DIMENSION 6

Working environments free of violence and harassment

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GUIDE TO PROMOTE GENDER
EQUALITY IN LATIN AMERICAN
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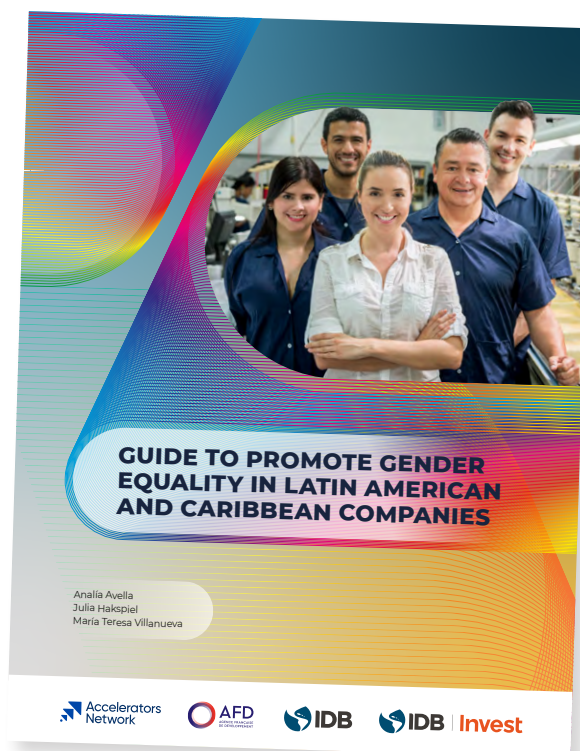
Working environments free of violence and harassment

Companies have a responsibility to ensure safe environments. However, violence and harassment are not only legal issues, but also social problems rooted in gender inequalities. Addressing these issues is essential to fostering a culture of respect and inclusion.

Context and evidence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a widespread and multifaceted social problem. **It refers to all violence directed against women, as well as violence against people based on their sexual orientation or gender identity**. GBV encompasses several types of potentially co-occurring expressions. Women and girls are the most affected by GBV, although this problem is aggravated when it coincides with more than one dimension such as race, ethnicity, disability, migratory status, sexual orientation, age, among others (see Box 10).

According to data from the World Health Organization, t**he average lifetime prevalence of physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence among women aged 15-49 years is 25% in Latin America and the Caribbean and 27% globally (WHO, 2021)**. Intimate partner or ex-partner violence has been recognized as the most widespread form of gender-based violence against women; however, the limited availability of data due to fear of stigmatization, shame or retaliation for reporting suggests that these figures may be underestimated. As for sexual violence by a third party (outside the intimate partner), estimates for LAC are high. The prevalence of this type of violence among women aged 15 years and older is 11%, compared to a global average of 6% (WHO, 2021).

GBV has multiple consequences that transcend the direct victims. **In addition to violating the human rights of these individuals, GBV has social and economic costs to them, their families, society and economies**. Victims of GBV suffer short- and long-term physical and mental health problems that affect their quality of life and overall well-being. In addition, GBV has adverse effects on victims' employment outcomes. Exposure to violence is reflected in difficulties finding work, maintaining employment, increased absenteeism, tardiness, and fewer hours worked.

With regard to violence in the workplace, the data reveals a priority challenge. According to an ILO survey conducted in 2021, almost 23% of employed people worldwide have experienced violence and harassment at work, whether in its physical, psychological or sexual form. In particular, **Latin America and the Caribbean shows the highest regional prevalence, with an average of 34.3%, and a higher propensity of women who suffer violence and harassment at work than men (39% compared to 31%)**.

On the other hand, analysis by type of violence reveals that men are more likely to have suffered repeated incidents of physical violence and harassment at work, while women are more likely to have suffered psychological violence. **Psychological violence is one of the most common forms of GBV in the region and one of the most difficult to measure and understand**, manifesting itself, for example, through insults, discrediting, humiliation, manipulation, isolation and threats (Roza and Martin, 2021).

The ILO study also identifies that **sexual violence and harassment has a more unequal impact on women throughout their working lives**: 8.2% compared to 5.0% in the case of men worldwide. The LAC region has a higher prevalence of this type of violence in both genders: 17.7% women and 7.2% men.

In terms of case reporting, only half of the victims of workplace violence have recounted their experiences, generally after having experienced multiple forms of violence. **Workplace violence and harassment is a recurrent and persistent phenomenon in the region:** more than three out of five victims of workplace violence and harassment report having experienced it several times.

Other sources of information confirm the prevalence of workplace violence in the region. In Ecuador, 20.1% of women aged 15 years or older experienced some type of lifetime violence in the workplace, of which 17.2% suffered psychological violence, 6.8% sexual violence and 1.2% physical violence (INEC, 2019). In Mexico, 11.2% of women aged 15 years or older who have ever worked were victims of sexual violence in their lifetime: 10.6% suffered emotional violence and 1.6% physical violence (INEGI, 2016). In Uruguay, 17.9% of women experienced situations of GBV in the workplace (INE, 2020). In Bolivia, a study of large companies found that 47% of female workers suffered psychological violence and almost 36% experienced some incident of sexual harassment at work (GIZ, 2022).

Preventing workplace violence and harassment is a fundamental responsibility of companies to ensure safe working environments. Failure to fulfill this responsibility can have negative consequences not only for victims, affecting their performance, career progression and overall well-being, but also for organizations. Reports of workplace violence and harassment can negatively affect a company's reputation and performance.

According to research conducted in the United States, **the reputation of organizations that face sexual harassment allegations is much more affected than that of organizations which have been reported for other, different transgressions, such as financial misconduct**. The general perception is that a sexual harassment complaint is indicative of a cultural problem in the organization, rather than a particular individual person or group (Harvard Business Review, 2018).

In terms of addressing domestic violence in the workplace, different studies have evaluated the economic costs associated with gender-based violence. In Ecuador, it is estimated that companies suffer an average loss of 10.5 working days per year for each female worker who is a victim of gender-based violence (GIZ, 2019). In Peru, violence against women generates an annual loss of more than 6.7 billion dollars, equivalent to 3.7% of GDP (GIZ, 2014). In the US, women who have suffered violence in the domestic environment work on average 10% fewer working days per year (IWPR, 2017).

BOX 10
DEFINITIONS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

GBV is an umbrella term used to refer broadly to different manifestations of violence. GBV is a social problem that encompasses several types of potentially co-occurring expressions. Research and practice often distinguish different types of GBV according to the form in which they are exercised and the context in which they occur (Roza and Martin, 2021).

In terms of the form exercised, it is generally classified as **physical**, which includes all "acts that may physically harm the victim" (WHO, 2021); **sexual**, which refers to "being physically forced to have sex and other forms of sexual coercion such as sexual harassment" (WHO, 2021); **emotional**, which refers to "insults, constant humiliation, threats and intimidation (e.g., destruction of things)" (WHO, 2012); and controlling, which refers to actions that include "isolating a person from family and friends, monitoring his or her movements, and restricting access to financial resources, employment, education or health care" (WHO, 2012). In terms of the context in which it occurs, a distinction is generally made between **domestic violence**, which includes both intimate partner violence and family violence (Palermo, Bleck, & Peterman, 2014); **online gender-based violence**, which includes "any act of gender-based violence that is committed, assisted or aggravated in part or in whole through information and communication technologies, such as cell phones and smartphones, the internet, social networking platforms or email" (Morales, 2020); **workplace violence**; and **violence in public settings**, such as on the streets (Roza and Martin, 2021).

Microaggressions in the workplace

Microaggressions are a form of psychological violence rooted in everyday prejudices, often present in work settings, with a significant and lasting impact on the people who suffer them. These manifestations include comments and actions, often subtle but equally damaging, that belittle or dismiss people based on their gender, sexual orientation or other aspects of identity. This behavior denotes a lack of respect, generating stress and discomfort and negative consequences on both the health and employment opportunities of those who experience them. Research indicates that women face a greater number of microaggressions in the workplace than men, and for groups with intersectional identities, these situations tend to be more frequent.

Source: own elaboration.

Potential actions

Organizations and leaders committed to workplaces free of violence and harassment

The following are some of the measures that can guide companies in preventing and addressing violence and harassment in the workplace. Different axes are suggested for a comprehensive approach that companies can consider and adapt to their particular contexts and needs.

A Commitment

- **Implement a zero-tolerance policy on GBV that covers all levels of the organization, endorsed by the highest authority in the company and supported by the entire management team.** It is key that this policy extends throughout the value chain, promoting transparency among organizations and establishing effective prevention and response systems.

- **Define a comprehensive approach strategy** that includes programs to prevent GBV, action protocols, clarity on roles and responsibilities of employees, leaders and the company, reliable and confidential reporting channels, investigation procedures and protection mechanisms.

B Prevention

- **Establish a committee or team with senior staff** and organizational leaders to define a strategy to prevent and address GBV.

- **Conduct a baseline study,** considering, for example, a survey directed to all employees, inquiring about knowledge of GBV, confidence in reporting channels, experiences of violence lived or witnessed in the company, etc.

- **Rely on external specialists** to map and monitor internal and external vulnerabilities. Identify work practices and groups of workers who are most at risk, such as interns, contractors, employees working in specific locations outside the office or in remote areas, etc.

- **Implement risk prevention and mitigation measures** to increase workplace safety, mainly in companies with field operations. Adapt aspects of infrastructure such as gender-differentiated restrooms, locker rooms and dormitories, safe transportation for all employees, security equipment such as monitoring cameras and alarm systems, security guards to monitor areas of greatest vulnerability, security in common areas and adequate lighting (USAID, 2022).

- **Integrate GBV prevention in risk management systems and processes and in the company's health and safety committees,** ensuring equal participation of women in these spaces. Ensure that psychological violence is included in risk assessments.

- **Offer periodic trainings to sensitize all employees** on the importance of recognizing GBV in all its forms, and specific training for leaders on prevention and case management.

- **Coordinate efforts with other companies in the sector to generate joint diagnoses,** that will allow for a more complete and detailed vision of the problems in the specific industry.

- **Work collaboratively with the sector's unions and trade associations to incorporate specific clauses** in collective bargaining agreements or internal regulations on the prevention and eradication of violence in the workplace.

C Protection

- **Ensure reporting channels that safeguard confidentiality and anonymity,** and establish special mechanisms for high-profile cases. Define different channels for queries and complaints, including: hotlines, e-mail, text message and/or online systems.

- **Establish an action protocol.** Provide confidential and anonymous support through a committee of specialists, internal or external, and an assistance program for affected persons. Ensure anonymity and protection against retaliation and guarantee that cases are recorded, acted upon and monitored, ensuring efficient resolution times.

- **Train and support leaders** to recognize, respond to and refer GBV cases that may arise in their teams.

- **Establish disciplinary actions with clear, documented and known processes,** which include measures proportional to the seriousness of the case and are implemented consistently, for greater procedural confidence.

- **In serious situations, it may be necessary to inform the authorities, subject to the consent of the person concerned,** in order to take appropriate legal action, both criminal and civil. It is recommended to provide adequate psychosocial support during this process and to collaborate with civil society organizations to connect women to specialized services.

D Transparency, registration and monitoring

- **Make GBV policies transparent** and inform employees and stakeholders of any actions taken to reduce GBV.

- **Record the number of cases of violence and harassment disaggregated by gender** and track their progress.

- **Evaluate the effectiveness of implemented policies and programs** through regular employee surveys. Share key findings with employees and stakeholders. Ensure feedback mechanisms for employees to share their ideas.

- **Consider developing monitoring and evaluation processes together with universities and organizations specialized in GBV.**

E Collaboration

- In certain male-dominated industries and with work in field operations, it may be necessary to **raise standards within the value chain** to build a stronger ecosystem for preventing and addressing GBV. Some workplaces are home to employees and their families, so the company's responsibility extends to homes, suppliers and the community.

- **Identify stakeholders with whom to work in partnership,** such as medical service providers, police, transportation, local governments, specialized NGOs, etc. Develop policies and programs to prevent and address GBV with relevant stakeholders.
- **Create sectoral networks to agree on joint principles and actions across the supply chain** and facilitate peer-to-peer learning. In addition, collective agreements can be made between multiple employers.
- **Train suppliers and publicize anti-GBV policies.** Purchasing power can be used to demand changes in behaviors, practices and/or the development of specific policies.
- **Work with investors to include GBV as a risk criterion in their environmental and social performance standards.**

F Domestic violence[1]

Domestic violence is a problem that also affects the workplace, as it impedes women's full participation in employment and their professional advancement, with profound physical, economic and psychological repercussions for those affected.

To support women and other groups in situations of domestic violence, companies have begun to broaden their commitment to addressing domestic violence in the workplace, as recommended by ILO Convention 190 (see Box 11). As specific measures, companies can implement an action protocol and work proactively to identify warning signs at early stages of risk. In this regard, the Recognize, Respond and Refer framework can be a useful approach for leaders and organizations (Vodafone Foundation, 2020).

- **Recognize signs of domestic violence.** Watch for changes in individual behaviors, decreased work attendance and performance and physical changes, such as injuries, visible bruises, etc.
- **Respond with appropriate instruments.** Ensure that policies, protocols and/or procedures provide appropriate support to victims, such as: paid leave, confidentiality, leave days, financial support, legal advice and psychological support.
- **Referrals to specialized services.** Facilitate the orientation of employees to confidential in-house services through communication strategies such as general e-mails, posters in common areas, rest areas, restrooms, etc. In addition, provide information about specialized domestic violence sites, such as crisis centers and safe shelters.

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1. Domestic violence refers to any behavior within an intimate or family relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviors (UN).

BOX 11
INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS ON GBV

In 1992, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) declared, through Recommendation No. 19, that violence against women is a form of discrimination directed against women because of their gender and that it affects them disproportionately. In 2017, in Recommendation No. 35, the CEDAW Committee recognized that the prohibition of gender-based violence against women has evolved into a principle of customary international law.

In 2019, the ILO adopted Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206 to combat violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and sexual harassment, at work. These standards are binding instruments that establish a clear framework and global mandate to prevent and address violence and harassment. They recognize the right of everyone to a workplace free from violence and harassment and define that these situations can occur in an isolated or repetitive manner, impacting mostly women and diverse groups. Their scope is broad, applying to all workers, public and private sector, formal and informal employment, and urban and rural areas.

Convention 190 has been adopted by 11 countries in LAC: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, Peru and Uruguay. In the case of Chile, although the Convention has been ratified, it has not yet entered into force. With respect to employer organizations, the Convention calls for the adoption of tools to prevent and address violence and harassment in the workplace. It emphasizes the importance of carrying out diagnoses to determine where the company stands. It promotes employee training and the institutionalization of policies and protocols against violence and harassment and stresses the need to recognize and address the impact of domestic violence in the workplace.

Background in LAC

In 1994, the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS) approved the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, also known as the Convention of Belém do Pará. Recognizing the right of every woman to a life free of violence, in both the public and private spheres, the Convention of Belém do Pará is the first instrument of the Inter-American system to address violence against women. Although the Convention uses the term "violence against women," social and cultural advances have made it possible to broaden the concept and understand it as GBV, also encompassing diverse groups.

Source: own elaboration.

Tools and resources

GUIDES AND GUIDANCE DOCUMENTS	
Organizational survey for sexual harassment - ELSA	• Digital diagnostic and intervention tool to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. Seeks to promote a culture of prevention and learning that contributes to consolidate workplaces free of sexual harassment. **Entity:** IDB / **+ Explore**
Violence and harassment in the workplace. A practical guide for companies	• A guide with practical advice for companies and leaders to develop policies and systems to manage issues related to workplace violence and harassment. **Entity:** ILO / **+ Explore** (*Avalaible in Spanish*).
How Can Business Tackle Gender Based Violence in the World of Work: A Toolkit for Action	• Toolkit with five-step action framework to help companies address gender-based violence in the workplace. Includes suggestions, diagnostic tool and case studies. **Entity:** UN Women / **+ Explore**
Gender-Based Violence and Workplace Harassment Policy Model	• Policy model and template to address gender-based violence and harassment in WEP-Signatory Companies. It helps identify and assess risks associated with these situations in the workplace and develop specific policies. **Entity:** UN Women / **+ Explore**
Domestic Violence Policy Template	• Model policy and procedural template for addressing domestic violence in WEP signatory companies. Provides guidance for detecting signs of domestic violence. **Entity:** UN Women / **+ Explore**
Small steps, big differences	• This report analyzes the best practices of the companies that make up the FTSE 100, the benchmark stock market index of the London Stock Exchange comprising the 100 companies with the largest market capitalization in the United Kingdom. **Entity:** UN Women, Heforshe, 2024 / **+ Explore**
Toolkit on domestic violence and abuse at work: Recognise, respond and refer	• Toolkit for addressing domestic violence in the workplace, through the Recognize, Respond and Refer framework. **Entity:** Vodafone Foundation / **+ Explore**
PreViKit: Business toolbox to prevent violence against women	• PreViKit is a toolkit to address violence against women. It enables capacity building and facilitates strategies, measures and actions at the corporate level. **Entity:** German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ) and Ministry of Justice and Institutional Transparency of Bolivia / **+ Explore** (*Avalaible in Spanish*).
Guidelines for addressing GBV in the world of work	• How companies can address gender-based violence in the world of work: a guide for action (2019)) / **+ Explore** • Addressing gender-based violence and harassment: Emerging good practices for the private sector (2020) / **+ Explore** **Entity:** IFC

ALLIANCES AND COMMUNITIES	
Spotlight Initiative	The Spotlight Initiative is a joint campaign of the European Union and the United Nations aimed at eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls. **Entity:** European Union and UN Women / **+** Explore
White Ribbon Campaign (White Ribbon)	Initiated in Canada in 1991, this campaign is one of the largest movements against gender-based violence led by men, focused on their active commitment to eradicating it. **Entity:** White Ribbon Campaign / **+** Explore
Sexual Violence Research Initiative	Global research network on violence against women and girls, bringing together researchers, practitioners, donors, activists and policy makers. **Entity:** Sexual Violence Research Initiative / **+** Explore

Source: own elaboration.

Case studies

Leading global and regional business practices

GLOBAL

Tata Steel

Advancing gender parity in non-traditional industries through inclusive and safe workplaces..

- **Industry:** Mining and Manufacturing.
- **Country:** Global, based in India.

Focusing on improving gender diversity in key mining and manufacturing roles, the organization set out to make both the physical environment and equipment more inclusive. Tata Steel increased safety protocols at the mines by including camera monitoring, female security guards and GPS-enabled transportation for women on their shifts. It also built childcare facilities, gender-neutral restrooms, sanitary napkin vending machines and other inclusive measures in certain offices.

In terms of culture, it designed awareness-raising actions for its 35,000-strong workforce to address biases that negatively affect women and appointed compliance officers to create a direct channel for queries regarding non-inclusive behavior. The company achieved an 18% increase in its overall diversity between 2020 and 2022, an 88% increase in the hiring of women in management positions, and 95% growth among women applying for the engineering scholarship program.

The full case study for this company is available in the World Economic Forum's DEI Lighthouse 2023 report.

REGIONAL

Gildan

Monitoring and supervision of labor practices to ensure respect for human rights and the prevention of violence, through social compliance programs and confidential communication mechanisms.

- **Industry:** Textile and Apparel Industry.
- **Country:** Honduras.
- Member company of the IPG Leadership Group in Honduras.

The *Social Compliance Program* arose from the need to supervise and monitor the company's labor practices, ensuring respect for human rights and compliance with codes of conduct and local and international laws by plants, contractors and external suppliers. In addition, the *Communication Mechanisms Program* provides confidential channels for both internal and external communication, in line with the principles of

the company's Code of Conduct. These initiatives are part of the company's global strategy in relation to environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues.

See the complete case study of this company in Annex 5.1.

Bagó Laboratories

Addressing domestic violence in the workplace, with monitoring programs and voluntary employee training for prevention and support.

- **Industry:** Pharmaceutical Industry.
- **Country:** Chile.
- IPG member company in Chile.

Since 2009, Laboratorio Bagó has implemented a labor protocol to address domestic violence, motivated by a case of femicide of a female employee. This event aroused the concern of the company's leaders, who believe in the role that the workplace can play in preventing and addressing this scourge. Bagó has trained its personnel in preventive measures and offers support and assistance services to people in situations of domestic violence. It also provides leave, financial support and geographical relocation to safeguard the physical and psychological integrity of victims. The company has initiated a training program for internal volunteers, who will be ***Domestic Violence (DV) Monitors***, with the objective of leading in the prevention of this type of violence, providing information, answering questions and referring cases to specialized personnel in People Management as needed. Under this program, 8 women and 4 men have been trained as DV monitors, detecting 4 cases of domestic violence among employees.

See the complete case study of this company in Annex 5.1.

Source: Prepared by the authors, based on the DEI Lighthouse 2023 report of the World Economic Forum and information provided by the companies.