

► Regional Policy Brief

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ILO Convention 190: The Right of Everyone to a World of Work Free from Violence and Harassment in the Arab States

Violence and harassment in the world of work is a pervasive and harmful phenomenon around the world with profound and costly effects ranging from severe physical and mental health consequences to lost earnings and destroyed career paths to economic losses for workplaces and societies.

To address that scourge, the [Centenary](#) Conference of the International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted in June 2019, [Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 \(No. 190\)](#) and its accompanying [Recommendation \(No. 206\)](#).

These instruments recognize the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, and for the first time, provided a common framework for the prevention and elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work, including gender-based violence and harassment.

In that moment, governments, employers and workers from 187 countries made it clear that violence and harassment in the world of work will not be tolerated and must end.

So far, 36 countries have [ratified](#) C190: UK, Ireland, Spain, Italy, Greece, Albania, San Marino, Canada, Argentina, Uruguay, Peru, Panama, Mexico, El Salvador, Ecuador, Bahamas, Barbados, Antigua and Barbuda, Fiji, South Africa, Mauritius, Central African Republic, Namibia, Nigeria, Somalia, Australia, Belgium, Chile, Germany, France, Uganda, Papua New Guinea, Norway, North Macedonia, Rwanda, and Lesotho. Many others are in the process of considering following suit.

A new joint [Global Survey](#), the first of its kind, conducted by the ILO, Lloyd's Register Foundation (LRF) and Gallup, showed that more than one in five (22.8 per cent or 743 million) persons in employment having experienced at least one form of violence and harassment at work during their working life. Among people who had experienced violence and harassment at work, about one-third (31.8 per cent) said they had experienced more than one form, with 6.3 per cent having faced all three forms (physical, psychological, and sexual violence and harassment) in their working life.

Violence and harassment in the world of work is an entrenched problem, and eliminating it requires determination, perseverance, and cooperation among the actors of the world of work. Governments, workers, employers, and their representative organizations each have distinct responsibilities and complementary roles to play.

Definitions

Governments that ratify C190 are required by the convention to “adopt laws and regulations to define and prohibit violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment”.

C190 acknowledges that to be able to fully prevent and eradicate gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work, ratifying countries must address its root causes, such as multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination; unequal gender-based power relations; gender stereotypes; and gender, social and cultural norms that support violence and harassment.

Defining and prohibiting violence and harassment in work-related legislation often fills a void in national law because such behaviours have often gone under the radar for so long. While a definition in laws and regulations is key for interpretation purposes, only a prohibition can have a particular effect on conduct and could lead to behaviours that produce change in practice, thereby protecting individuals and effectively preventing violence and harassment.

C190 refers to violence and harassment as a single composite concept covering “a range of unacceptable behaviours, practices or threats thereof”, rather than providing a closed or uniform definition of what constitutes violence and/or harassment in the world of work.

That approach allows for the flexibility needed to cover various manifestations of violence and harassment, including new ones that emerge over time. It also allows for “violence and harassment” to cover a wide range of terms found in different legislation to describe the same or similar phenomena. These laws often acknowledge that there is no clear line between violence and harassment.

► Article 1 of C190

1. For the purpose of this Convention:

- a. the term “violence and harassment” in the world of work refers to 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.
- b. the term “gender-based violence and harassment” 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.

2. Without prejudice to subparagraphs (a) and (b) of paragraph 1 of this Article, definitions in national laws and regulations may provide for a single concept or separate concepts.

Arab States

Two Arab countries have ratified C190, despite country-level efforts to define and address violence and harassment at work. According to the ILO-LRF-Gallup survey, Arab States registered a violence and harassment prevalence rate of 13.6 per cent, compared to the Americas (34.3 per cent); Africa (25.7 per cent); Europe and Central Asia (25.5 per cent); Asia and the Pacific (19.2 per cent).

When looking at gender differences in these countries, women were 5.9 percentage points more likely than men to have experienced violence and harassment in their working life, in comparison to the Americas (8.2 percentage points); Europe and Central Asia (8.0 percentage points).

Among wage and salaried workers, women in the Arab States were 7.2 percentage points more likely than their male counterparts to have experienced violence and harassment, compared to the Americas (8.8 percentage points); Europe and Central Asia (4.3 percentage points).

Violence and harassment undermine equality at work by calling into question the integrity, dignity, and well-being of workers, and damaging an enterprise by weakening the bases upon which work relationships are built and impairing productivity.

They result in large monetary costs for governments and employers, particularly in terms of medical care and counselling, lost productivity, case settlement and judicial monetary awards. For employers, Violence and harassment can also lead to significant reputation costs. They also create significant health, economic and career costs for victims.

Because of their disproportionate impact on women, violence and harassment may exacerbate already existing gender gaps in the world of work, including the pay gap and the gap in labour force participation of women, and to the segregation of women into sectors and occupations with lower remuneration or that have limited career prospects. That contributes to the unequal status of women in the world of work and in societies around the world.

► Article 6 of C190

- Each Member shall adopt laws, regulations and policies ensuring the right to equality and non-discrimination in employment and occupation, including for women workers, as well as for workers and other persons belonging to one or more vulnerable groups or groups in situations of vulnerability that are disproportionately affected by violence and harassment in the world of work.

Violence and harassment may contribute to women earning less than men. They push victims to reduce their working hours or to leave their jobs with the risk of entering into lengthy periods of unemployment or leaving the workforce entirely. For victims who remain in the job, violence and harassment may deter them from applying to higher-level, and better-paying, or more visible positions.

► Facts and figure

- The Arab region has the world's lowest rate of female labour force participation - 18.4 per cent compared to the global average of 48 per cent. By contrast, male labour force participation rates, at 77 per cent, are above the global average of 75 per cent.
- Female unemployment in the Arab states is at 15.6 per cent – three times higher than the world average.
- Women in managerial positions are low in the region, with only 11 per cent of women holding managerial positions as compared to the world average of 27.1 per cent.
- Unpaid childcare work result in women spending almost five times more hours than men on unpaid care work.
[Source: ILO World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2019](#)

Protecting the Rights of Vulnerable Groups in the World of Work

Vulnerable groups, such as domestic workers, workers with disabilities, and workers in the informal economy, are particularly subject to experiencing various forms of violence and harassment in the workplace. Despite their essential contributions to the economy and society, they often face greater challenges in accessing protections and justice against such violations.

Domestic workers, for instance, frequently work in private households, leaving them isolated and more likely to face verbal abuse, physical violence, and exploitation, with no legal support. Workers with disabilities encounter unique challenges as well, they often face discrimination, prejudice, and abuse. Workplace accommodations may be lacking, and they may be subjected to derogatory remarks or exclusion from opportunities.

Workers in the informal economy, such as the informal agriculture workers, comprising a substantial portion of the global workforce, are often marginalized, with limited access to social protections and legal frameworks. They are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and violence, with little recourse for justice.

C190 takes a comprehensive approach, acknowledging the causes of violence and harassment in the world of work, including discrimination, power imbalances, and harmful social norms. Its ratification not only sends a strong signal of commitment to eliminating violence and harassment but also demonstrates a nation's dedication to protecting the rights and well-being of all workers, especially those from vulnerable groups.

► **Promoting Safety, Equality and Empowering Vulnerable Groups**

- Incorporating C190 into national laws and regulations will provide much-needed clarity on defining and prohibiting violence and harassment, fostering a safer and more equitable work environment for domestic workers, people with disabilities, workers in the informal economy, and all others. Governments, employers, workers, and civil society must collaborate in ratifying and implementing C190 to ensure that everyone, regardless of their position or circumstances, can enjoy a world of work free from violence and harassment.

Way Forward

- Ratifying an international convention like C190 sends an important signal to individuals and to the international community about the State's commitment to take all measures necessary to prevent and address violence and harassment in the world of work.
- Ensuring social dialogue is of paramount importance. All actors of the world of work need to be involved and listened to. Social dialogue leads to better outcomes since it provides more practical information and offers a range of approaches and solutions by those directly concerned. Engaging in tripartite consultation also helps bring C190 to the knowledge of a broader public and build a sense of ownership, which is likely to result in ensuring effective implementation. Participation of representative workers' and employers' organizations in social dialogue should be on an "equal footing", according to [ILO C144](#), and representation should be gender-responsive and inclusive.
- Quality statistics on the phenomenon are important to inform prevention and remediation laws and mechanisms, policies, and programmes, as well as research and advocacy. The acquisition of better data requires a sound conceptual and methodological measurement framework, and legal gap analysis towards which the ILO is working, with the aim of supporting countries to measure the issue and monitor progress in the future.
- Existing national and workplace mechanisms should be extended or adapted to effectively prevent and manage violence and harassment in the world of work, including through occupational safety and health (OSH) management systems, OSH policies and programmes, OSH national tripartite mechanisms and labour inspection systems. These prevention mechanisms should be updated on a regular basis to enable protection against all forms of violence and harassment by responding to the different needs of women and men in all their diversity.

Governments

- Review and update labour laws to align with ILO C190 provisions through enhanced definitions, scope, and mechanisms for reporting and addressing incidents of violence and harassment;
- Develop targeted National Action Plans outlining strategies, objectives, and resources for preventing and addressing workplace violence and harassment;
- Ensure coordination among relevant entities for effective implementation.

Employers' and workers' organizations

- Put a written request to the government to find out whether C190 has been submitted to the competent authorities for possible ratification and whether the ratification is under consideration;
- Require a tripartite consultation at the national or sectoral level;
- Develop, join and/or support international and national campaigns, and mobilize members in support of C190;
- Contact the most representative organizations in the country and coordinate with them;
- Raise awareness of C190 and conduct assessments among members to understand the situation and challenges in relation to its effective implementation;
- Transfer of knowledge and ILO tools to build the capacities of employer organization to build a system that prevents V&H, protects employees and raises awareness on V&H.

Parliamentarians

- Put an oral or written question to the government to find out whether ratification is under consideration, and if not, to determine why C190 has not yet been ratified;
- Encourage a parliamentary debate on the question;
- Work with competent ministries, social partners, media, and civil society to mobilize public opinion in support of C190.

Civil society organizations

- Lobby government representatives and/or employers' or workers' organizations for the ratification of C190;
- Keep institutions accountable for national and global commitments made by governments concerning the ratification and implementation of C190;
- Develop, join and/or support international and national campaigns in support of the ratification and implementation of C190;
- Mobilize members and other civil society organizations to create a movement in support of C190.

Individuals

- Get in contact with social partners and ask about any ratification prospects;
- Join international and national campaigns, and mobilize friends, your community and civil society in support of C190;
- Create a movement in support of C190;
- Be active and make your voice heard offline and online, including by using the hashtag #RatifyC190;
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- Become an agent of change wherever your work is.

Let's all work together to recognize the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment!



For more details Contact:

Reem Aslan (aslan@ilo.org)

Duaa Ajarmeh (ajarmeh@ilo.org)

Contact details
International Labour Organization
Regional Office for the Arab States
Aresco Centre - Justinien Street –
Kantari
Beirut - Lebanon

T: 00961-1-752400
 E: beirut@ilo.org

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