

**41<sup>st</sup> session of the Human Rights Council**  
**Annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women**  
**Panel 1: Violence against women in the world of work**

*Concept note (as of 28 May 2019)*

<b>Date and venue:</b>	<b>27 June 2019, 10 a.m. - noon, Room XX, Palais des Nations, Geneva</b> (will be broadcast live and archived on <a href="http://webtv.un.org">http://webtv.un.org</a> )
<b>Objectives:</b>	The panel discussion will provide an opportunity to address violence against women in the world of work. It will look into the existing trends and patterns, identify the challenges faced by women workers in seeking redress, and consider ways to address these at legal, policy and practical levels. The panel will pay particular attention to sectors where women workers are more at risk and analyze the role of various stakeholders, including trade unions and corporations at national and global levels.
<b>Chair:</b>	<b>H.E. Mr. Coly Seck</b> , President of the Human Rights Council
<b>Opening statements:</b>	<b>Ms. Michelle Bachelet</b> , United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights <b>H.E. Ms. Katrin Jakobsdóttir</b> , Prime Minister of Iceland
<b>Moderator:</b>	<b>Mr. Surya Deva</b> , Chair of the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises
<b>Panellists:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Ms. Maria-Luz Vega</b>, Coordinator of the Future of Work Initiative at the International Labour Organization</li><li>• <b>Ms. Dubravka Šimonović</b>, Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences</li><li>• <b>Ms. Novelita Valdez Palisoc</b>, Regional representative for Asia in the International Domestic Workers Federation and National President of United Domestic Workers of the Philippines</li></ul>
<b>Outcome:</b>	A summary report on the discussion will be prepared by OHCHR.
<b>Mandate:</b>	In its resolution 6/30, the Human Rights Council reaffirmed the principle of gender equality and the need for the full implementation of the human rights of women and decided to hold an annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women. The first panel of the 2019 annual discussion will address violence against women in the world of work.
<b>Format:</b>	<p>The total duration of the annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women will be four hours, divided into two panels of two hours each.</p> <p>At this panel, the opening statements and initial presentations by the panellists, the latter guided by the moderator, will be followed by an interactive discussion divided into two slots and chaired by the President of the Human Rights Council. A maximum of one hour will be set aside for the podium, including the opening statements, moderator's introduction, panellists' presentations, responses to questions and concluding remarks. The remaining hour will be reserved for interventions from the floor, divided into two slots, for States and observers (2x12), national human rights institutions (2x1) and non-governmental organizations (2x2).</p> <p>The list of speakers for the discussion will be established at the beginning of the panel and, as per practice, statements by high-level dignitaries and groups of States will be moved to the beginning of the list. Each speaker will have two minutes to raise issues and to ask questions. Interpretation will be provided in the six United Nations official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish).</p>
<b>Background:</b>	"Violence in the world of work" refers to work-related physical and psychological violence, including mobbing and bullying. It also includes sexual violence and harassment, as well as harassment based on maternity or medical conditions or on family responsibilities of female

workers. It occurs in all jobs, occupations and sectors across the world and takes various forms - from verbal and physical abuse to sexual assault and even murder.

Though violence affects all workers, women are more exposed to it due to unequal status and power relations and due to the fact that women are concentrated in the informal sector and enjoy restrictive labour and social protection. Regardless of their job, sector or employment status, women often experience violence from their co-workers, employers and even customers. Some sectors can be more at risk than others can, notably the informal sector, and sectors such as restauration, entertainment and service workers. Manufacturing and agriculture are also sectors prone to gender-based violence. A joint handbook by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UN-Women reported about very high rates of harassment, including unwanted sexual touching (83 per cent) and coerced (sex 38 per cent) in the beer industry against women in Cambodia.<sup>1</sup> Another study indicated that among 400 workers in tea growing and processing in Kenya, more than 90 per cent had experienced or observed sexual abuse at their workplace. Also working in the informal economy, and in contact with the public, in intimate spaces and private homes and in conflict and disaster zones can further expose women to violence. A report entitled “Women in the Workplace 2018” revealed that 35 per cent of women in the corporate America face sexual harassment.<sup>2</sup> For many this experience is common, among them, 55 per cent at least are women in senior leadership, 45 per cent are women in technical field and 30 are women of colour.

Violence against women in the work place is often the result of intersecting circumstances and risk factors. Discrimination based on factors such as race, social origin, migration status, disability, maternity, family responsibilities, contractual status, sexual orientation and gender identity, among others, may expose women to increased risks of violence. Violence is most often experienced either in the physical workplace or while attending work-related events, travelling to and from work, being in employer-provided accommodation or using technologies such as mobile phones, computers, and email or social media. Sometimes, violence faced in private life may spill over into workplaces, particularly in case of domestic violence.

An unsafe working environment impinges on various human rights of women workers. These include, but are not limited to, equal rights to economic resources, as well as the right to physical integrity and the right to public participation. It can also have devastating effects on women’s safety, health and well-being, with substantial economic costs for employers and the society at large.

Despite its prevalence, women victims of violence in the workplace are too often afraid to speak out, as they do not necessarily receive appropriate protection and remedies when they complain. For example, even when survivors obtain legal remedy, the negative social impacts they face may exceed the benefit of remedy they receive. They may lose their jobs, be stigmatized, or be socially ostracized both at the public and private domains.

General comment No. 23 (2016) of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) indicates that ensuring a violence-free environment is a prerequisite for the respect of the right to just and favourable conditions of work as defined under article 7 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. In addition, in its general recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) states that States should encourage, through the use of incentives, corporate responsibility and mechanisms, the engagement of the private sector, including businesses and transnational corporations. It also underlines that protocols and procedures addressing violence against women in the workplace should be adopted to ensure effective and accessible internal complaints procedures for the victims and survivors.

---

<sup>1</sup> UN-Women and ILO, [Handbook on violence and harassment against women in the world of work \(2019\)](#).

<sup>2</sup> [LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company, Women in the Workplace 2018](#).

Other international conventions such as the ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, ILO Maternity Protection Convention and ILO Domestic Workers Convention provide further guidance for the prevention and protection against violence in the workplace. Moreover, the ILO is finalizing an international convention on ending violence and harassment in the world of work. The final discussion and the possible adoption of the convention are scheduled in June 2019.

**Background documents:**

- [Human Rights Council resolution 6/30 \(2007\) on integrating the human rights of women throughout the United Nations system](#)
- [CEDAW general recommendation No. 35 \(2017\) on gender-based violence against women](#)
- [CESCR general comment No. 23 \(2016\) on the right to just and favorable conditions of work](#)
- [Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#)
- [ILO Domestic Workers Convention No. 189 \(2011\)](#)
- [ILO Discrimination \(Employment and Occupation\) Convention No. 111 \(1958\)](#)
- [ILO Maternity Protection Convention No. 183 \(2000\) and ILO Maternity Protection Recommendation No. 191 \(2000\)](#)