

OVERVIEW: Tools to Address Gender-Based Violence and Harassment and Create Respectful Workplaces

Gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) is defined as “an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e., gender) differences between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty”.⁷ GBVH disproportionately affects women and girls across their lifespan, but can impact anyone, and can include sexual, physical, economic, and psychological abuse in domestic, community, or workplace settings. (See Box 4A, below, for definitions of workplace GBVH.) GBVH can include physical violence or injury, as well as more subtle or less obvious forms of harassment, coercion, or extortion. GBVH occurring on the job can create a hostile work environment, causing employees stress, anxiety, and fear. It can also disrupt concentration, which can lower productivity and/or increase turnover.⁸ GBVH is an issue that cuts across all the Tool Suites in this Toolkit, due to the impacts on all genders in the workforce, supply chain, and community.

The cost of GBVH extends beyond the individuals and families who experience it. Regardless of whether GBVH occurs in the workplace, the costs for businesses can be significant. A World Bank Group report estimates that across five countries, the cost of certain forms of GBVH⁹ is between 1.2 to 3.7 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP),¹⁰ and figures from the private sector mirror similarly significant costs. A 2017 study by CARE found that nearly one in three female garment factory workers in Cambodia had experienced sexual harassment in the past 12 months, costing the industry USD 89 million per year as a result of turnover, absenteeism, and presenteeism.¹¹ In Peru, private sector companies lose more than USD 6.7 billion a year—comparable to 3.7 percent of GDP—highlighting the significant underrecognized costs of GBVH.¹² In fact, research¹³ indicates that sexual harassment claims can be even more detrimental to corporate reputation than fraud, as illustrated by the seismic shifts of the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements.¹⁴

⁷ Inter-agency Standing Committee (IASC), [Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing risk, promoting resilience and aiding recovery](#), p. 5. Geneva: IASC, 2015.

⁸ M. Ellsberg and L. Heise, [Researching Violence Against Women: A Practical Guide for Researchers and Activists](#). Washington DC: World Health Organization and PATH, 2005.

⁹ Intimate partner violence (IPV).

¹⁰ Countries include Australia, Bangladesh, Peru, United Kingdom and Vietnam. J. Klugman, L. Hanmer, S. Twigg, T. Hasan, J. McCleary-Sills, and J. Santamaria, [Voice and Agency: Empowering Women and Girls for Shared Prosperity](#). Washington, DC: World Bank Group, 2014.

¹¹ CARE, [‘I know I cannot quit.’ The Prevalence and Productivity Cost of Sexual Harassment to the Cambodian Garment Industry](#). Canberra: CARE Australia, 2017.

¹² A. Vara Horna, [Violence against women and its financial consequences for businesses in Peru](#). Peru: GIZ, 2013.

¹³ S. Does, S. Gundemir, and M. Shih, [“Research: How Sexual Harassment Affects a Company’s Public Image,” Harvard Business Review](#), 2018.

¹⁴ A. Allan, [How Businesses Can Take the Lead in Combatting Gender-Based Violence](#). *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 2019.

Any company seeking to address GBVH must ensure that it is meeting minimum obligations to provide a safe workplace by addressing bullying and sexual harassment and taking steps to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) connected to the workplace. Tackling GBVH and respectful workplace issues also presents an important opportunity to enhance company culture and values, staff wellbeing, and the productivity of the company. All initiatives must be survivor centered (**BOX 4I**).

BOX 4A | Definitions: Scope of Workplace Gender Based Violence and Harassment

Workplace violence and harassment is pervasive, and it affects all countries, occupations, and work arrangements.¹⁵ The problem consists of a range of unacceptable behaviors or threatened behaviors that aim at or result in physical, psychological, sexual, or economic harm, including gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH).¹⁶ These behaviors are incompatible with a respectful workplace culture and a productive business.

In 2019, the International Labor Organization (ILO) formalized the right of employees to work in an environment free from workplace violence and harassment through Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment. The convention brings together principles of equality and non-discrimination with workplace health and safety to “address violence and harassment that occurs in the course of, linked with or arising out of work, both in the formal and informal economy, and whether in the private or public sector”.¹⁷ These behaviors are linked with or arise out of work, including:

- in the workplace, including public and private spaces where they are a place of work
- in places where the worker is paid, takes a rest break or a meal, or uses sanitary, washing and changing facilities
- during work-related trips, travel, training, events, or social activities
- through work-related communications, including those enabled by information and communication technologies
- in employer-provided accommodation, and
- when commuting to and from work.¹⁸

Convention 190 notes that domestic violence can affect employment, productivity, and health and safety, and that governments, employers' and workers' organizations

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¹⁵ International Labor Organization, [Eliminating Violence and Harassment in the World of Work Convention No. 190, Recommendation No. 206, and the accompanying Resolution](#), 2019.

¹⁶ International Labor Organization, [Violence and harassment in the world of work: A guide on Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206](#), 2021.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Definition adapted from: International Labor Organization, [Violence and harassment in the world of work: A guide on Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206](#), 2021.

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and labor market institutions can help, as part of other measures, to recognize, respond to and address the impacts of domestic violence.¹⁹ For further information on other international laws and conventions, see **TOOL 4.4: Guidelines on Potential Legal Obligations Involving GBVH**.

Prior to the ratification of ILO Convention 190, several ILO instruments related to occupational safety and health (OSH) set out to protect workers' safety and health, including from the risk of violence and harassment. They include the Occupational Safety and Health Convention (No. 155) and Recommendation (No. 164), 1981; as well as the Protocol of 2002 to the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981.

Definitions of workplace bullying, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), and domestic violence are outlined below and in the Respectful Workplaces Sample Policy in **TOOL 4.12**.

Workplace Bullying: Workplace bullying is unreasonable and often repeated behavior that undermines a person's health, safety, confidence, or dignity.

Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment is unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, which makes a person feel offended, uncomfortable, humiliated, or intimidated.

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA): Sexual exploitation is any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust for sexual purposes, including but not limited to profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.²⁰

Sexual abuse is actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions. It also includes sexual relations with a child, in any context, defined as a human being under the age of 18 years.

Sexual Assault: Sexual activity with another person who does not consent. It is a violation of bodily integrity and sexual autonomy and is broader than narrower conceptions of "rape," especially because (a) it may be committed by other means than force or violence and (b) does not necessarily entail penetration.²¹

Domestic and Sexual Violence (DSV): Domestic violence is conduct, or the threat of such conduct, committed by a person against another person with whom the offender is in a domestic relationship that constitutes physical, sexual, psychological, or economic abuse. It may consist of a single act or a number of acts that form part of a pattern of behavior, even though some or all of those acts when viewed in isolation may appear to be minor or trivial.

¹⁹ International Labor Organization, [Eliminating Violence and Harassment in the World of Work Convention No. 190](#), 2019.

²⁰ UNHCR, [What is sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment?](#)

²¹ UN Glossary on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse 2017, pg. 6.

Research has shown a correlation between infrastructure projects and rising rates of GBVH, from incidences of onsite harassment to an increased risk of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and domestic and sexual violence (DSV) within project-affected communities (including both incidents involving workers and those driven in part by project-related impacts within the community).²² In situations where these issues are not addressed, the infrastructure sector can create and/or exacerbate dynamics leading to GBVH incidents. Beyond the workplace impacts, the occurrence of incidents of GBVH is a violation of fundamental human rights, and what happens in the immediate workplace is intimately connected with what happens offsite. Taken together, the risks to individuals, to communities, to business, and to reputation have prompted many companies to also recognize opportunities to change onsite behavior and address issues in the broader community by taking a proactive stance on combating GBVH. Companies have an opportunity to not only create standards in terms of acceptable work conduct and atmosphere in the workplace and employee conduct in communities, but also provide support for employees who may experience violence at home.

As companies increasingly recognize the growing imperative to address GBVH in-house and as community stakeholders, this Tool Suite provides guidance and tools to help companies understand these issues, take measures, and set expectations for behavior and support services. In addition, this Tool Suite recognizes that GBVH is frequently connected to, and a symptom of, broader ‘respectful workplace’ issues (i.e., workplaces that are free from bullying and harassment). While the tools presented here are often focused on GBVH, they can also be used to support the development of workplaces that are free from all forms of violence and harassment.²³



In some countries, GBVH IS ESTIMATED TO COST UP TO 3.7% OF GDP.



ONE IN THREE WOMEN WORLDWIDE have reported experiencing either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner in their lifetime.

Sources: J. Klugman, L. Hanmer, S. Twigg, T. Hasan, J. McCleary-Sills, and J. Santamaria, [Voice and Agency: Empowering Women and Girls for Shared Prosperity](#). Washington, DC: World Bank Group, 2014, and UN Women, [Facts and Figures: Ending Violence against Women.](#)

²² L. Berger, [How a Community-Led Response to Sexual Exploitation in Uganda Led to Systemic World Bank Reform](#). Accountability Research Center, Accountability Note 3, 2018.

²³ IFC, [Respectful Workplaces: Exploring the costs of Bullying and Sexual Harassment to Businesses in Myanmar](#). Washington, D.C.: IFC, 2019.

BOX 4B | IFC E&S Support Linked to IFC Performance Standards**IFC GBVH Due Diligence and Risk Screening**

Environment and Social (E&S) Specialists at the IFC are required to undertake gender and GBVH due diligence.²⁴ When a project is at the design stage, the E&S Specialist responsible for the project at the concept review stage completes the Gender and GBVH Contextual Risk Screening Tool (an internal IFC document)²⁵. The level of risk of a project related to GBVH depends on a range of data points and questions, such as national laws, GBVH prevalence rates, labor influx, use of security, etc. By asking the client questions about its gender and GBVH-related policies, procedures, and grievance mechanisms, the specialist can initiate the conversation about gender and GBVH risks with the client and identify the level of risk associated with the project. Below are some examples of how IFC works with clients to apply gender-related requirements of the Performance Standards:²⁶

IFC is working with an investment client in West Africa to implement mitigation actions to address the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse by project employees or contractors against local community members. IFC is working with the client on ethical and survivor-centered responses and mechanisms should an incident occur.

At a chemical manufacturer in India, IFC noted there were no female employees. Women are often not hired in the sector because it is assumed that such jobs entail hard physical labor and are dangerous. However, given technology changes, modern chemical plants need little physical labor and can in fact be safer than other industries. The IFC team worked with the company on developing a female employee-friendly plant through a physical redesign of the factory operations, focused recruitment efforts to increase female employees, and updated human resource policies. This helped shift the employment footprint, and the company managed to employ 45 women for its first 630 roles.

IFC Advisory programs such as the [Respectful Workplaces Program](#) have also taken steps to address harassment, including GBVH, with over 50 private sector companies across various countries, including, for example, in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands²⁷, and in the garment sector in other countries, where as part of the Better Work program, IFC promotes anti-sexual harassment training for workers and managers.²⁸

²⁴ IFC, *Assessing Gender and GBV Risks in Projects: A Guide for IFC E&S Specialists*, 2019.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Examples from IFC's [Addressing Gender and Gender Based Violence in IFC Projects](#). Washington, D.C.: IFC, 2018.

²⁷ See IFC's [Respectful Workplaces Program](#).

²⁸ For more information, see "[Better Work's Sexual Harassment Prevention Training sparks changes in attitudes and behavior](#)," 2017.

TOOL SUITE 4: Tools to Address Gender-Based Violence and Harassment and Create Respectful Workplaces

Any company seeking to address gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) must ensure that it is meeting minimum obligations to provide a safe workplace by addressing bullying and sexual harassment and taking steps to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) connected to the workplace. These steps are essential to building a respectful corporate culture and will allow you to support your employees further by responding to domestic or sexual violence that may occur outside the workplace.

Tool Suite 4 offers support, practical suggestions, and examples of strategies to address GBVH. This toolkit is meant to provide a comprehensive guide of options—companies should pick and choose tools, or portions of tools, to use depending on their current needs and capabilities. The tools can be used as rough guides, or can be followed verbatim, but should always be tailored to the specific context of the organization and the contexts in which it operates. All initiatives must be survivor centered (see **BOX 4I**).

TOOL	TARGET UNIT	GOAL
↓ TOOL 4.1: Road Map for Using Tools in Tool Suite 4	All Readers	Introduces how all the tools in this Tool Suite work together
↓ ASSESS AND PREPARE: Tools 4.2–4.8		
↓ TOOL 4.2: The Business Case for Respectful Workplaces	All Readers	Explains how GBVH can affect your businesses, employees, and the communities in which you operate
↓ TOOL 4.3: Guidelines for Finding and Assessing Available GBVH Data	Community Engagement, Employee Assistance, Internal Communications, Human Resources, Legal, Medical, Occupational Health and Safety (OHS), Gender Focal Points, Security, and Unions	Provides guidance on identifying and assessing GBVH data specific to your company
↓ TOOL 4.4: Guidelines for Potential Legal Obligations Involving GBVH	Human Resources and Legal	Outlines legal obligations involving GBVH that may apply to your company

↓ TOOL 4.5: Service Provider Guidelines	Community Engagement, Employee Assistance, Internal Communications, Human Resources, Legal, Medical, Occupational Health and Safety (OHS), Gender Focal Points, Security, and Unions	Identifies what supports are available in the locations your business operates
↓ TOOL 4.6: Gender Smart Safety	Occupational Health and Safety, Human Resources, Medical and Legal	Provides an overview of gender smart safety and a case study
↓ TOOL 4.7: Respectful Workplaces Staff Engagement Survey	Human Resources and Unions	Includes sample questions that can be included in employee engagement surveys
↓ TOOL 4.8: Terms of Reference for GBVH and Respectful Workplaces Assessment	Human Resources and Gender Focal Points	Provides a sample ToR for independent specialists to conduct employee interviews and surveys about GBVH

↓ **ADDRESS:** Tools 4.9–4.14

↓ TOOL 4.9: Checklist for Publicly Committing to Address GBVH and Model Respectful Behavior	Executive Board, Senior Management, and Human Resources	Outlines steps leadership teams can take to demonstrate commitment to addressing GBVH
↓ TOOL 4.10: Identify Key Staff for GBVH Focal Points and Contact Team	Senior Management and Human Resources	Offers guidance on selecting staff to serve as focal points
↓ TOOL 4.11: Guidelines for GBVH Focal Point Training	Human Resources, Training and Development and Union	Provides guidance on training focal points
↓ TOOL 4.12: GBVH and Respectful Workplaces Guidelines and Sample Policy	Executive Board, Senior Management, and Human Resources	Offers guidance and examples of workplace policies, procedures, and reporting and investigation mechanisms

<p>↓ TOOL 4.13: Raising Awareness and Communication of GBVH Commitments and Approaches</p>	<p>Executive Board, Senior Management, Communications and Public Relations, Human Resources, and Unions</p>	<p>Provides information on how to improve employee awareness through training and everyday reminders</p>
<p>↓ TOOL 4.14: Guidelines for Self-Care for Respectful Workplaces Focal Points/Contact Team</p>	<p>Human Resources and Focal Points/Contact Team</p>	<p>Outlines resources to support focal points and the contact team</p>

↓ **MONITOR AND SUSTAIN:** Tool 4.15

<p>↓ TOOL 4.15: Developing a Theory of Change for Interventions Involving GBVH</p>	<p>Human Resources, Training and Development, and Focal Points/Contact Team</p>	<p>Examples of how to monitor progress through a theory of change</p>
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