



► ILO Brief

May 2020

ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190): 12 ways it can support the COVID-19 response and recovery

This note highlights the relevance of the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) to the current Covid-19 pandemic. It provides examples of work-related violence and harassment that have been reported across countries in the context of Covid-19¹ and mentions specific provisions of Convention No. 190 and its accompanying Recommendation No. 206 that can help prevent and address those situations.²

Violence and harassment is unacceptable anywhere and at any time, whether in times of prosperity or of crisis. The risk of violence and harassment is even higher during times of crisis: the COVID-19 outbreak has been a sombre reminder of this. Addressing violence and harassment in the world of work has been a priority for the ILO, and the work in this area has become even more relevant than ever.

In 2019, the International Labour Conference adopted the ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, expressing a clear commitment to a world of work free from violence and harassment.³ It also adopted the first standards on the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work, namely the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) and its accompanying Recommendation (No. 206). The framework set out in these instruments provides a clear roadmap for preventing and addressing violence and harassment in the world of work, thus contributing to delivering on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including in the context of COVID-19.

Convention No. 190 recognizes the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment. It defines violence and harassment as “a range of unacceptable behaviours and practices” that “aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm”. This covers physical abuse, verbal abuse, bullying and mobbing, sexual harassment, threats and stalking, among other things. Along with its supplementing Recommendation (No. 206), it sets out a common framework for action to prevent and address violence and harassment in the world of work.⁴

Urgent action needs to be taken in the COVID-19 context to ensure everyone’s right to a world of work free from violence and harassment, not only during and after the outbreak, but also to build a sustainable recovery and better resilience in the face of future crises. Efforts to ratify Convention No. 190 and implement both the Convention and Recommendation need to be a key element of response and recovery measures.

1 See [The COVID-19 response: Getting gender equality right for a better future for women at work](#) and [Protection of Migrant Worker during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).

2 [ILO Violence and Harassment Convention](#), 2019 (No. 190).

3 [ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work](#), International Labour Conference, 108th Session, Geneva, 2019.

4 See [ILO Series of technical briefs: Violence and harassment in the world of work](#).

Twelve reasons why ratification of Convention No. 190 and its implementation together with Recommendation No. 206 are important for the COVID-19 response and recovery:

<p>1. To prevent and address the rise of violence and harassment beyond the physical workplace. COVID-19 has reshaped the way many people work, shedding light on venues where work-related violence and harassment may occur, both in the formal or informal economy. Examples of chlorine thrown at nurses while commuting to and from work or grocery store workers beaten or verbally abused by clients due to supply shortages have been recorded in many countries. The increase in teleworking also appears to be translating into an increase in cyberbullying.</p>	<p>► Convention No. 190 protects against all forms of violence and harassment in the world of work. The Convention is based on a broad concept of the “world of work” that takes account of the fact that nowadays work does not always take place at a physical workplace. For example, it covers violence and harassment occurring during work-related travel, when commuting to and from work, in employer-provided accommodation or through work-related communications, including those enabled by information and communications technologies (ICT) (Art. 3 C190).</p>
<p>2. To protect everyone in the world of work. During COVID-19, many have put their skills at the service of the response to the pandemic. Medical students and retired doctors and nurses have joined the ranks of those providing health care services; those who sew have produced protective equipment at no cost; and volunteers have joined organizations and associations in their efforts to distribute staple food.</p>	<p>► Convention No. 190 protects all individuals in the world of work. C190 builds on the understanding that no one should be subject to violence and harassment in the world of work. It protects workers and other persons in the world of work, including employees as defined by national law and practice, persons working irrespective of their contractual status, 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 C190).</p>
<p>3. To address violence and harassment in a comprehensive manner. The COVID-19 crisis has evidenced that actions and measures in different areas of law and policy are necessary to effectively address violence and harassment in the world of work. For instance, migrant workers in vulnerable situations have reported increased risks of violence and harassment by border law enforcement authorities, when leaving the host country as a result of losing their job.</p>	<p>► Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206 are grounded on the adoption of an inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach, in consultation with representatives of employers’ and workers’ organizations. This approach envisages action in all the fields concerned, including in labour, equality and non-discrimination, occupational safety and health, migration and criminal laws, regulations and policies, as well as through collective bargaining. In adopting such an approach, C190 recognizes the different and complementary roles and functions of governments, and employers and workers and their respective organizations, taking into account the varying nature and extent of their respective responsibilities (Art. 4 C190).</p>
<p>4. To prevent and address the rise of gender-based violence and harassment. COVID-19 has further exacerbated gender stereotypes and harmful masculinities, leading to increased unpaid care work for women. This, coupled with higher financial insecurity and unemployment, has led to a spike in gender-based violence and harassment and, more specifically, domestic violence against women and girls.</p>	<p>► Convention No. 190 provides for specific measures to address gender-based violence and harassment. It acknowledges that gender-based violence and harassment disproportionately affects women and girls. It also recognizes that a gender-responsive approach, which tackles underlying causes and risk factors, including gender stereotypes, multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and unequal gender-based power relations, is essential to ending violence and harassment in the world of work (Preamble, Art. 1, 4, 5 and 10 C190, and Paras. 16-18 R206).</p>

<p>5. To mitigate the impact of domestic violence on the world of work. COVID-19 lockdowns and curfews force people to stay at home and, when possible, work from home. For many, the home is now their workplace, which comes with heightened risks of violence and harassment. Alarming spikes in domestic violence, particularly against women and people with disabilities, but also against men, have been recorded in many countries since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak. Domestic violence has an impact in terms of health, safety and productivity of workers and other persons concerned, as well as on their capacity to enter, remain and progress in the labour market.</p>	<p>► Convention No. 190 recognizes the link between domestic violence and the world of work. It calls upon member States to recognize the effects of domestic violence, and mitigate its impact in the world of work. Recommendation No. 206 supplements Convention No. 190 by setting out some specific measures that can be taken, including leave for victims, flexible work arrangements, temporary protection against dismissal, inclusion of domestic violence in workplace risk assessments and awareness-raising (Art. 10(f) C190, and Para. 18 R206).</p>
<p>6. To prevent and address cyberbullying. Due to COVID-19, millions of people are working from home using ICT. While teleworking may reduce those forms of violence and harassment requiring face-to-face contact, generalized teleworking arrangements may lead to a higher risk of technology-enabled violence and harassment (often known as “cyberbullying”).</p>	<p>► Convention No. 190 also applies to cyberbullying. By covering all forms of violence and harassment occurring in the course of, linked with or arising out of work, Convention No. 190 extends protection against violence and harassment occurring through work-related communication, including those enabled by ICT (Art. 3 C190).</p>
<p>7. To protect those even more exposed to violence and harassment in certain sectors, occupations and work arrangements. COVID-19 has exacerbated violence and harassment in some sectors, occupations and work arrangements, such as health and social work, emergency services, domestic work, or working at night or in isolation, which already experienced high levels of exposure even before the pandemic.</p>	<p>► Convention No. 190 recognizes that some sectors, occupations and work arrangements, such as health, transport, education and domestic work, or working at night or in isolated areas, may be more exposed to violence and harassment. It further requires member States, in consultation with the employers’ and workers’ organizations concerned, to identify such sectors and take measures to effectively protect the persons concerned (Art. 8 C190, and Para. 9 R206).</p>
<p>8. To ensure protection of those working in the informal economy. COVID-19 is having a dramatic impact on the livelihoods and well-being of many people working in the informal economy. Lockdown, curfews and restricted mobility may exacerbate their already high risk of violence and harassment from clients, third parties or local authorities. In many countries, rag-pickers or street vendors have reported violent retaliation or harassment from the police for being in public spaces, even when working out of necessity or providing essential services.</p>	<p>► Convention No. 190 extends protection to workers and other persons concerned operating in the informal economy. It recognizes that individuals in the informal economy also have the right to be free from violence and harassment, and that public authorities have an important role in ensuring that they are protected (Art. 8 C190, and Para. 11 R206).</p>
<p>9. To ensure equality and non-discrimination of those in situations of vulnerability. COVID-19 further exacerbates stigma, discrimination, violence and harassment of groups in vulnerable situations. For example, indigenous peoples have denounced the lack of information in their languages on COVID-19 prevention strategies and on how to access health and support services in case of violence and harassment. When multiple forms of discrimination intersect based on different personal characteristics, the impact can be even more severe.</p>	<p>► Convention No. 190 explicitly mentions 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, and calls for laws, regulations and policies ensuring their right to equality and non-discrimination (Art. 5 C190, and Paras. 10-13 R206).</p>
<p>10. To adopt, adapt and implement workplace measures on violence and harassment. The COVID-19 crisis has evidenced that a range of factors can lead to or increase the risk of violence and harassment, such as poor working conditions, stress, stigma and discrimination. For instance, health and care workers have been harassed due to their exposure to COVID-19; at the same time, lack of sufficient staff, personal protection equipment and facilities have created a tense working environment, leading to a higher risk of violence and harassment by patients and their families, as well as by colleagues and managers. In this context, steps have been taken to review and implement risk assessments and put in place preventive and control measures to protect the safety and health of workers against COVID-19 as well as from related risks that could lead to violence and harassment.</p>	<p>► Convention No. 190 calls for the adoption of workplace policies on violence and harassment, and for the assessment of all associated factors as part of the occupational safety and health (OSH) management system and workplace OSH risk assessment. The Convention, along with Recommendation No. 206, offers clear guidance that could help employers and workers to identify hazards and assess the risks of violence and harassment, and to take effective measures to protect the safety, health and well-being of all workers, including in the COVID-19 context (Art. 9 C190, and Paras 8 and 18 R206).</p>

<p>11. To ensure safe, fair and effective reporting and appropriate and effective remedies. COVID-19 has evidenced that support services and access to justice to respond to violence and harassment are essential and should continue to function effectively even during lockdowns or other forms of social isolation. Some countries have introduced specific measures to ensure the availability of judicial procedures for the most urgent cases, or their timely and efficient processing.</p>	<p>► Convention No. 190 calls for enforcement, remedies and assistance as a key component of any efforts to end violence and harassment. This includes dispute resolution mechanisms internal and external to the workplace, courts and tribunals, and access to support, services and remedies, including for victims of gender-based violence and harassment (Art. 10 C190, and Paras 14-22 R206).</p>
<p>12. To promote better data. COVID-19 has shown that data on violence and harassment are essential to respond effectively to the crisis. This includes information on perpetrators, victims and on places where it occurs. Statistical information, among others, should be disaggregated by sex, occupation and sector of economic activity, as well as, disability, ethnicity, migration, HIV status and LGBTIQI.</p>	<p>► Recommendation No. 206 recognizes the importance of data. Member States are called upon to make efforts to collect and publish statistics disaggregated by sex, form of violence and harassment, and sector of economic activity, as well as by characteristics of groups in vulnerable situations. This is necessary to inform and monitor policy responses to prevent and address violence and harassment in the world of work (Para. 22 R206).</p>

Ratifying Convention No. 190 and implementing Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206 for a world of work free from violence and harassment is of paramount importance, as the COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted.

What can ILO constituents do?

- Recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic and the related economic crisis is increasing the risk of violence and harassment in the world of work, and exchange views, including through social dialogue, on the most suitable and effective responses.
- Ensure that the principles and policy measures laid out in Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206 guide the design and implementation of COVID-19 emergency and recovery responses.
- Continue promoting the ratification of Convention No. 190, as well as the implementation of the Convention and Recommendation No. 206 at national, sectoral, enterprise and workplace level.
- Strengthen prevention measures at the workplace level by ensuring workplace policies and risk assessment and management systems take violence and harassment into account, including domestic violence and cyberbullying.
- Enhance the knowledge base of violence and harassment in the world of work, including by collecting and publishing data, and documenting any occurrences.
- Ensure safe and easy access to justice and remedies for victims of violence and harassment.

What can the ILO do to support its constituents?

- Provide technical support to governments, and employers' and workers' organizations on the inclusion of Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206 in COVID-19 response and recovery measures, including at the national, sectoral, enterprise and workplace level.
- Assist authorities concerned to continue undertaking pre-ratification analyses of national law and practice and to identify measures to overcome relevant gaps.
- Support tripartite consultation and national efforts towards the ratification of the Convention and implementation of both the Convention and the Recommendation, including through awareness-raising initiatives, promotional materials, research and technical assistance.

Contact details

International Labour Organization
Route des Morillons 4
CH-1211 Geneva 22
Switzerland

Conditions of Work and Equality Department
Gender, Equality and Diversity & ILO/AIDS Branch
E: ged@ilo.org