The scope may also be expanded if the visit reveals other victims or additional serious breaches

2.2.3.2. Investigation and collection of evidence

Throughout the investigation, inspectors must remain independent and evidence-based, resisting improper influence and acting in line with the principles of legality, integrity, impartiality, confidentiality and prudence. They should also apply a victim-centred approach, interviewing victims with sensitivity and empathy, mindful that recounting V&H may be re-traumatising.

Accordingly, interviews should use trauma-informed and respectful techniques and take account of gender dynamics. For example, some victims of sexual harassment may feel unable to speak freely with an inspector of a different gender; where feasible, inspectorates may assign an inspector of the same gender and/or allow a support person at the victim's request. Maintaining gender balance among inspectors can support this practice (ILO, 2023a).

In reactive V&H cases, and depending on the facts, workplace context or a person's request, inspectors may also choose to conduct interviews privately and individually at the inspectorate's office (rather than on the employer's premises) to strengthen trust and better secure privacy and confidentiality and protection against retaliation.

Depending on the allegations, inspectors may need to go beyond the evidence normally gathered under the "2.1.2.2.1. Research" and "2.1.2.3.2.1. Process" steps and request additional material, such as recruitment and job-application files, performance and promotion records, email exchanges, social media content, mobile-phone communications (messages/logs), and CCTV footage of the workplace and other work-related settings (e.g., travel, training, events or social activities, including accommodation and meals).

Where the alleged facts may also amount to a criminal offence, inspectors should act in accordance with national law and applicable protocols, including by preserving relevant evidence within their mandate, avoiding actions that could compromise a criminal investigation, and referring the matter promptly to the competent public prosecutor or police where required. The administrative inspection process may continue in relation to labour, OSH, equality/non-discrimination or other breaches within the inspectorate's mandate, while the criminal process follows its own procedures. For further guidance on referral and coordination with criminal justice authorities, see Section 4.1.3, "Public prosecutors and police".

Inspectors should also assess whether existing V&H prevention and protection measures are effective, including whether the employer conducted an internal investigation regarding the case in hand and whether it was lawful, thorough and followed by appropriate action. Where a proper and lawful internal investigation and measures taken aligns with the inspector's findings, it may be endorsed. Where it is absent, flawed or followed by unlawful or inadequate measures—or where controls are ineffective—inspectors should secure compliance through appropriate procedures (e.g., improvement notices, stoppage/suspension notices, infraction notices, and referrals to competent authorities, especially where a crime is suspected).

2.2.4. Feedback

Once the complaint investigation is concluded, inspectors should, as far as possible, inform the victim/complainant of the outcome and any actions taken, as highlighted in Module 13 - Labour inspection and non-discrimination. Transparent communication helps close the loop, recognizes the complainant's effort, and strengthens trust in the system.

However, any information shared must comply with applicable rules on access to administrative documents and personal data protection, and must safeguard the employer's manufacturing, commercial or trade secrets.

2.3. Improvement of the legal framework

Beyond enforcing existing rules and advising employers and workers, labour inspectorates must also report to competent authorities any defects or abuses not adequately covered by current legislation (C81, Art. 3(1); C129, Art. 6(1)). This function reflects the role of labour inspection within the broader labour administration system, contributing to evidence-based policymaking, legislative reform and continuous improvement of labour governance.

Consistent with the inspectorate's indivisible and complementary functions of enforcement, advice and reporting (ILO, 2022d, Paragraph 1.2.3), this places labour inspection in a structural position to help strengthen national V&H regulation: inspection practice reveals implementation gaps (including challenges in applying OSH frameworks to V&H) and generates evidence for regulatory improvements (ILO, 2020).

Through systematic reporting, tripartite consultation and recommendations grounded in inspection findings, labour inspectorates contribute to the definition of policy and legislative priorities, including when recurring psychosocial risks, sexual harassment patterns or third-party violence are not effectively addressed by existing norms.

In this connection, the SLIC Common Principles for Labour Inspection in Relation to Health and Safety in the Workplace highlight the importance of effective internal communication so inspection findings reach policy-makers and legislators—reinforcing the feedback loop between enforcement and normative development—consistent with inspectorates' reporting obligations (C81, Arts. 19–21; C129, Arts. 25–27).

The next section presents practical tools and approaches to support compliance in day-to-day inspection work on this topic.

3. Practical tools and resources for labour inspectors

To deliver the roles outlined above, labour inspectors can draw on a range of practical tools and resources—from inspection checklists and questionnaires to specialised training modules, guidelines and internal protocols that help standardise and strengthen interventions on V&H. Inspectorates can also use technology (e.g., digital case-management and reporting systems, e-learning and other online tools) to improve consistency, accessibility and effectiveness. This section highlights some of these tools and resources that support more effective inspection practice on V&H.

3.1. Practical tools

3.1.1. Checklists

A simple, high-impact tool is an inspection checklist (or structured question set) to assess how well a workplace prevents and responds to V&H. It can be used in routine OSH visits or in targeted V&H inspections. It should be adapted to the objectives and scope of the inspection visit and reflect national requirements and the standards in Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206, incorporating recognised good practices where feasible.

These often cover not just employer policies but also workplace culture indicators. For instance, questions about whether workers feel safe to report issues, or if there are any anonymous surveys showing prevalence of bullying, can give important insights.

The Indonesian labour inspectorate, for example, has developed checklists to prevent and address workplace discrimination and sexual violence and to promote gender equality.

Box 13 – Indonesian labour inspectorate's checklist on workplace sexual violence

Regarding workplace sexual violence, the aforesaid checklist includes the following questions:

- *Does the company have a written policy for preventing and addressing sexual violence? If yes, please explain how the policy is communicated to employees.*
- *Does the company have a Task Force for Preventing and Responding to Sexual Violence in the Workplace?*
- *Does the company make efforts to prevent sexual violence, for example, through education on company policies related to sexual violence, training related to sexual violence in the workplace, raising workers' awareness of sexual violence in the workplace, etc.?*
- *Does the company have a mechanism for receiving and addressing complaints about sexual harassment?*
- *Are reports and investigations of sexual harassment recorded and documented?*
- *Have there been any complaints of sexual harassment in the past year?*
- *Does the company handle complaints of sexual violence cases reported to the company?*

Source: ILO (2023a).

Using such checklists systematically helps inspectors cover key elements, but they are support tools and should not restrict, in any way, the scope of the inspection visits to the issues containing therein. They can also be repurposed by employers, workers and their representatives to self-assess or audit workplace practice against legal requirements and recognised good practice, identify gaps and plan corrective action.

3.1.2. Questionnaires

Questionnaires are a practical prevention tool for employers, workers and their representatives. Used as diagnostic and audit instruments, they help identify V&H-related hazards and exposed groups, assess occupational risks, and check whether existing controls are working properly.

For example, the Danish WEA provides employers with a questionnaire covering 21 categories of workplace behaviours that may amount to sexual harassment, and Japan has developed a comparably detailed questionnaire on power harassment (ILO, 2024b).

Other widely used standardized tools include Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire, version III (COPSOQ III), which assesses psychosocial working conditions to support workplace risk assessment and prevention through an internationally harmonized set of core items (e.g., quantitative demands, work pace, emotional demands, influence at work, possibilities for development, meaning of work, role clarity, role conflicts, quality of leadership, job insecurity, work–life conflict, etc.), and the Psychosocial Safety Climate scales (PSC-4/PSC-12), which capture workers' perceptions of how strongly management prioritizes psychological health and safety across four domains (commitment, priority, communication and participation).

3.1.3. Inspection guidelines, manuals, protocols, and standard operational procedures

To promote quality, effectiveness and consistency nationwide, some inspectorates develop guidelines, manuals, protocols and standard operating procedures for key inspection tasks (e.g., conducting visits, evaluating risk assessments, providing advice, sharing good practices). These tools may target specific risks (e.g., psychosocial, chemical, biological), sectors (e.g., construction, healthcare, mining) or issues (e.g., V&H, working time, informality, platform work), and they complement initial and continuous training, including for campaigns and targeted actions.

For example, Spain's Labour and Social Security Inspectorate (ITSS) has issued internal protocols to support inspection work on workplace V&H and psychosocial risks (ITSS, 2009, 2021).

Box 14 – Spanish ITSS guidelines on V&H and psychosocial risks

Technical Criterion 104/2021: supports labour inspectors in monitoring employers' compliance with their duty to manage psychosocial risks pursuant law 31/1995 (on occupational risks prevention). It guides inspectors on what to verify: whether psychosocial risks are properly identified and assessed (e.g., workload, working time, role clarity, interpersonal relations), whether assessment methods are appropriate (quantitative and qualitative), whether workers participate, and whether documentation and results are integrated into preventive planning. It also helps inspectors evaluate whether corrective measures are proportionate, implemented and monitored, and provides orientations for complex situations such as stress-related disorders and burnout, organisationally driven harassment, third-party violence, multi-employer coordination, and potential Social Security consequences (e.g., benefit surcharges due to preventive failures). Overall, it equips inspectors with operational criteria to treat psychosocial risk management as a core OSH enforcement area.

Sources: ITSS (2021).

Another example is the *Inspection Activity Guidelines* developed in 2019 by the Portuguese ACT. They are an operational and methodological guide to help inspectors structure, conduct, document and report interventions on working conditions and OSH. The Guidelines, among other aspects, cover core inspection techniques (e.g., unannounced visits, evidence collection, interviews, accident investigations and document review), supplies flowcharts for different types of cases (e.g., complaint handling, OSH inspections, accident investigations, collective redundancies, wage non-payment, strikes, construction safety and bogus self-employment), and provides guidance on the application of inspection procedures (recommendations, warnings, suspension orders, infringement notices and referrals to other competent authorities).

At the international level, the ILO *Guidelines on General Principles of Labour Inspection* provide a comprehensive operational framework, grounded in Conventions Nos. 81 and 129, clarifying inspectors' mandate, powers, status and working methods in contemporary labour markets. They promote risk-based planning, participatory policy development, monitoring and reporting, and emphasise that most inspectors' time should be devoted to unannounced workplace visits, using core powers such as free entry without prior notice, document review, interviews and orders for remedial or immediate measures. The Guidelines also address proportionate enforcement (combining advice, notices and sanctions), and underline the need for adequate staffing, training and specialist support, cooperation with social partners and other authorities, and protection of inspectors from undue influence or violence (ILO, 2022d).

At EU level, the SLIC *Common Principles for Labour Inspection in Relation to Health and Safety in the Workplace* offer a harmonized reference framework for effective, risk-based and prevention-oriented OSH enforcement. They set operational benchmarks for inspectors, including evidence-based annual planning; clear inspection methodologies; workplace examination coupled with dialogue with employers and workers; proportionate but effective enforcement (from advice to sanctions and work stoppage in cases of serious risk); robust documentation and internal record systems; and guarantees of inspector competence, independence and protection. They also stress strong internal and external communication, engagement with social partners and other authorities, and ongoing professional development and quality assurance (SLIC, 2024).

3.1.4. Risk assessment tools

Risk-assessment tools can support prevention and elimination of V&H by helping labour inspectors (as well as employers and workers) to identify psychosocial hazards and to assess and control associated occupational risks. Inspectors, however, as mentioned earlier, should not replace the employer in conducting risk assessment; their role is to monitor and enforce compliance, judge the quality of the employer's assessment and controls, and, where appropriate, provide advice and share good practices. In this respect, the SLIC non-binding Labour inspectors' guide for assessing the quality of risk assessments and risk management measures with regard to prevention of psychosocial risks can be particularly useful.

Inspectors can also disseminate practical tools and, where relevant, help the employer, workers and their representatives use them properly. Some examples include (ILO, 2024b): the French National Research and Safety Institute's interactive psychosocial-risk instrument developed for enterprises with fewer than 50 workers (a joint management–staff questionnaire producing a results table, analytical report and dashboard to support an action plan); the Spanish INSST methodology for psychosocial risk assessment and management in small enterprises (up to 25 workers), structured in ten broad categories of psychosocial risk (including internal V&H and third-party violence) that offers step-by-step guidance to assist conducting the assessment and proposes control measures; the Dutch Labour Inspectorate's online self-diagnostic "e-tool" on V&H that generates an analysis and improvement recommendations; and Canada's online sample workplace risk assessment which must be used by employers of federally regulated industries or workplaces to assess workplace V&H risks jointly with the appropriate worker-representation body (health and safety representative, workplace committee or policy committee, depending on the employer size).

Beyond the tools mentioned above, employers and workers can use many other instruments to carry out and document psychosocial risk assessments and control, such as guidance materials, surveys, structured interviews, workplace observations, checklists and standard templates. Inspectors may recommend, for example:

- Training Package on Workplace Risk Assessment and Management for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises: three modules training package on risk assessment and management for those running and working in SMEs, developed by the ILO and translated in several languages.

- A 5 step guide for employers, workers and their representatives on conducting workplace risk assessments: short guide developed by the ILO, based on the above training package.

- Online interactive Risk Assessment (OiRA): a free web platform developed by EU-OSHA for micro and small enterprises to conduct risk assessments and develop prevention plans, searchable by sector, country and language; it includes a generic tool for psychosocial risks.

- E-guide to managing stress and psychosocial risks: an introductory guide developed by EU-OSHA for small enterprises, explaining work-related stress and psychosocial risks, their impacts, and practical steps for their prevention and management.

- Stress prevention at work checkpoints: an action-oriented manual developed by the ILO with practical "checkpoints" for low-cost improvements, linked to common sources of work-related stress and designed to integrate stress prevention into risk assessment and OSH management.

- Prima-EF consortium online resources: online reports, guidelines, good-practice collections and thematic sheets to support psychosocial risk management, including tools for policy development, indicators and action plans addressing work-related stress, as well as workplace violence, harassment and bullying.

3.1.5. Practical guides

As part of their advisory function, labour inspectors can share practical guidance on preventing and eliminating V&H—produced by the inspectorate itself or by other national actors (e.g., employers' organisations, trade unions, research centres and universities) and international organisations (e.g., the ILO, WHO, PRIMA-EF, and EU). These resources compile recommendations and good practices that can often be adapted to the workplace concerned.

Examples may include: *Preventing and Addressing Violence and Harassment in the World of Work through Occupational Safety and Health Measures*; *Violence and harassment in the world of work: Trade union initiatives, strategies and negotiations on implementing the Convention on Violence and Harassment (No. 190) and Recommendation (No. 206), 2019*; *How to prevent and address violence and harassment at work: A training course for enterprises – Training manual*; *Violence and harassment at work: A practical guide for employers*; and Working together for a culture of respect - Code of conduct for prevention of all forms of violence and harassment at ILO events.

3.1.6. List of references and good practices

Other useful inspection tools include: (i) a readily accessible list of the key applicable laws, regulations and collective agreements (or their main provisions), and (ii) a curated set of relevant good practices in practical formats (e.g., document or digital templates, photos, videos). These resources help inspectors justify required improvements and propose feasible, workplace-adapted solutions to support compliance.

3.2. Training and specialization for labour inspectors

In accordance with Conventions Nos. 81 and 150, Member States have the obligation to ensure that labour inspectorates are provided with adequate human, financial and technical resources to effectively discharge their functions. Without such resources, expanded mandates—such as those arising from Convention No. 190—cannot be effectively implemented. As noted earlier (see Section 1), Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206 call for gender-responsive training for labour inspectors and officials of other competent authorities to identify and address V&H, including psychosocial hazards and risks, gender-based V&H, and discrimination affecting particular groups of workers (C190, Art. 11(b); R206, Paragraph 20).

This is also a practical requirement, as V&H cases often involve social and psychological dynamics not covered in depth by more traditional inspector training. Training should therefore be embedded in both initial and continuous learning and may include:

1. Technical and investigative training on psychosocial risks and V&H (e.g., handling sexual-harassment complaints, recognising bullying patterns, interviewing traumatised persons, and identifying domestic violence spillover at work), using case studies, role-playing exercises, and input from psychologists or gender experts.

2. Soft skills and sensitivity training to support a victim-centred yet impartial approach, including understanding gender power relations, heightened vulnerability of certain groups and how inspector positionality may shape evidence interpretation and judgement.

3. Joint training with other actors (e.g., police, prosecutors, judges, social services), as envisaged in Recommendation No. 206 (Paragraph 23(b)), to improve coordination and mutual understanding (e.g., evidence preservation and victim protection).

4. Specialisation arrangements, such as dedicated focal points or small specialised teams for psychosocial/gender-related issues, to handle complex cases, advise colleagues and support peer learning and updates.

3.3. Data collection and analysis

One of the most important resources for strengthening inspectorate action on V&H is reliable data. Statistics and trend analysis help both targeting interventions and demonstrating their impact. Recommendation No. 206 therefore encourages Members to collect and publish V&H statistics, disaggregated by sex, form of V&H, sector, etc. (R206, Paragraph 22).

Labour inspectorates can support this by systematically recording V&H cases they handle—complaint volumes, regions, sectors, employer profiles, forms of V&H, groups affected, outcomes and follow-up. Some inspectorates publish such information in their annual reports, consistent with their reporting obligations (C81, Arts. 20–21; C129, Arts. 26–27). This transparency can inform public policy, shape inspectorate priorities, and strengthen awareness and accountability.

Internally, data enables risk-based targeting. A rise in complaints in a particular region, sector or among certain enterprise sizes can justify reallocating inspections and resources. Conversely, very low reporting in known high-risk sectors may signal underreporting and trigger outreach or proactive inspections.

Digital case-management systems can facilitate this work if they include clear categories/codes for different forms of V&H and links to complaint channels, while ensuring privacy and confidentiality, with reporting based on aggregated data.

Data can also help evaluate what works, as patterns in repeat incidents or compliance after specific interventions can inform whether guidance, training, notices or stronger enforcement is needed, especially for repeat offenders.

Overall, effective V&H inspection practice relies on a practical toolkit—checklists and guidance, training and protocols, coordination mechanisms, and robust data systems—so inspectors can act more consistently, proactively and strategically, and help normalise V&H prevention as part of everyday inspection work.

Systematic reporting and public dissemination of inspection results are key accountability mechanisms within labour administration systems. They contribute to transparency, inform policy decisions, and reinforce public trust in enforcement institutions.

▶ 4. Coordination and enforcement strategies

V&H in the world of work is a complex and multidimensional issue that can fall under the mandates of several institutions simultaneously. It may be a labour rights violation, an OSH violation, a form of discrimination, and sometimes a criminal offence. Effective prevention and response therefore requires strong coordination across institutions. Labour inspectors should work alongside other public authorities, social partners and, where relevant, civil society actors to ensure cases are handled holistically and that no aspect is overlooked. This section outlines how partnerships and integrated approaches can strengthen enforcement

4.1. Cooperation with other authorities and entities

Coordination among authorities should be structured and led by the competent labour administration authority, ensuring clarity of roles, avoiding duplication, and promoting a coherent and integrated approach to enforcement and prevention. Cooperation between labour inspectorates and other public authorities and, where relevant, public and private actors involved in preventing and addressing V&H, is essential to effective inspection. It is particularly important where responsibilities for V&H are spread across labour inspection, OSH and equality/non-discrimination bodies, as encouraged by Recommendation No. 206 (Paragraph 21). The integrated approach required by Convention No. 190 (Art. 4(2)) and the necessity to address V&H through labour, employment, OSH, equality/non-discrimination and, where appropriate, criminal law (R206, Paragraph 2) further reinforce the need for inter-institutional cooperation. Effective inspection and investigation mechanisms (C190, Art. 4(2)(h)) and the obligation to ensure competent authorities are empowered to act (C190, Art. 10(h)) are difficult to operationalize without clear cooperation frameworks, information-sharing and coordinated interventions.

The ILO Guidelines on General Principles of Labour Inspection stress that, where inspection authority or mandate are distributed, close cooperation is needed to avoid duplication, optimize the use of resources and ensure coherent action (Guidelines, Paragraphs 2.2.2–2.2.3), and should be organized around systematic information-sharing, coordinated activities and joint programmes/inspections (Guidelines, Paragraph 2.2.5). To secure sustained coordination, it recommends permanent arrangements—such as Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), cooperation agreements or protocols—covering data exchange, sharing good practices and joint planning, training, inspections and awareness-raising campaigns (Guidelines, Paragraph 2.2.1).

Some V&H issues cannot be addressed by labour inspectors alone. For example, mitigating the impact of domestic violence at work requires an integrated, inter-agency approach, involving coordination with other relevant authorities. Labour inspectors focus on ensuring that employers adopt appropriate workplace measures to prevent and eliminate the risks and to protect and support affected workers (such as flexible working arrangements, leave provisions, and enhanced safety or security), while referring issues outside its mandate to other competent authorities and entities (e.g., social security, social support services, NGOs, CSOs and, where appropriate, the police and the judiciary). In serious cases, structured victim-centred case management may also be needed—subject to the worker's informed consent—bringing together labour inspection, law enforcement and, where appropriate, support services' professionals to clarify roles and coordinate follow-up.

Key partners typically include OSH authorities, equality/human rights bodies, other public administration entities (e.g., employment, social security and migration), insurance bodies, specialized NGOs and CSOs and, where necessary, the public prosecutor's office or the judiciary.

4.1.1. OSH authorities and institutions

In most jurisdictions, labour inspection covers both conditions of work and OSH, but some systems split responsibilities—either between labour and OSH inspectors within the labour inspectorates, or between a labour inspectorate and a dedicated OSH authority or inspectorate.

Regardless of the model, close coordination is essential because V&H is often addressed as a psychosocial hazard, and OSH is closely linked to broader working conditions (e.g., working time, leave, wages, training, job design, workload, work pace, and career development). Labour and OSH inspectors (and their institutions, as the case may be) should therefore exchange information and run joint activities—planning, programming, capacity-building, coordinated inspections and awareness campaigns—to address physical and psychosocial risks in a coherent and holistic way.

Where OSH enforcement sits with a separate OSH authority, the labour inspectorate should refer detected OSH/V&H breaches and, where appropriate, conduct joint workplace visits with OSH inspectors. The same logic applies to other OSH actors: for example, if an OSH research institute identifies high levels of third-party violence in health care, and OSH falls under the remit the labour inspectorate, that intelligence should be shared with the inspectorate to help target inspections in hospitals and clinics.

4.1.2. Equality and human rights commissions

Equality and non-discrimination bodies are expected to cover V&H where it falls within their mandate (R206, Paragraph 21), especially GBVH and other discrimination-based V&H; however, not all forms of V&H necessarily constitute discrimination. For example, in Finland the Equality Ombudsperson and the Non-Discrimination and Equality Tribunal (Equality and Gender Equality Board) are empowered under the Act on Equality between Women and Men to monitor compliance in private and public sectors and to request from employers the information and documents needed for their work (ILO, 2021).

Labour inspectorates should coordinate closely with these bodies by sharing information on cases within their remit so they can investigate, apply their own measures or refer for legal action. Conversely, equality bodies may refer matters to labour inspection for workplace follow-up when situations detected fall under labour inspectorate's purview.

Coordination can be formalised through MoUs or protocols (e.g., information-sharing, joint training, joint visits and joint programmes), including referral arrangements—with the complainant's consent—when a case falls under both mandates. Regular liaison meetings can also help align priorities and planned actions.

4.1.3. Public prosecutors and police

Depending on the jurisdiction, V&H may trigger not only administrative liability (e.g., under labour, OSH, or equality/non-discrimination law), but also criminal offences (e.g., assault, threats, coercion, sexual violence, stalking). Where inspectors have reasonable grounds to suspect criminal conduct in addition to administrative offences, they should address the administrative breaches and promptly refer the case to the competent public prosecutor (or, where appropriate, the police) for further investigation and prosecution.

Portugal illustrates this dual track. Harassment is prohibited under the Portuguese Labour Code[6] and constitutes a *very serious administrative offence*, without prejudice to possible criminal liability (Art. 29). Depending on the facts, related conduct may also fall under crimes in the Portuguese Penal Code[7], including threat (Art. 153), coercion (Art. 154), stalking/persecution (Art. 154-A), offences against physical integrity (Arts. 143–149), sexual coercion (Art. 163), rape/sexual violation (Art. 164) and sexual harassment (Art. 170). In such cases, inspectors should ensure the file is transmitted to the Public Prosecutor's Office, while the

[6] Approved by the Law No. 7/2009, of 12 February 2009, last amended by Law No. 32/2025, of 27 March 2025.
[7] Approved by the Decree-Law No. 48/95, of 15 March 1995, last amended by Law No. 72/2025, of 23 December 2025.

administrative offence procedure continues under its own rules (Law No. 107/2009 of 14 September) in parallel with the criminal process under the Portuguese Code of Criminal Procedure[8].

Where there is an immediate and serious risk (e.g., ongoing assault or sexual violence at the workplace), inspectors should contact the police without delay. Police support should also be sought where access is likely to be obstructed or there is a credible risk of V&H against the inspection team.

4.1.4. Judiciary and dispute resolution bodies

Labour inspectors often need to refer V&H-related cases to the judiciary and/or other competent authorities, particularly where they lack powers to initiate sanctions and can only recommend proceedings to prosecutors or courts, where the conduct amounts to a criminal offence and must be referred to the public prosecutor/courts, where the breach falls under another authority's mandate (for example, a dedicated OSH body or an equality/non-discrimination authority), or where remedies such as compensation or reinstatement are outside the inspectorate's legal competence.

In some jurisdictions, alternative dispute-resolution bodies—such as labour arbitration panels or ombudspersons—can handle V&H cases. Inspectors may refer workers to these mechanisms where appropriate, and coordinate when cases are referred back for enforcement (e.g., ombudsperson may successfully mediate an apology and compensation for a victim and ask the inspectorate to ensure that prevention measures are strengthened).

Because labour inspection's credibility and deterrent effect depend in large part on how judicial and dispute-resolution bodies handle referred cases, close communication and coordination are essential (Guidelines, Paragraph 6.3.10). Such cooperation helps inspectorates: understand how their files are assessed; improve case quality; promote consistent outcomes; and strengthen overall enforcement (Guidelines, Paragraph 6.3.10). Regular liaison meetings and cooperation agreements can institutionalise this exchange and address practical gaps.

Reflecting its importance, many countries have introduced mechanisms to strengthen this cooperation:

Box 15 – Cooperation arrangements with judiciary

Spain:
Creation of specialized ITSS units to support courts and the Public Prosecutor's Office.
France:
Creation of a body to monitor cases arising from labour inspection action and liaise with the Ministry of Justice, alongside an inter-institutional expert working group to analyse judgments, complex legal issues and unsuccessful cases, and the inclusion of public prosecutors and labour inspectors in the Departmental Anti-Fraud Operational Committees.

Source: Santos (2017).

4.1.5. Social security and insurance bodies

Exposure to V&H can have serious—and sometimes long-lasting—psychological effects, undermining mental health, well-being and self-esteem. Victims may experience shame, guilt, anxiety, depression, distrust and powerlessness; severe cases can involve post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other stress-related symptoms, including sleep disturbance, chronic fatigue and, in extreme situations, increased suicide risk (ILO, 2020).

Some countries increasingly recognise mental harm from V&H, including PTSD, as an occupational injury, following the revised ILO List of Occupational Diseases[9], which explicitly includes mental and behavioural disorders such as PTSD and allows recognition of other work-related mental conditions where a scientifically established (or nationally determined) causal link exists (Paragraphs 2.4.1–2.4.2), and Recommendation No.

[8] Adopted by Decree-Law No. 78/87, of 17 February 1987, last amended by Law No. 67/2025, of 24 November 2025.
[9] Annexed to the List of Occupational Diseases Recommendation, 2002 (No. 194).

206, which affirms victim's entitlement to compensation where psychosocial, physical or other harm results in incapacity for work (Paragraph 15).

In many systems, employment-injury or workers' compensation schemes provide medical care (including psychological support), rehabilitation and return-to-work measures, alongside cash benefits for injured workers (and, in fatal cases, their dependants), helping prevent income loss from translating into poverty or exclusion (ILO, 2021).

Box 16 – Workplace V&H harm recognition as occupational injury

Denmark:
Sexual harassment and workplace violence are recognized and compensated as occupational injuries within the employment injury insurance. Compliance is monitored by the Labour Inspectorate within the Danish Working Environment Authority.

Canada:
Several provinces and territories (including Québec, Saskatchewan and Ontario) have incorporated workplace V&H into their workers' compensation schemes. Where these behaviours result in work-related injury, they can trigger entitlement to the range of benefits available under the applicable compensation schemes.

Source: ILO (2021).

Depending on the jurisdiction concerned, labour inspectorates may cooperate with social security institutions and, where relevant, insurance bodies on the investigation of V&H-related occupational injuries and diseases, enforcement of applicable rules, and prevention and elimination of underlying risk factors. They may also exchange data and statistics to identify trends and better target inspections (C81, Art. 14; C129, Art. 19; C187, Art. 4(3)(g); Guidelines, Paragraphs 1.3.1(a) and 1.3.2). For example, an unusual concentration of stress- or mental-health claims linked to a specific employer, sector or region should trigger further investigation to identify their root causes and to prevent, eliminate or mitigate the associated risks.

4.1.6. Other public administration bodies

Within an integrated, gender-responsive approach to preventing and addressing V&H, other public bodies—such as employment services and migration authorities—may also have relevant roles. Because migrant workers can be especially vulnerable, inspectorates may need to coordinate with migration authorities to ensure complainants are protected and not penalised for reporting. Cooperation with employment services can be particularly important where victims are jobseekers or applicants, or where complainants, witnesses or whistle-blowers have been dismissed or pressured to resign.

To make this cooperation consistent and predictable, jurisdictions may consider establishing a cross-institutional or intergovernmental coordination body, comprising representatives of the competent entities, to support joint planning, clarify roles and strengthen operationalization cooperation.

4.1.7. NGOs and CSOs

Collaboration with NGOs and CSOs can significantly strengthen labour inspection responses to V&H because these actors often provide (or can facilitate access to) victim support services that inspectorates do not deliver directly (e.g., psychosocial counselling, crisis support and shelter, legal information and legal aid, hotlines, accompaniment, and other specialized assistance), thereby reinforcing a victim-centred approach and helping victims navigate remedies and protection.

For example, on Bangladesh's garment sector, national and international CSOs (including the Shojag Coalition, Awaj Foundation and the Fair Wear Foundation) have delivered awareness-raising activities, trainings and individual support to employers and workers on preventing and addressing work-related V&H, including by supporting the set-up of anti-harassment committees and complaint procedures (ILO, 2024b).

4.2. Collaboration with social partners

As noted earlier, social dialogue encompasses negotiation, consultation and information exchange among governments, employers and workers on matters of common interest, enabling joint solutions that strengthen rights, productivity and social cohesion.

Cooperation with employers' and workers' organisations is therefore integral to an effective labour inspection system. Social partners should be involved in developing, implementing and reviewing inspection policies, strategies, programmes and action plans through mechanisms such as tripartite consultative bodies, cooperation agreements, joint committees, structured consultations and joint awareness initiatives (Guidelines, Paragraphs 2.2.7–2.2.8). This cooperation should operate not only nationally but also at regional and enterprise levels, to reflect workplace realities and the expertise of those directly concerned (Guidelines, Paragraph 2.2.8). At workplace level, inspectors may engage employers' and workers' representatives (trade union representatives, workers' delegates, workers' OSH representatives, members of joint OSH committees, workers' "harassment officer", etc) during visits and related actions, facilitating access to information and supporting compliance—while safeguarding inspectors independence, authority and safety (Guidelines, Paragraph 2.2.9).

4.2.1. Tripartite consultation

Tripartite consultation between government and employers' and workers' organizations is central to shaping national frameworks on labour inspection, OSH and V&H, aligned with relevant ILO instruments, including Conventions Nos. 81, 129, 155, 187 and 190.

Labour inspectorates contribute by reporting practical experience from enforcement—highlighting gaps, defects or abuses not covered by existing rules—and by providing technical input and support to consultation processes (C81, Art. 3; C129, Art. 6). Tripartite dialogue can also help elevate V&H as a priority within national inspection plans, enabling dedicated campaigns and resource allocation.

Some countries, such as Portugal, have institutionalised this through a tripartite OSH council, within the inspectorate structure, to consult social partners on priorities, plans, budgets and training.

Box 17 – Labour inspectorate's tripartite OSH advisory council in Portugal

The Advisory Council for the Promotion of Occupational Safety and Health is ACT's consultative body on OSH. It is chaired by the Inspector-General and includes the two Deputy Inspectors-General, one ACT representative appointed by the Inspector-General, two representatives from each trade union confederation, and one representative from each employers' confederation represented in the Permanent Commission for Social Concertation. The Council issues opinions on ACT's main management instruments (e.g., activity plan and report, budget and accounts, action programmes and regulations, and quality and training policies), with some opinions—particularly on the plan, action programmes and quality policy—being binding. Social partners may request information and submit proposals or recommendations, and the Council's internal rules are adopted by majority vote.

Source: *Organic law of the Authority for Working Conditions*, approved by Regulatory Decree No. 47/2012, of 31 July 2012.

4.2.2. Collective bargaining

Collective bargaining refers to negotiations between an employer (a group of employers or one or more employers' organizations) and one or more workers' organizations to set working conditions and terms of employment, to regulate relations between employers and workers, and/or between employers or their organizations and workers' organizations (C154, Art. 2). It is anchored in the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98), further developed in the Collective Bargaining Convention, 1981 (No. 154), and complemented by the Collective Bargaining Recommendation, 1981 (No. 163) and by the Collective Agreements Recommendation, 1951 (No. 91). Together with freedom of association, the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining forms part of the ILO's fundamental principles and rights at work under the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

These rights are critical for preventing and addressing V&H: where they are curtailed, workers are typically more exposed (ILO, 2021). Accordingly, Convention No. 190 requires Members to respect, promote and realize the fundamental principles and rights at work, including collective bargaining, as part of a comprehensive approach to ending V&H (C190, Art. 4). Recommendation No. 206 calls for these rights to be guaranteed to all workers and employers, especially in higher-risk sectors, occupations and work arrangements (R206, Paragraph 3), and encourages collective bargaining at all levels, supported by information on bargaining trends and agreement content (R206, Paragraph 4).

In practice, collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) increasingly include V&H clauses that prohibit, prevent and address such conduct, reinforcing implementation of V&H rules at workplace level (ILO, 2024b).

Box 18 – Main topics of collective agreements' clauses on V&H

In a recent ILO review of 95 sectoral and company-level CBAs across 20 countries, 252 V&H-related clauses were identified. The most common provisions include: (i) prohibiting V&H; (ii) setting out workplace procedures and sanctions for V&H incidents; and (iii) general "mutual respect"/professional-conduct rules.

Source: ILO (2024b).

Beyond enforcing obligations that arise from collective agreements, labour inspectors can also use their advisory role to encourage employers and unions to address V&H through negotiation and CBAs.

For example, if inspection findings and aggregated data show that many workplaces in a sector or region lack a V&H policy and/or credible internal complaint mechanisms, the inspectorate may prompt the relevant employers' organization and trade unions to negotiate— or update— CBAs provisions to close those gaps. This can deliver systemic impact by embedding minimum standards on prevention, reporting and protection across an industry or territory, spreading good practice, and strengthening sustainable compliance while supporting fair competition.

4.2.3. Collaborative mechanisms at workplace level

As noted, V&H investigations should involve collaboration with employers, workers and their representatives, and cooperation with other competent authorities and relevant public or private entities, as appropriate (C81, Art. 5; C129, Art. 12), provided this does not compromise victims' and other persons' privacy, confidentiality or protection against retaliation.

Where no representation exists in the workplace, inspectors can, through their advisory role, encourage the establishment of OSH committees (including joint committees), the designation of workers' safety delegates/OSH representatives (C155, Arts. 5(d), 19(a)–(b) and 20; C187, Art. 4(2)(d); R164, Paragraphs 8 and 12(1)–(2); R197, Paragraph 5(f)), or dedicated joint labour–management arrangements or focal points for V&H. Where trade union delegates, workers' representatives or OSH committee members are in place, inspectors should engage with them during visits and other workplace actions, while maintaining strict confidentiality safeguards.

In addition to these general participation structures, some countries also require employers to create specific workplace arrangements to prevent and address V&H.

Box 19 – Workplace-level arrangements to deal with V&H

France:
From 1 January 2019, companies employing at least 250 employees are required to designate a person (called "harassment officer") to guide, train, inform and support employees in the fight against sexual harassment and sexist behaviour. In smaller companies, the employer must designate a named "equality or human resources person" who is responsible for guiding, informing and supporting employees in the fight against sexual harassment and sexist behaviour.
Peru:
Employers must establish a workplace "Sexual Harassment Committee", adopt an anti-harassment policy with clear investigation procedures, and conduct annual risk assessments on sexual harassment.
Luxembourg:

The staff delegation and, where exists, the equality representative, are empowered to support and advise an employee who is experiencing sexual harassment. In carrying out this role, they must maintain strict confidentiality regarding any information obtained, unless the person concerned expressly releases them from this obligation (Article L.245-6(2) of the Labour Code, as revised in 2016).

Sources: ILO (2021; 2022b; 2024a).

These arrangements can provide valuable insight into potential V&H cases, how employers handle them, what preventive and protective measures exist, and any breaches of applicable rules. Committees and designated representatives can also inform and support workers, contribute to risk assessments, and help detect retaliation against victims, complainants, witnesses or whistleblowers. Inspectors should check whether such arrangements exist and function properly and use them as key interlocutors during visits. In practice, this means verifying that bodies are established and operational, that policies and procedures are adequate, and that risk assessments are effectively carried out. Where shortcomings are found, inspectors can give technical advice and, if needed, apply enforcement measures.

Where the law does not require such arrangements, inspectors may still promote them as good practice, tailored to the employer's size, resources and V&H risk profile, for example, by designating a small internal team or trusted HR focal point for complaints, involving an OSH specialist (internal or external) to conduct risk assessments with worker participation, and ensuring relevant training.

In unionized workplaces, inspectors can also engage union representatives or worker delegates as sources of information and partners in monitoring the workplace after an intervention or jointly conduct an awareness-raising session and may encourage workers to involve their union representative as a support person where appropriate.

4.2.4. Joint activities

4.2.4.1. Joint planning and campaigning

Joint planning and programming between labour inspectorates and employers' and workers' organizations is pivotal to a coherent and preventive approach to V&H, helping shift practice from reactive enforcement to structured prevention.

The Danish WEA provides an illustrative example: in 2019, it jointly developed with social partners a 10-point plan, *"A Good Psychological Working Environment: Ending Sexual Harassment"*, and partnered with unions and employers' organizations in the campaign *"Hvor går grænsen?"* ("Where do we draw the line?") (ILO, 2024a). Such tripartite programming helps align legal standards, inspection priorities and sector-level implementation, strengthening both prevention and compliance.

A similar logic underpins ACT's Advisory Council for the Promotion of Occupational Safety and Health in Portugal. By convening government, employer and worker representatives to advise on OSH policies and programmes, it provides a standing forum to align inspection planning, guidance and awareness-raising on OSH and, in particular, on the prevention and elimination of V&H.

4.2.4.2. Training, guidance materials and practical tools development

Preventing and eliminating V&H requires more than legal duties and enforcement; it also depends on shared understanding and coordinated action across the labour market. Cooperation between labour inspectorates and employers' and workers' organizations—especially to co-develop training, guidance and practical tools—helps align inspection priorities with workplace realities, ensuring that recommended measures are legally robust, sector-specific and workable in practice, while strengthening ownership at enterprise level and promoting a coherent, gender-responsive and sustainable approach to tackling V&H.

A concrete example is the Netherlands' "Safe Healthcare" initiative, which brought together public authorities, the labour inspection system, hospital employers and the FNV trade union. After a sector agreement introduced measures such as training requirements, registers for third-party incidents, and stronger victim support/aftercare, these elements were reflected in inspection guidance through 11 measures on aggression risks, reinforced by workshops and guidance materials (ILO, 2024a). Denmark provides a similar model, with the WEA partnering with social partners to strengthen prevention and outreach in this area.

Box 20 – Partnership on the development of guides and training materials on V&H in Denmark

The WEA developed, in partnership with social partners, a wide range of guidelines, training materials and practical tools to support employers in complying with their psychosocial risk management obligations.

Sources: ILO (2024b).

Labour inspectorates can also support employers' and workers' organizations in developing and disseminating their own codes of conduct and guidance for members, by sharing expertise and aggregated data and reinforcing outreach—provided these materials align with national and international standards and good practices.

For example, an employers' federation may issue sector-specific guidance on preventing harassment, while a union may run awareness campaigns on workers' rights and reporting channels. Where inspection data point to recurring problems—such as harassment in agriculture—the inspectorate can convene the relevant farmers' association and unions to develop joint training or practical guidance. Social partners can also train their constituencies with inspectorate input (e.g., unions training shop stewards to handle complaints and liaise with inspectors), and inspectorates may use employers' organizations as channels to explain the main employers' obligations under Convention No. 190 and national legislation, and how inspection will promote compliance.

4.2.4.3. Peer monitoring and whistleblowing

Workers' organisations can act as the inspectorate's "eyes and ears" at enterprise level—particularly important where inspectorates face resource constraints and cannot visit all workplaces regularly. Unions and worker representatives are often well placed to spot emerging risks, repeated non-compliance and retaliation early, and they may also be a safer first point of contact for workers who fear reprisals or do not know how to complain. For this reason, inspectorates frequently receive union referrals about serious or persistent breaches. Maintaining structured communication—such as a designated liaison function—can improve timely information-sharing and strengthen enforcement while reducing workers' exposure.

Employers' organizations can play a similarly strategic role. They can flag sectors struggling with compliance due to complexity, limited technical capacity or emerging risks, and may seek guidance to prevent violations and clarify obligations. They can also alert inspectorates to unfair competition, including social dumping, which harms workers and disadvantages compliant firms. Regular dialogue helps inspectorates identify high-risk sectors and systemic non-compliance patterns, feed this intelligence into risk-based planning, and target resources to strengthen compliance and a level playing field.

4.2.4.4. Joint inspections or observation

In many jurisdictions, worker participation in inspection visits—especially in OSH—is well established. Workplace safety representatives may accompany inspectors where this does not compromise the inspection. In Sweden, for example, the Work Environment Act recognises safety representatives (*skyddsombud*) as part of ongoing workplace monitoring and allows them to suspend work where there is a serious and immediate danger (Chapter 6, Paragraph 7). They may also trigger supervisory follow-up by requesting action (Chapter 6, Paragraph 6a). Similarly, in Norway, the Working Environment Act provides for safety representatives to participate in Labour Inspection Authority inspections and may stop dangerous work when life or health is in immediate danger (Chapter 6, sections 6-2 and 6-3).

V&H inspections, however, require greater caution. Because these cases raise heightened risks for privacy, confidentiality and protection against retaliation, accompaniment may be inappropriate where it could inhibit testimony, compromise confidentiality or otherwise undermine the inspection's objectives.

Inspectors may therefore need to conduct visits unaccompanied and rely on confidential interviews and evidence-gathering instead.

That said, in some Nordic contexts, joint union–management cooperation structures in OSH (such as bipartite safety committees) create a framework within which psychosocial risks, including V&H, can be addressed alongside traditional occupational risks through established joint mechanisms. In all cases, and especially for V&H allegations, participation must remain compatible with strict confidentiality, voluntary victim engagement and robust anti-retaliation safeguards.

▶ Key takeaways

The following are key takeaways:

1. Everyone has the right to a world of work free from V&H, including GBVH — this right is affirmed in Convention No. 190 and reinforced by enabling principles and rights, including equality and non-discrimination, freedom of association and collective bargaining, and the right to a safe and healthy working environment.
2. V&H are not “personal issues”; they can be workplace risks and, in some cases, discrimination issues — because V&H may stem from and affect work organization, working conditions, psychosocial hazards, power relations and workplace culture, employers must prevent and address them as part of their duty to ensure a safe and healthy working environment. In particular, gender-based violence and harassment and other forms of discrimination-based violence and harassment should be addressed both as occupational hazards and as serious forms of discrimination, while recognizing that not every form of V&H is necessarily discrimination-based.
3. Labour inspection can act across the full compliance cycle — inspectorates can support prevention through advice and awareness-raising, conduct proactive risk-based inspections, handle complaints and investigations, apply enforcement and referrals, and feed lessons learned into policy and normative development, while safeguarding confidentiality and protection against retaliation.
4. Protecting those who speak up is non-negotiable — confidentiality, privacy and robust anti-retaliation safeguards must be built into inspection planning and operations, as well as into employer procedures for complainants, victims, witnesses and whistle-blowers.
5. Prevention is strongest when embedded in OSH management systems — effective OSHMS integrate psychosocial risks and V&H through risk assessment, hierarchy of controls, worker consultation and participation, training and information, incident reporting, and monitoring and review for continuous improvement.
6. Effective enforcement combines urgency with fairness — inspectors should act promptly, rely on impartial fact-finding, and use proportionate procedures: advice and corrective measures where sufficient, sanctions and measures with immediate executory force where necessary, and referrals to other authorities or services when appropriate.
7. Coordination multiplies impact — victim-centred, comprehensive outcomes often require structured collaboration with social partners, OSH authorities, equality/human rights bodies, other public administration entities (e.g., employment, social security and migration), insurance bodies, specialized NGOs and CSOs and, where necessary, the police, the public prosecutor’s office or the judiciary.
8. Inspectors need institutional backing to deliver — effective action depends on training (including gender-responsive), practical tools, resources, specialist support, clear protocols, and measures to protect inspectors’ own safety and independence.
9. Data strengthens prevention and accountability — systematic recording, disaggregation where feasible, and trend analysis enable better targeting, demonstrate results, inform policy and legislative improvements, and sustain prevention strategies.

In the end, labour inspection is where principles and rights meet lived reality. Labour inspectors carry a unique mandate of turning the universal aspiration to a world of work free from violence and harassment into protection that people can feel—at the gate, on the shopfloor, in the office, online, and wherever work takes place. When inspectors are properly equipped—with the authority, training, resources and tools to act—and when they work in close cooperation with social partners, other competent authorities and relevant public and private entities, each intervention strengthens prevention, reinforces respect, and shapes what decent work should look like. Step by step, workplace by workplace, this steady effort helps build safer, healthier and more dignified working environments, so that everyone can work with confidence, be treated with respect, and return home safe.

End-of-module exercises

Exercise 1 — Reactive inspection visit preparation

Description: A worker reports repeated sexual jokes and unwanted touching by a supervisor during a work-related training day that ended with a staff social event. The supervisor then sends sexually suggestive messages via work-related digital communications.
Tasks: prepare a reactive inspection visit plan, specifying: (1) trigger and alleged facts; (2) potential breaches to verify (checklist); (3) scope of the visit (persons/departments to cover and subject matter); (4) Evidence to collect and sources (justifying the relevance and how to protect confidentiality); and (5) Potential inspection procedures to apply.
Expected output: a one-page "reactive inspection visit plan"

Exercise 2 — Proactive inspection campaign plan for a high-exposure sector

Description: Choose a sector with high exposure to psychosocial risks and V&H (e.g., healthcare, retail, hospitality, transport, education).
Tasks: draft a concise inspection campaign plan covering: (1) purpose/scope (most serious and common breaches, subject matter or theme, objectives, targets, geographical area and duration); (2) social partners and other authorities to involve; (3) inspection visits guidelines (compliance issues to verify, documents to request and review, persons to interview, evidence to gather, precautionary measures for confidentiality and protection against retaliation, possible procedures and when to apply them, etc.); (4) supporting tools to develop (checklists, questionnaires, inspection guidelines, information materials to disseminate, etc.); (5) needed resources; (6) inspection campaign workplan, including its evaluation.
Expected output: a two-page inspection campaign plan.

Exercise 3 (Role play) — Complaint handling

Scenario: ongoing bullying by a team leader; the worker fears retaliation and distrusts internal mechanisms.
Roles: inspector, complainant, employer/HR, observer (note-taker) - participant's role should rotate.
Tasks: considering labour inspector's need to be impartial, independent, objective, evidence-based, and victim-centred, the labour inspector will conduct one initial and individual interview with:

- the complainant (addressing confidentiality, facts, retaliation risk, support services, potential referrals, next steps); and
- the employer's representative (focused on OSHMS, V&H policy, compliant and investigation mechanisms, V&H risks assessment and control, workers participation, training and information, document and records requests, etc.).

Expected outputs: note-taker's half-page debrief note, per each interview, on what went well and what to improve.

Exercise 4 — Risk assessment and control

Description: In a call centre, workers report repeated verbal abuse by customers and humiliating treatment by one supervisor. The employer has no documented psychosocial risk assessment and no clear V&H prevention plan.
Task: Analyse the above call centre's psychosocial factors, identify 3 psychosocial hazards and exposed persons, assess the related psychosocial risks and draft the corresponding psychosocial risks prevention plan, following the hierarchy of controls.
Expected outputs: A fully completed Table 10 - Risk mapping and assessment (with 3 psychosocial risks, estimated, valuated and prioritized) and a fully completed Table 12 – Occupational risk prevention plan (with appropriate preventive and protective measures per risk, aligned to the hierarchy of controls, with responsibilities, timelines and monitoring).

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