

► Policy Brief

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Preventing and Addressing Violence and Harassment in the Informal Economy and through Formalization: Promising practices

Key points

- **Emerging practice across countries shows that extending effective prevention and protection to the informal economy is possible** through stronger legal and policy frameworks, occupational safety and health (OSH) measures, accessible remedies, social protection and support services, strengthened social dialogue and representation, and the integration of violence and harassment considerations into formalization strategies.
- **Protection requires action wherever informal work takes place.** In line with ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), public authorities have an important role in preventing and addressing violence and harassment affecting workers in the informal economy. Measures can range from extending legal and occupational safety and health protection to improving safety in markets and other work settings and ensuring accessible complaint, support and enforcement mechanisms.
- **Formalization can strengthen protection but should not be a precondition for it.** In line with the ILO Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204), gradual, inclusive and gender-responsive formalisation efforts can expand labour and social protection, OSH, access to remedies and institutional accountability, while measures to prevent and address violence and harassment are pursued in parallel.
- **There is no single model for effective protection.** Responses need to reflect the diversity of informal work and the specific risks associated with different sectors, occupations and work arrangements. Practices across countries demonstrate the value of context-specific approaches, from sector- and place-specific legislation and accessible complaint mechanisms to safer infrastructure, regularisation and adapted labour inspection.
- **Organisation, representation and social dialogue can strengthen protection and support formalization.** Employers' and workers' organisations, organization of informal economy workers and social and solidarity economy entities can help identify risks, support access to remedies, negotiate safer conditions and strengthen voice and representation, while also contributing to pathways towards formality.

This is the second of two complementary policy briefs on preventing and addressing violence and harassment in the informal economy and through formalization. The companion brief (<https://doi.org/10.54394/00035404>) sets out the key principles and context underpinning the approaches presented here. The development of these policy briefs was made possible with the financial support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

Introduction

Preventing and addressing violence and harassment in the informal economy requires both immediate measures to protect workers and other persons concerned and longer-term action to address the structural vulnerabilities associated with informality. The companion policy brief, [*Preventing and Addressing Violence and Harassment in the Informal Economy and through Formalization: Key principles*](#), examines these vulnerabilities in detail and sets out the relevant international labour standards, including the complementary roles of the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), its accompanying Recommendation (No. 206), and the Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204). Building on that foundation, this second brief focuses on promising practices. It examines measures and approaches through which governments, employers and workers and their organizations, and other relevant actors are extending prevention, protection and access to remedies in the informal economy and promoting the transition to formality while integrating violence and harassment considerations into processes of formalization. The examples illustrate different ways in which the principles set out in relevant international labour standards can be translated into action across diverse national, sectoral and institutional contexts.

Addressing violence and harassment in the informal economy and through formalization: some emerging practices

Member States are increasingly taking steps to address violence and harassment in the informal economy in ways that reflect the inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach set out in Convention No. 190. While contexts differ, emerging practices demonstrate that protection can be extended beyond formal employment relationships through legal reform, policy innovation, institutional strengthening and social dialogue. The examples below illustrate how the three pillars of Convention No. 190 – prevention and protection, enforcement and remedies, and

guidance, training and awareness-raising – can be operationalized in diverse national settings.

Prevention and Protection

Convention No. 190 requires member States to adopt laws and regulations that define and prohibit violence and harassment in the world of work, including gender-based violence and harassment (Art. 7), and to take appropriate measures to prevent it (ILO 2021a). These include recognizing the important role of public authorities in the case of informal economy workers and identifying, in consultation with the employers' and workers' organizations concerned and through other means, the sectors or occupations and work arrangements in which workers and other persons concerned are more exposed to violence and harassment, and taking measures to effectively protect such persons (Art. 8). Prevention obligations also extend to the workplace level. Convention No. 190 requires Member States to ensure that employers take appropriate steps, commensurate with their degree of control, to prevent violence and harassment in the world of work and, among others, to take into account violence and harassment and associated psychosocial risks in the management of occupational safety and health (Art. 9). In the context of the informal economy, prevention and protection measures have taken a range of complementary forms.

Extending legal coverage

Some member States have explicitly extended protection granted by labour-related legislation to workers in the informal economy. For example, in India, the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) Act (2013) covers workers in both the organized (formal) and unorganized (informal) sectors and includes domestic workers, recognizing dwelling places and houses as workplace.¹ In South Africa, the 2022 Code of Good Practice on the Prevention and Elimination of Harassment in the Workplace explicitly applies to workers in the informal economy.² In Ecuador, the amended Labour Code as well as the revised Organic Law on Public Service provides that all workers, public officials and other persons in the world of work shall benefit from protection against violence and harassment, irrespective of their contractual situation in both the formal

¹ The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (India).

² South Africa. Code of Good Practice on the Prevention and Elimination of Harassment in the Workplace (2022), under the Employment Equity Act (1998).

and informal economy.³ Similarly, amendments to the Pakistan's Penal Code criminalize sexual harassment in both public and private spaces, reinforcing protection beyond traditional employment settings, such as private homes, while the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace (Amendment) Act, as amended in 2022, expands the definition of workplaces to encompass both formal and informal workplaces.⁴

Integrating violence and harassment into occupational safety and health systems

Efforts have also been undertaken to integrate violence and harassment into broader occupational safety and health (OSH) frameworks and to extend these protections to workers in the informal economy. In Lesotho, the 2024 Occupational Safety and Health Act, which prohibits work-related violence and harassment, applies to “any employment relationship in the private and public service including the agricultural sector, informal sector and the self-employed.”⁵ In Nepal, violence and harassment have been incorporated into national action plans and training programmes for labour authorities, alongside the development of model sectoral codes of conduct and clear guidance on reporting, remedies and enforcement mechanisms for sectors particularly prone to violence and harassment (ILO 2021b). Participatory OSH programmes in Cambodia and the Philippines further demonstrate how practical workplace improvements in small enterprises and home-based settings can help reduce exposure to violence and harassment.⁶ Infrastructure-focused initiatives have similarly contributed to prevention. The Safe Markets programme in Zimbabwe improved lighting, sanitation and overall safety conditions in markets where informal workers operate, thereby reducing exposure to violence and harassment.⁷ In Brazil, social dialogue in the ceramic industry resulted in agreements between workers’ and employers’ organizations to renovate plants and living

quarters, improving working and living conditions (ILO et al. 2019).

Sector-specific protections for groups at higher risk

Other countries have adopted targeted legislation to address the particular vulnerabilities of some groups of workers at high risk of informality, such as domestic workers. The revised Viet Nam’s Labour Code (2019) includes dedicated provisions protecting domestic workers from violence and sexual harassment.⁸ The Philippines’ Domestic Workers Act prohibits any kind of abuse, violence, and harassment against domestic workers and also includes health and safety obligations.⁹ Peru’s Domestic Workers Law together with the Guide for the Prevention and Punishment of Occupational Sexual Harassment towards Domestic Workers aims at preventing, punishing and eradicating violence against domestic workers.¹⁰ In Spain, Royal Decree 893/2024 regulating occupational safety and health in domestic work explicitly recognizes the right of all domestic workers to protection against violence and harassment, including sexual harassment and harassment based on racial or ethnic origin, nationality, sex, sexual identity or orientation, or gender expression, and mandates the development of an action protocol by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health in this respect.¹¹ The 2010 Domestic Workers’ Bill of Rights in New York State extends protection against sexual harassment and assault to all domestic workers irrespective of their immigration status.¹²

Protection based on place of work

Recognizing that informal work often occurs in private homes or public spaces, some States have adapted legal definitions accordingly with a view to ensuring protection. For instance, domestic violence legislation in Cambodia and Ghana also cover persons working within households,

³ Ecuador section 46.1 of the [Labour Code](#) and new section 24 of the [LOSEP](#), as amended in 2024.

⁴ Pakistan Penal Code (Act XLV of 1860) Amended by Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2010; Protection Against Harassment of Women at Work Act, 2010 and Harassment Law Amendments, 2022, Pakistan.

⁵ See [2024 Occupational Safety and Health Act](#), section 3(1).

⁶ OECD and ILO. 2019. *Tackling Vulnerability in the Informal Economy*.

⁷ A UN joint project Safe Markets Project: Empowering Women Through Safe, Resilient, Gender-Responsive Food Markets and Systems in Response to COVID-19 in Zimbabwe (UN Women, ILO and UNDP under the United Nations Country Team (UNCTs)).

⁸ Social Republic of Viet Nam Labour Code. No. 45/2019/QH14 (2019).

⁹ Art. 1 Sec. 2(c) and (d) and Art. 2 Sec.5 [Domestic Workers Act, Republic Act No. 10361 \(Philippines\)](#) | ADB’s Law and Policy Reform Program.

¹⁰ [Peru - Repository of Actions on Paid Domestic Work](#) | Rial.

¹¹ See [Spain regulates the safety and health in domestic work in accordance with ILO Convention 189](#) | International Labour Organization.

¹² Domestic Workers’ Bill of Rights, 2010 which amends the New York State Human Rights Law, New York Labor Law and New York Workers’ Compensation Law.

including domestic workers.¹³ Laws addressing violence and harassment, or at least some of its manifestations, in public spaces, strengthen protection for workers operating in streets, markets and transport environments (ILO 2021a).¹⁴ This is the case for France's legislation criminalizing street harassment, Mexico City's amendments expanding the scope of violence against women, and the Philippines' Safe Spaces Act. Similarly, legislative frameworks in Ecuador and Peru explicitly recognize violence committed by State agents within the scope of violence against women legislation, reinforcing accountability where informal workers interact with enforcement authorities.¹⁵ In Peru, provisions on the prevention and penalization of sexual harassment in public places also require the adoption of preventive and reactive measures in the operational plans of regional and local authorities, as well as the training of personnel, particularly security forces.¹⁶ Paraguay's Law No. 7239/2024 strengthens prevention efforts by mandating training on gender-based violence across the public sector and promoting changes in discriminatory social norms. As of April 2025, certification in such training is required for re-hiring and promotion within public institutions.¹⁷

Decriminalization and regularization measures

Some countries have opted to address structural vulnerability of informal economy workers by reforming legal frameworks that expose them to punitive or disproportionate enforcement measures. Measures such as the Street Vendors Act in India (USAID 2022) and the Safe Sidewalk Vending Act in California¹⁸ have reduced exposure to harassment by decriminalizing or regulating street vending and promoting participation in local decision-making (Hidalgo 2022). Regularization initiatives in countries such as Italy and Spain have enabled migrant domestic workers in irregular situations to access legal protection, thereby reducing exposure to exploitation and violence and harassment while facilitating their integration into formal regulatory and protection frameworks (ILO 2015).

Enforcement and Remedies

Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206 set out principles and guidance for States to put in place strong and effective reporting and dispute resolution mechanisms for addressing violence and harassment. In particular, Article 10 of Convention No. 190 calls on Member States to ensure easy access to appropriate and effective remedies, as well as safe, fair and effective complaint and dispute resolution mechanisms. It also calls for support, protection and enforcement measures for victims of violence and harassment in the world of work as well as other people involved, such as complainants, witnesses and whistleblowers. It further emphasizes the importance of effective monitoring, inspections and sanctions, as well as protection against retaliation and victimization. Ensuring effective enforcement and access to remedies is particularly important in the informal economy, where workers often lack access to formal workplace grievance mechanisms and may face additional barriers to reporting violence and harassment. In this context, States and social partners have adopted a range of complementary measures.

Accessible complaint and support mechanisms

Some countries have taken steps to establish accessible reporting channels, dispute resolution mechanisms and support services tailored to workers in informal settings. For example, in India, the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) Act (2013) mandates the establishment of local committees empowered to receive complaints from women in the informal economy, including through the She-Box portal that enables all women facing sexual harassment at the workplace to register complaints easily and securely.¹⁹ In the Philippines, the Department of Labour and Employment has issued Guidelines under the Safe Spaces Act providing that informal workers may seek institutional support when filing complaints related to

¹³ Royal Government of Cambodia, Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and the Protection of Victims, 2005; Ghana Domestic Violence Act, 2007, Act 732.

¹⁴ France Law No. 2018-703 of August 3, 2018, strengthening the fight against sexual and gender-based violence; Philippines Republic Act No. 11313 An Act Defining Gender-Based Sexual Harassment in Streets, Public Spaces, Online, Workplaces, and Educational or Training Institutions, Providing Protective Measures and Prescribing Penalties Therefore.

¹⁵ See Ecuador's Comprehensive Law to Prevent and Eradicate Violence Against Women (Art. 12.5); Peru Law 30364 (Art. 5).

¹⁶ See Peru, Act No. 30314 of 2015.

¹⁷ See [Law No. 7239/2024](#).

¹⁸ United States (California) Senate Bill 946 (SB 946).

¹⁹ India Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (prevention, prohibition, and redressal) Act, 2013; [Press Release: Press Information Bureau](#).

gender-based harassment.²⁰ Similarly, in Peru persons who work in the informal economy have access to the guidance and assistance provided by the *Trabaja Sin Acoso* (“Work without Harassment”) service and other inter-ministerial comprehensive support mechanisms for victims of workplace sexual harassment.²¹ In Argentina, women and LGBTIQ+ persons, including in the informal economy, experiencing gender-based violence, including violence occurring outside the world of work, may have access to support programmes that provide economic assistance and strengthen support networks, with a view to promoting their economic and social autonomy.²² These measures help bridge enforcement gaps where traditional workplace mechanisms may be absent. Migrant workers, in particular temporary migrant workers and those in irregular situations, may face additional barriers to accessing complaint and support mechanisms, including language and information barriers and fear that reporting violence and harassment could lead to loss of employment, loss of migration status, detention or deportations. As noted above, decriminalization and formalization measures can help reduce such structural barriers. At the same time, access to protection and remedies should not depend on migration status, and reporting mechanisms should be safe, confidential and trusted.

Strengthening labour inspection and enforcement capacity

Labour inspectorates often face significant challenges in promoting compliance in the informal economy, due to the dispersed, concealed or inaccessible nature of many workplaces, the limited organization among employers and workers, including own account workers; weak incentives for formalization in contexts marked by poverty and survival-driven informality; and capacity constraints by inspection systems. Strengthening the capacity of labour inspectorates and other authorities has therefore been a priority. In Peru, the National Labour Inspection Supervisory Authority is mandated to carry out inspections in informal workplaces to verify compliance with labour regulations, including on violence and harassment, with workers’ organizations also highlighting the importance of trade union participation in such efforts.²³ In Bangladesh, inspection teams are trained to visit and assess domestic workplaces under the 2015 Domestic Workers Protection

and Welfare Policy, extending oversight into previously unregulated spaces (ILO 2022a). It should be noted that, in contexts involving migrant workers, particularly those in irregular status, the ILO supervisory bodies have consistently emphasized that labour inspectorates should prioritize the protection of workers rather than the enforcement of immigration laws. This approach is critical to ensuring that fear of deportation or job loss does not deter reporting of violence and harassment (ILO 2022b).

Collective agreements and multi-stakeholder compliance initiatives

Employers’ and workers’ organizations have also played an important role in strengthening enforcement and prevention through collective agreements, codes of conduct and awareness-raising initiatives. In Uganda, a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) negotiated between the Uganda Flower Exporters Association and two national trade unions introduced sexual harassment prevention mechanisms and laid the groundwork for a sector-wide sexual harassment policy (ILO 2019). In Italy, the national CBA for domestic workers recognizes violence and harassment as occupational safety and health risks, integrating these concerns into formal protections (ILO 2024).

Multi-stakeholder initiatives have further reinforced compliance standards. In Kenya, producers in agriculture and industry are required to comply with codes of conduct developed by market brokers, industry associations and international partners that explicitly address violence and harassment (ILO 2018). In Latin America, a union-led campaign prompted the adoption of the first sexual harassment policy in the banana sector, extending coverage to seasonal, temporary and contract workers as well as non-employees interacting with the company (UNWOMEN 2020).

Guidance, Training, and Awareness Raising

Convention No. 190 requires Member States, in consultation with employers’ and workers’ organizations, to ensure that violence and harassment in the world of work are addressed in relevant national policies, including those concerning occupational safety and health, equality and non-discrimination, and migration, and to provide

²⁰ Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) Department Order No. 130, Series of 2021 (“DO 230-21”).

²¹ ILO CEACR, Peru, Convention No. 190, [Direct Request](#), 2026.

²² ILO CEACR, Argentina, Convention No. 190, [Direct Request](#), 2025. See [Decree 734/2020](#), as amended, and [Law 26.485/2009](#), as amended.

²³ ILO CEACR, Peru, Convention No. 190, [Direct Request](#), 2026.

guidance, training, education and awareness-raising in accessible formats, as appropriate (Art. 11). Recommendation No. 206 further encourages the development of guidance, education and training programmes, as well as awareness-raising initiatives, in consultation with employers' and workers' organizations and other relevant stakeholders. These measures are particularly important in the informal economy, where limited access to information, support services and institutional protection may heighten vulnerability to violence and harassment.

Integrating violence and harassment into national policy frameworks

Several countries have incorporated violence and harassment into broader national policy frameworks, including development strategies, social protection policies, public security mechanisms, and broader efforts to facilitate transition to formality. In Tanzania, the National Action Plan on ending Violence against Women and Children in Tanzania, adopted in consultation with employers' and workers' organizations, includes the promotion of decent working environments for workers in situations of vulnerability in the informal economy as a cross-cutting priority.²⁴ Grenada's 2019 National OSH Policy explicitly covers all workers, including those in the informal sector.²⁵ In Nigeria, the National Policy on OSH, launched in 2021, covers both formal and informal sector workplaces, and specifically includes physical and psychological violence among the psychosocial risks to be taken into account.²⁶

Other countries have adopted more comprehensive and gender-responsive frameworks addressing violence and harassment through integrated measures, with a positive effect also on those engaged in the informal economy. For example, in El Salvador the National Policy for Women's Access to a Life Free from Violence and its Action Plan adopt a prevention and public safety approach covering all forms of violence against women, including sexual harassment in public spaces. The National Equality Plan 2021–2025 also aims to reduce women's overrepresentation in the informal economy. In addition, targeted measures, such as

vocational training in non-traditional occupations and the "Crece Mujer" programme, support women in the informal economy and promote more sustainable livelihoods.²⁷

Coordinated institutional responses and support systems

Some countries have strengthened institutional coordination and support systems to address violence and harassment affecting informal economy workers. In Thailand, access to primary health-care units has been extended to workers in the informal economy, strengthening support mechanisms for those experiencing violence and harassment (ILO et al 2019). In the United Kingdom, relevant authorities, such as the Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority, His Majesty's Revenue and Customs, and the Director of Labour Market Enforcement, tackle these issues through measures including addressing modern slavery and labour exploitation, applying regulatory frameworks, and leveraging helplines to report abuse.²⁸

Awareness-raising and behavioural change initiatives

States and social partners have also invested in initiatives aimed at raising awareness, promoting behavioural change and strengthening prevention at community and workplace levels. In Namibia, the 2021 Code of Conduct for the Informal Economy promotes dignity and respect for informal economy operators and encourages policy development supportive of safe working environments.²⁹ In Nigeria, ratification of Convention No. 190 informed the development of an anti-gender-based violence and harassment code for the Mile 12 Ketu food market, reinforcing zero-tolerance and encouraging cooperation with local authorities (Solidarity Center 2023).

Workers' and employers' organizations have similarly contributed to awareness and capacity-building efforts. For instance, the International Domestic Workers Federation's "My Fair Home" campaign encourages employers to uphold standards consistent with relevant international labour standards, including ensuring a work environment free from abuse, harassment and violence.³⁰ In Tunisia, trade

²⁴ See [National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children \(NPA – VAWC II 2024/25 – 2028/29\)](#).

²⁵ Grenada National Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) policy, 2019

²⁶ See [NATIONAL POLICY ON OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH.pdf](#).

²⁷ See ILO CEACR, El Salvador, Convention No. 190, [Direct Request](#), 2026.

²⁸ See ILO CEACR, United Kingdom, Convention No. 190, [Direct Request](#), 2026.

²⁹ Namibia Informal Sector Organization (NISO). 2021. Code of Conduct for the Namibian Informal Economy.

³⁰ See: <https://idwfed.org/campaigns/my-fair-home/>.

union initiatives in the informal agricultural sector raise awareness among women workers regarding their rights and safe working conditions, including risks associated with transportation to and from work (ILO 2024). The ASEAN Confederation of Employers has also developed regional guidance on violence and harassment involving migrant workers and promoted its implementation through regional dialogue platforms.³¹

Strengthening protection through formalization

Transition to the formal economy is a critical structural pathway for strengthening protection against violence and harassment. In line with Recommendation No. 204, formalization of workers and economic units expands access to labour rights, social protection, OSH and collective representation. By extending legal recognition and regulatory oversight, formalization addresses or reduces structural vulnerabilities associated with informality, including legal invisibility, economic insecurity and limited access to remedies. Formalization also enhances employers' and workers' abilities to organize and engage in social dialogue, strengthening collective mechanisms for preventing and addressing violence and harassment. Formalization is often a gradual process requiring supportive legal, administrative and economic measures adapted to the diversity of informal work arrangements and the realities of micro and small economic units, including self-employed workers.

Practical initiatives also illustrate how formalization should be tailored to the needs and characteristics of specific groups and economic units, while addressing some of the structural factors that can increase vulnerability to violence and harassment. In Bolivia, the ILO supported the formalization of Trekking Maya, an initiative established by Indigenous Aymara women providing mountain guiding and tourism services (ILO 2025). Through a participatory process, different legal structures for formalization were assessed based on the group's needs and characteristics. The initiative supported their economic activity while promoting women's empowerment and challenging gender and age barriers in mountain sports. By enhancing legal recognition, visibility and economic opportunities for

indigenous women facing intersecting forms of disadvantage, the experience illustrates how inclusive pathways to formality can help address some of the underlying conditions associated with vulnerability to violence and harassment, while advancing equality and decent work.

Within this broader framework, some states have integrated violence and harassment considerations into broader formalization strategies. Mozambique's National Employment Policy (2016) explicitly promoted formalization while addressing discrimination and encouraging reporting mechanisms for violations, including those related to violence and harassment. In Mexico, since the ratification of Convention No. 190 in 2022, the formalization strategy has been explicitly linked to the Protocol for the Prevention of Violence and Harassment.³² In Chile, Law No. 21.805/2026 on the Right to Care and the National Support and Care System recognizes care as a fundamental social right and provides for measures to promote caregivers' economic autonomy and access to decent work, including their entry into and retention in formal employment (Article 29). The Law also requires public and private bodies, within their respective competences, to promote the prevention of violence and harassment in workplaces (Article 26(c)).³³ In Uruguay, similar considerations have been incorporated into the ACCESOS formal labour market integration programme, which includes preventive measures on violence and harassment such as the integration of related obligations in agreements with partner institutions, a zero-tolerance clause in beneficiary agreements, training for programme staff, and the provision of information to participants.³⁴ Sri Lanka's National Human Resources and Employment Policy combines enterprise formalization measures, such as incentives, with gender mainstreaming strategies aimed at increasing women's access to decent work, tackling gender occupational segregation, promoting entrepreneurship and ensuring equal pay for work of equal value.

Social partners' led initiatives can also support formalization efforts. For example, the Nigeria Employers' Consultative Association (NECA) has launched a Women Entrepreneurs Self-Check Action Plan to promote gender equality and facilitate the formalization of women-led

³¹ See [Enhancing the effectiveness of legal pathways for labour migration in ASEAN](#), 2023.

³² Mexico defines "Decent Work" as the goal of formalization, which legally requires the absence of violence and harassment as per the [Federal Labor Law](#).

³³ See Chile, 2026. [Ley Núm. 21.805: Reconoce el derecho al cuidado y crea el sistema nacional de apoyos y cuidados](#).

³⁴ See ILO CEACR, Uruguay, Convention No. 190, [Direct Request](#), 2026.

businesses, including the development of workplace policies addressing gender-based violence and harassment (Nwafor 2022).

► **Box 4. The role of SSE in formalization and protecting against violence and harassment at work**

Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) entities and cooperatives contribute significantly to preventing and addressing violence and harassment in the world of work, including through pathways to formalization. The social and solidarity economy can support such efforts as workers and economic units in the informal economy organize themselves into new or existing SSE entities — including cooperatives, associations, mutual societies, foundations, social enterprises and self-help groups operating in accordance with SSE values and principles. These models have emerged in diverse contexts to advocate for members' rights and interests while providing structured and collective forms of organization. By offering complementary institutional frameworks grounded in solidarity, mutual support and shared decision-making, SSE entities help bridge the gap between the informal and formal economies. In doing so, they enhance legal recognition, strengthen collective voice, improve access to social protection and public services, and contribute to safer and more dignified working environments free from violence and harassment. In 2019, the International Cooperative Alliance adopted a Declaration on Decent Work and Against Harassment, committing the cooperative movement to a zero-tolerance approach (ILO 2025).

At the institutional level, formal interfaces with public authorities, such as licensed or co-managed markets and the recognition of cooperatives as public service providers, help clarify rights and responsibilities, reduce exposure to arbitrary evictions or extortion, and establish structured channels for complaints and inspections. At the organizational level, cooperative governance mechanisms, including bylaws, elected boards and women's committees, can embed codes of conduct, non-retaliation policies, referral pathways and bystander support measures within workplace structures. Through buyer requirements and public procurement, SSE actors can also promote human rights due diligence across value chains. Contractual standards may require risk

assessments, worker-centred grievance mechanisms and effective remediation, including for informal workers organized through SSE structures.

Country experiences illustrate these dynamics. In the United Kingdom, the Co-op applies a zero-tolerance policy on bullying, harassment and discrimination across its operations and suppliers, with clear investigation procedures and contractual consequences for misconduct. In Argentina, the Eradication of Violence and Workplace Harassment in the Cooperative Sector programme has been rolled out following C190 implementation.³⁵ In Brazil, the formal recognition of waste picker cooperatives under the National Solid Waste Policy (2010) has strengthened their status as essential service providers, improving working conditions and creating avenues to address violence and harassment, complemented by initiatives such as WIEGO's Gender and Waste Project, which has created safe spaces for women waste pickers to address violence and intersecting forms of discrimination. In Rwanda, the organization of street vendors into cooperatives and their allocation to designated markets has enhanced oversight, safety and collective voice, reducing exposure to harassment and extortion while improving dialogue with municipal authorities. In Senegal, the organization and formalization of fish-processing cooperatives with the support of an ILO-implemented project has empowered women to stand up against all forms of violence and harassment and to support awareness raising and advocacy efforts for the ratification of ILO Convention 190.³⁶

Fostering protection in the informal economy through social dialogue and representation

Freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining are enabling conditions that contribute to preventing and addressing violence and harassment in the informal economy and promoting the transition to formality. Yet workers and economic units in situations of informality may face legal and practical barriers to organizing and representation, including legal exclusions, administrative hurdles and difficulties in obtaining legal recognition for trade unions and other member-based organizations. Their organization, voice

³⁵ See [Erradicación de las Violencias y el Acoso Laboral en el Sector Cooperativo - COOP 190 | Argentina.gob.ar](#).

³⁶ See [Our fish-processing cooperative has empowered women and earned them recognition and safety | International Labour Organization](#).

and representation in inclusive social dialogue can help strengthen protection, improve working conditions and enhance access to support mechanisms while also supporting their gradual transition to formality. Collective organization enables workers to articulate risks, negotiate preventive measures and establish procedures to address violence and harassment. It can also build trust between informal workers, employers and public authorities, helping to reduce tensions and improve accountability. For employers engaging with informal economic units, such as micro-entrepreneurs, street vendors or home-based workers and business operators, dialogue mechanisms can promote collective problem-solving, legal literacy and shared responsibility for safe and dignified working environments, while complementing other regulatory and practical measures to prevent and address violence and harassment. By extending, where feasible and with appropriate capacity-building, membership and services, outreach and support to those in the informal economy or by forming alliances and partnerships, representative employers' and workers' organizations can play a supportive role in facilitating dialogue and promoting the gradual transition to formality. In Malawi, for example, the Malawi Congress of Trade Unions has supported the establishment and registration of trade unions within the informal economy, affirming informal workers' rights to organize and engage in collective bargaining (ILO 2019). In Cambodia, the NGO IDEA organizes associations of informal economy workers, including domestic workers, tuk-tuk and motorcycle drivers, and street vendors, and provides dispute resolution and legal support services to reduce violence, especially in interactions with local authorities (ILO 2019). In Ghana, revisions to collective bargaining agreements in 2022–2023 introduced specific clauses addressing violence and harassment, serving both as protective instruments and as platforms for organizing young workers in sectors characterized by informality. In Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Associations (ZCIEA) is a national body formed by over 22 informal traders' associations to represent the interests of informal economy workers, who make up the vast majority of Zimbabwe's labour force. By organizing street vendors, cross-border traders, home-based workers and other informal operators into local chapters grouped within territorial structures, ZCIEA has given them collective voice and visibility in national and local decision-making

processes, strengthening their capacity to engage authorities, advocate for safer working conditions and address violence and harassment in public and market spaces.³⁷

Cross-border cooperation among trade unions has also strengthened protection for migrant workers. A joint initiative between trade unions in Paraguay and Argentina developed an "Information Passport" for Paraguayan migrant domestic workers, providing information on rights, anti-trafficking safeguards and union contacts in destination countries. Such initiatives enhance access to information and support networks, reducing vulnerability to violence and harassment across borders (ILO 2019). These experiences demonstrate that inclusive dialogue and representation are a complement to formal regulation and can support building sustainable, gender-responsive and rights-based responses to violence and harassment in the informal economy or through the transition to formality.

Conclusions and Way Forward

The practices examined in this Brief illustrate a range of ways in which the key principles set out in relevant international labour standards (ILO 2021a; ILO 2026) can be translated into legal, policy, institutional and social-dialogue measures. Preventing and addressing violence and harassment in the informal economy and through formalization requires coordinated and context-sensitive action by governments, employers and workers and their organizations, within their respective responsibilities and degrees of control. Measures should take into account the diversity of informal work arrangements and the realities faced by micro and small economic units, including resource and administrative constraints. In this regard, priority areas for action include:

Prevention and protection

Member States should adopt and effectively implement legal and policy frameworks that define and prohibit violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment, and ensure that such protections extend to the informal economy. Preventive measures should identify sectors, occupations and work arrangements where exposure may be heightened and support practical

³⁷ See [Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economies Association | Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions](#).

and proportional measures adapted to different work environments and capacities.

Enforcement and remedies

Effective enforcement and remedies require accessible, gender-responsive, well-resourced institutions capable of responding to violence and harassment in diverse work settings, including in the informal economy. Labour inspectorates and other relevant authorities should be supported in developing context-specific and proportionate approaches adapted to informal work arrangements, including work performed in private homes, public spaces and other non-traditional workplaces. Safe, confidential and trusted reporting mechanisms, alongside survivor-centred support services, are critical to improving access to protection and remedies. Workers' organizations can also facilitate access to remedies by providing information, representation, referrals and support throughout complaint procedures, including by reaching out to workers in the informal economy through expanded membership and access to such services.

Guidance, training and awareness-raising

Violence and harassment in the informal economy should be integrated into broader national strategies, including occupational safety and health policies, gender equality and anti-discrimination strategies, formalization strategies and migration policies. Guidance, awareness raising and capacity-building initiatives can help strengthen institutional responses, promote behavioural change and support employers, workers and their organizations in implementing practical prevention measures adapted to their respective contexts and responsibilities.

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Organization, representation and inclusive social dialogue

Ensuring effective and gender-responsive mechanisms for organization, voice and representation of workers and economic units in the informal economy and inclusive social dialogue is essential. Freedom of association and social dialogue, including collective bargaining, can support the identification of risks, practical prevention measures and safer and dignified working environments in the informal economy as well as formalization processes. Employers' and workers' organizations can play an important role in supporting all actors in the informal economy through awareness-raising, organization and representation, access to support mechanisms, dialogue, prevention efforts, outreach, services and capacity-building initiatives. They can also contribute through partnerships and practical approaches adapted to the realities and capacities of those operating in the informal economy, including households employing domestic workers.

Addressing informality and promoting the transition to formality

While preventing and addressing violence and harassment must be ensured both in the formal and informal economy, transition to the formal economy is a key pathway to sustainably strengthening protection. Formalization helps reduce the structural vulnerabilities associated with informality by extending labour protection, including occupational safety and health frameworks, social protection and access to justice. Embedding violence and harassment considerations into gradual, inclusive and gender-responsive formalization strategies is therefore an important component of advancing decent work, equality and non-discrimination, supporting sustainable enterprises and productivity, and promoting inclusive and sustainable development.

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