

# Addressing Gender-Based Violence and Harassment (GBVH) in the Private Sector



## What is GBVH?

GBVH is an umbrella term that covers a range of behaviours, including sexual, physical, psychological and economic abuse. What sets it apart from other types of violence and harassment is that it is either directed at - or disproportionately affects - people of a particular sex or gender, including gender-nonconforming individuals. GBVH is rooted in gender inequality and unequal power relations, which means that women and girls are especially subject to violence and harassment, while unequal gender relations can prevent them from reporting it.

GBVH is widespread: it happens in every country and will affect all organisations at some time. It affects both men and women but is most often perpetrated by men against women and girls, with more than one in three women having experienced some form of physical or sexual violence during their lifetime. This figure excludes sexual harassment, which means the proportion of women experiencing GBVH overall is likely to be far higher.

GBVH is particularly relevant to the private sector when it takes place:

- among a company's workers or in its supply chain;
- between workers and community members or service users;
- among users of a company's services or infrastructure;

- by local authorities against workers, community members or service users;
- within workers' families and intimate relationships.

## Why is addressing GBVH good for business?

Knowing the compelling business case, private sector companies and investors are increasingly recognising that GBVH is a serious issue with far-reaching consequences for workplaces, services and communities.

GBVH can have a range of negative impacts on the health and wellbeing of individuals and their families. Even forms of GBVH that may initially seem less severe can have a damaging and lasting effect on people's physical, mental and/or sexual and reproductive health, as well as their financial wellbeing.

The impacts of GBVH on individuals can also adversely affect businesses, including:

- loss of confidence among investors and partners, and damaged relationships with local communities and service users;
- reduced productivity through increased absenteeism and presenteeism and difficulty securing workers for shifts;
- increased staff turnover and difficulty recruiting and promoting staff;
- unexpected costs through litigation and reduced health and safety.



**60%**

OF GARMENT FACTORY WORKERS IN **INDIA AND BANGLADESH** HAVE EXPERIENCED HARASSMENT AT WORK



**84%**

OF WOMEN IN **MEXICO CITY** HAVE EXPERIENCED SEXUAL HARASSMENT ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT



**24%**

OF 11-14 YEAR OLD GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES IN **UGANDA** HAVE EXPERIENCED SEXUAL VIOLENCE AT SCHOOL



**64%**

OF LGBTQI+ PEOPLE IN **EASTERN EUROPE** FEEL THEY NEED TO HIDE THEIR SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR GENDER IDENTITY TO PROTECT THEMSELVES AT WORK



## What are the risk factors?

GBVH risks will be present in every country and in all organisations, however, a range of factors can exacerbate them. By regularly screening and assessing risks, companies and investors will be better placed to target resources at those investments and areas of operation where GBVH is most likely. In terms of country context, GBVH risks tend to be higher where:

- gender inequality is high and gender stereotypes are strong and widespread;
- intimate partner violence is prevalent;
- national legislation on GBVH is weak;
- poverty and discrimination are high, increasing people's vulnerability to sexual exploitation;
- corruption among local authorities is widespread;
- rule of law is weak;
- locations are fragile or conflict-affected.

Certain features of an investment, project or operation can also increase levels of GBVH risk, in addition to those associated with the country context. GBVH risks tend to be higher where:

- a large new workforce and/or an influx of male workers is required and/or where temporary, informal and/or migrant workers are needed;
- there are seasonal deadlines, with heavy fluctuations in workload;
- transportation of goods over long distances and overnight is required;
- community engagement in greenfield projects is needed;
- services are provided, especially luxury services or highly sought-after basic services;

- security personnel are used, especially where they are armed;
- worksites are in remote locations, requiring long and/or isolated journeys to and from work.

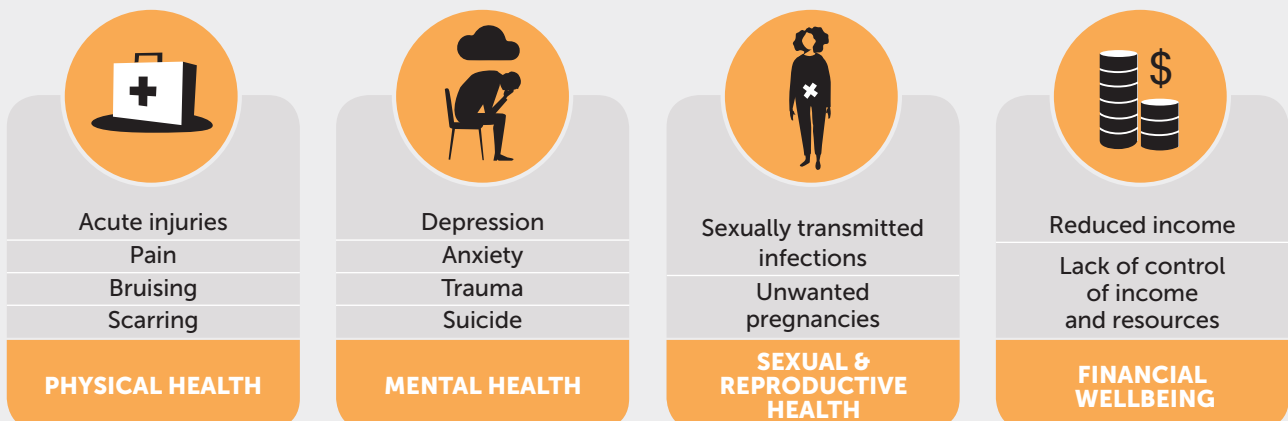
## What can investors and companies do?

It is important to keep in mind that for those who speak out against GBVH, the stakes can be extremely high and, in some cases, life-threatening. Using the following overarching principles to inform all efforts to address GBVH can help to ensure survivors and witnesses are safe and do not experience further harm.

It is important that efforts to prevent and respond to GBVH are:



## Examples of the impact of GBVH on individuals





Investors and companies can take action to prevent GBVH and to be ready to respond to reports by:



**Strengthening leadership and company culture**, so that GBVH risks are understood, clear and consistent messages are communicated, necessary partnerships are developed, inclusive organisational structures are developed, and adequate resources are invested.



**Developing and communicating policies and codes of conduct** that define GBVH, set out prevention and response measures and outline behaviours that are not tolerated, with clear links to sanctions and disciplinary procedures.



**Establishing grievance mechanisms and investigation procedures** that enable GBVH to be reported in a safe and confidential way, with effective channels at project level and for workers, service users and communities.



**Strengthening recruitment and performance assessments** so that they address GBVH risks and enable fair and transparent decision-making on hiring, promotions and performance-related pay.



**Delivering training and awareness raising**, both internally among workers and externally among communities and service users, providing essential information and enhanced training for those with specific responsibilities for GBVH prevention and response.



**Working with contractors and suppliers** to address GBVH through procurement processes, contract selection and negotiation, and regular engagement along the supply chain.



**Improving the physical design of worksites and service delivery locations**, with safety assessments to identify potential GBVH hotspots for workers, service users and community members.

To find out more, please see [Addressing Gender-Based Violence and Harassment: Emerging Good Practice for the Private Sector](#) and accompanying sectoral briefs focused on [manufacturing](#), [construction](#) and [public transport](#).

**Addressing Gender-Based Violence and Harassment**  
Emerging Good Practice for the Private Sector

**Addressing Gender-Based Violence and Harassment (GBVH) in the Manufacturing Sector**

**Why is addressing GBVH important to the manufacturing sector?**

The manufacturing sector is a key source of income for many people, providing jobs and opportunities to many workers. Addressing GBVH is important for creating a safe, respectful and competitive work environment.

There are also GBVH risks related to recruitment and hiring practices of contract workers. For example, migrant workers in the manufacturing sector are vulnerable to additional risks and sexual exploitation from labour intermediaries/recruitment agencies, human traffickers who may have recruited, or also recruited GBVH from suppliers or agents who contract work to them.

Manufacturing workers can experience violence from their partners, particularly when there are strong gender inequalities about working for the manufacturer and women staying at home.

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During the construction phase, workers are also vulnerable to various forms of harassment, exploitation and abuse, especially by informally-made working arrangements. For example, irregularly working arrangements, such as irregularly working hours, sexual harassment and exploitation were common practices of employers. The GBVH risk continued mostly by contractors' construction supervisors and equipment that is used during the construction phase also increases the risk of GBVH. Individuals who make decisions about recruitment and compensation can abuse this power to sexually exploit vulnerable

**Addressing Gender-Based Violence and Harassment (GBVH) in the Construction Sector**

**Why is addressing GBVH important in construction?**

Construction, particularly of major infrastructure projects, can be a high-risk environment for GBVH affecting community members, workers and service users.

GBVH can intensify within work locations, which are an integral part of the activities from outside the site. Such workers often come without their families and large deposits of money relative to the local community, and can lose out on their own social networks and support systems. This makes them more vulnerable to harassment and exploitation from contractors. These risks are higher when workers come from other countries than the local community. It is also an issue for those who are living together in remote areas.

Community members, such as those in female-headed households, who live in residential areas where workers cannot legally hold land titles and are therefore more easily evicted from that land.

**What are the benefits of addressing GBVH?**

Addressing GBVH in the construction phase can have the following benefits:

- Improve workers' physical and emotional wellbeing and strengthen occupational health and safety (OHS). For example, a safe and healthy work environment can lead to increased productivity and economic empowerment by increasing mobility and access to better paid work, education and healthcare.
- Avoid reputational damage, financial risk and legal liabilities for companies, investors and construction contractors. For example, in 2019, the [International Labour Organization \(ILO\)](#) reported that 10% of construction workers in the world were victims of sexual harassment and abuse by contractors.
- Build trust and social capital to operate in communities. This can result from regular dialogue and engagement with project GBVH risks, as well as the effective use of measures to prevent and respond to GBVH.
- Broaden the pool of potential workers that companies can draw upon, including women workers from nearby communities, because of lower perceived risk of GBVH.

India - [Research by ILO](#) found that one in three construction workers were women and they had experienced sexual harassment and exploitation from supervisors, contractors and site workers. Women who were heads of their households and had children were particularly at risk of sexual and economic exploitation in India, irrespective of whether working in the sector or informally employed and engaged in agricultural work and other activities. In the same region, women often face sexual harassment and demands, which can lead to gender inequality and violence from their partners at home.

**Addressing Gender-Based Violence and Harassment (GBVH) in the Public Transport Sector**

**Why is addressing GBVH important to the transport sector?**

Public transport systems are an important gateway to access essential opportunities, investments in work and well-being, financial stability and an overall economic empowerment by increasing mobility and access to better paid work, education and healthcare.

However, the perceived and actual risk of violence and harassment on public transport can be high. Reason for concern is that passengers often experience harassment and violence on public transport. For example, in the case of India, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, young women and girls can be [grooming to step a 'groom' job locations where they feel unsafe](#).

**Service users / passengers**

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**Transport workers**

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Considered public transport systems can increase GBVH risks through factors such as close proximity between service users, temporary environments and programs to control acts of GBVH.

**Women's experiences of sexual harassment on public transport**

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