



International  
Labour  
Organization



- ▶ **How to promote disability inclusion in programmes to prevent, address and eliminate violence and harassment in the world of work**

# 1

This information note promotes the inclusion of persons with disabilities in programmes to prevent, address and eliminate violence and harassment in the world of work.

# 2

It is aimed at everyone in the world of work and, in particular, at government officials, members of trade unions and representatives of workers' organizations, and enterprises and their representative organizations.

# 3

It is relevant in applying the ILO's Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) and Violence and Harassment Recommendation, 2019 (No. 206).

**This note will help to promote disability inclusion in programmes against violence and harassment in the world of work by:**

- ▶ Providing essential reasons on the need to include persons with disabilities;
- ▶ Identifying key areas of action that can benefit from disability inclusion;
- ▶ Showcasing emerging good practices of disability inclusion;
- ▶ Offering a set of practical recommendations for disability inclusion;



# A. INCLUSION IS THE SOLUTION

People can be targeted for violence and harassment for many reasons, including because of perceived differences related to how they look or think or act, including issues related to their disabilities. Violence and harassment affects a person's psychological, physical and sexual health. It is unacceptable, it is a threat to equal opportunities, and it is incompatible with decent work.



Inclusion is an important factor in preventing, addressing and eliminating violence and harassment against persons with disabilities in the world of work. This means valuing differences and accepting everyone for who they are and what they can bring to work. It is about listening to all people at work and creating responses that make work better for everyone. Inclusion is also a key way to treat everyone with dignity and to respect their rights.

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**The International Labour Organization (ILO) is the United Nations agency that brings together governments, employers and workers to promote decent work for all.**

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A disability-inclusive approach to preventing, addressing and eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work is one that fully engages persons with disabilities – when drafting national legislation, writing workplace policies, and designing communication and training material.

By listening to proposals from persons with disabilities, by understanding their needs, and by designing policies with them, responses to violence and harassment at work will be more effective for everyone in the world of work.

# B.

## REASONS TO INCLUDE PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

We need to include persons with disabilities when designing responses to violence and harassment in the world of work, because:



### 1. It's their right.

- ▶ The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) provides that persons with disabilities have the right to be free from exploitation, violence and abuse.<sup>1</sup> They also have a right to be consulted – including on decision-making processes, legislation and policies that impact on them.
- ▶ The ILO's Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) and its accompanying Recommendation (No. 206) recognize that everyone has the right to a world of work free from violence and harassment (Art. 4(1)). This includes persons with disabilities.

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**The ILO sets international labour standards by adopting Conventions (which are binding on ratifying States) and Recommendations (that provide non-binding guidelines).**

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<sup>1</sup> The “Freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse” is expressed in Article 16 of the UNCRPD. Also relevant to this discussion is the right to “Equality and non-discrimination”, expressed in Article 5. These are rights of all persons, with or without disabilities.

## 2. Persons with disabilities are often disproportionately impacted by violence and harassment in the world of work and can be targeted because of their disabilities.

- ▶ Persons with disabilities can experience all forms of violence and harassment (affecting their psychological, physical and sexual health).
- ▶ Some forms of violence and harassment are directed particularly at persons with disabilities, and they can be affected in unique ways.



### For example:

- ▶ Name-calling and “jokes” related to their disabilities;
- ▶ Stealing their assistive devices, such as wheelchairs or crutches;
- ▶ Constant micromanagement, based on negative stereotypes about their productivity and competence;
- ▶ Harassment to punish requests for reasonable accommodations;
- ▶ Gender-based violence and harassment directed at both women and men with disabilities;<sup>2</sup>

- ▶ Research indicates that persons with disabilities are more frequently affected by violence and harassment than persons without disabilities in the world of work.

**NOTE:** To complement the information provided in this note, the ILO brief [Violence and harassment against persons with disabilities in the world of work](#) details how violence and harassment may affect persons with disabilities in unique and disproportionate ways.

<sup>2</sup> This is due to the intersection of stereotypes and power relations related to gender and disability. While there is more data available on gender-based violence and harassment against women with disabilities, it is also experienced by men with disabilities. See: International Network of Women with Disabilities. 2010. “Document on Violence against Women with Disabilities”; ADD International. [Without a date]. “Disability and Gender-Based Violence: ADD International’s Approach – A Learning Paper”.



### 3. Persons with disabilities are a numerous, diverse group;

- ▶ The group “persons with disabilities” includes over one billion people, many of them workers, with a diversity of experiences and backgrounds, including persons with physical, sensory, psychosocial and intellectual impairments. Moreover, persons with disabilities are diverse in many ways unrelated to their disabilities – including in terms of ethnicity, race, colour, sex, gender, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, HIV status, age, family responsibilities...etc.
- ▶ That means that persons with disabilities have valuable lived experiences, knowledge and insights - across all regions, countries and sectors - and can come up with solutions that work for them, as well as for persons without disabilities.

### 4. Persons with disabilities need accessible tools and services;

- ▶ According to Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206, guidance, resources, education and training or other tools should be made in formats that are accessible to all, and there should be easy access to support measures (legal, social, medical and administrative).
- ▶ Since some forms of violence and harassment are directed at persons because of their disabilities, some prevention and response measures will have to be tailored to their specific situation.



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The ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) is the first international instrument to define and prohibit violence and harassment in the world of work. It is supplemented by the Violence and Harassment Recommendation, 2019 (No. 206).  
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# C. KEY AREAS FOR ACTION

Preventing, addressing and eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work should include persons with disabilities from start to finish. That is, disability should be a central part of all measures and actions taken, not an add-on.

**By using ILO Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206 as a guide, we can identify several key areas for action where persons with disabilities should be included from the beginning:**



The section below identifies several emerging good practices in all these areas, many of which overlap.

\* Consultation is an essential component of any work affecting persons with disabilities. Related to prevention and response to violence and harassment, consultation can cover a wide range of issues (e.g., workplace policies and Occupational Safety and Health measures).

# D. EMERGING GOOD PRACTICES

Workers' organizations, employers' organizations and Governments are already making disability inclusion a reality in their responses to violence and harassment in the world of work. These emerging good practices may help you design your own disability-inclusive responses.



**1. Consultation:** Consultation with persons with disabilities is a key part of the disability rights movement, exemplified by the slogan, "Nothing about us without us".



"Staff Code of Conduct" (The Ethiopian Center for Disability and Development (ECDD))

The ECDD, which serves as the secretariat for the Ethiopian Business and Disability Network, developed a Staff Code of Conduct. This was done in consultation with ECDD staff, including persons with disabilities. The code, which includes a sexual/personal harassment policy, provides protection for all workers and also specifies harassment on the ground of disability.



"Employment Issues Paper" (Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, Government of Australia)

In 2020, the Royal Commission put together a paper to understand employment and income issues related to persons with disabilities. To inform this paper, it posed questions to persons with disabilities and to organizations of persons with disabilities, including on how they experience violence and harassment in employment settings and what factors help them find and keep jobs in violence-free contexts. The questions come in a variety of formats, including easy-to-read.





**2. Training and Guidance:** Training and guidance materials are needed to understand violence and harassment, and to understand what roles world of work actors can play to prevent, address and eliminate it.



“Guide for the Prevention, Attention to, and Eradication of Labour Harassment in the Public Sector” (Government of El Salvador)

Within its description of “discriminatory harassment”, the document lists conditions for which some people may be “considered different from the rest of the group”, including for reasons of disability. Explicitly stating that disability is included as a ground for harassment makes the issue visible.



“Tackling Third Party Abuse and Harassment: A Guide for Trade Union Reps” (TUC, UK)

Within this guide, TUC notes that certain protected characteristics, including disability, “can be a factor in harassment”. As such, TUC recommends that “Unions should always be aware of these factors, both when negotiating robust workplace policies that take account of diversity and equality, and when supporting individual members with cases of abuse and harassment.” That is, disability issues can be treated in mainstream policies, and the needs of persons with disabilities can be understood within a wider context.

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**ILO Convention No. 190 “recogniz[es] the importance of a work culture based on mutual respect and dignity of the human being to prevent violence and harassment” and “recogniz[es] the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment” (Preamble).**

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### **3. Communication/Outreach:** Disseminating information about violence and harassment can help a range of actors in the world of work take action.



“Policy recommendations in response to COVID-19” (The Specialised Training & Disability Resource Centre of The Employers’ Federation of Ceylon (EFC))

The Specialised Training & Disability Resource Centre of the EFC developed policy recommendations in response to COVID-19. The recommendations urge government and relevant stakeholders to address the needs of persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka, to include them in COVID-19 response plans and strategies, and to ensure reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities working in offices as well as working at home. The recommendations highlight the need for measures to ensure accessible reporting mechanisms and victim assistance services for women and girls with disabilities facing domestic violence and harassment.



Wales TUC disability and “hidden” impairments campaign (Wales TUC Cymru)

As part of its campaign for disability rights, the Wales TUC published findings of their survey on attitudes towards, and experiences of, disability in the workplace. The survey included responses from workers with so-called “invisible” impairments, many of whom reported experiences of harassment. The campaign included recommendations for employers and an action plan for trade unions in Wales, as well as proposals for a national awareness-raising campaign.



**The ILO has declared it must direct its efforts to “ensuring equal opportunities and treatment in the world of work for persons with disabilities” (ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, II(A)(viii)).**





#### 4. Services, Remedies and Support: World of work actors can take a range of actions that are practical and that meet the needs of persons with disabilities where they work.



“Protocol of action against cases of workplace violence, harassment and sexual harassment, aimed at companies in the Mexican Republic” (Government of Mexico)

This protocol mentions the need for all activities it refers to (such as prevention, training and outreach on violence and harassment) to be accessible for persons with disabilities. It gives the example of “guaranteeing the accompaniment and advice for persons with a hearing or visual disability, amongst others.” This twin-track approach is essential: recognizing that persons with disabilities have the same rights as everyone else; and acknowledging that, to access those rights, persons with disabilities may need specialized services.



“Disability and alternative conflict resolution systems” (CERMI, Spain)

The Spanish Committee of Representatives of Persons with Disabilities (CERMI) is a disability platform that advocates for the rights of people with disabilities. In 2013, CERMI published a study that suggests persons with disabilities are unlikely to make complaints to official investigation systems, such as labour inspectorates. The study proposes labour mediation may be a more easily-accessible avenue to promote the rights of workers with disabilities.<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> While mediation is an important mechanism to address the needs of persons with disabilities, it may not provide as high a standard of protection as labour inspection, such as orders to stop work.



**5. Research/Knowledge base:** Collecting information about violence and harassment and how it impacts on persons with disabilities is key to informing public policy and workplace action.



“Harassment and sexual violence in the workplace - Public consultation What we heard”  
(Employment and Social Development Canada, Government of Canada)

The Government of Canada carried out a wide-ranging survey to ensure federal workplaces were free from harassment and sexual violence. Data was disaggregated by disability, along with other characteristics, with 11 per cent of respondents identifying as persons with disabilities. The report concludes that “People with disabilities and members of a visible minority group were more likely to experience harassment than other groups.”



Helpline Number 144 (National Institute for Women (INAM), Government of Argentina)

INAM implemented a national helpline for situations of gender-based violence. INAM collected data from these calls, breaking them down into categories of violence, and disaggregated the callers’ characteristics, including by disability status. Using this data from 2016, the National Observatory on Violence against Women reported that 34.4 per cent of women callers with disabilities in a situation of violence had experienced economic violence.

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**The ILO promotes social justice at work. A central tool is social dialogue, which refers to negotiation, consultation and exchange of information between or among its tripartite partners. The main goal of social dialogue is to promote consensus-building and democratic involvement among employer and worker representatives in the world of work.**

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# E. PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Design responses based on tripartite dialogue and consult with persons with disabilities, and their organizations, to prevent, address and eliminate violence and harassment in the world of work – whether they are general or disability-specific.

2

Make persons with disabilities visible within policies and responses to violence and harassment in the world of work by explicitly mentioning them, addressing their particular experiences of violence and harassment and coming up with solutions that address their needs.

3

Consider whether existing mechanisms to address violence and harassment in the world of work are accessible/appropriate for persons with disabilities; if they are not, create mechanisms endorsed by Labour institutions that fit everyone's needs.

4

Carry out research and collect data on the impact of violence and harassment in your work environment and create inclusive responses, with the involvement of persons with disabilities, based on the results.

5

Ensure that all communication and training materials on violence and harassment in the world of work are developed with persons with disabilities and accessible for them.

6

Ensure that responses in the world of work address all forms of violence and harassment against persons with disabilities, including gender-based violence and harassment, and that they recognize the effects of domestic violence.

*Include persons with disabilities when preventing, addressing and eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work.*

**It's the right thing to do, and it makes work better for everyone.**



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**For further information:** International Labour Organization  
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