

ENDING VIOLENCE & HARASSMENT IN THE WORLD OF WORK



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE ILO CONVENTION

The ILO Convention: Opportunity for Change

Everyone, everywhere has the right to work free from violence and harassment. Abuse isn't in anybody's job description, yet millions and millions of women around the world experience sexual harassment at work.

This year, we have an opportunity to change that. In June, governments, employers and trade unions that make up the International Labour Organization (ILO) will meet to agree a landmark treaty, or convention, to end violence and harassment in the world of work. The next few months are crucial if we're to secure a strong agreement that protects women and men wherever they work.

Why do we need a convention?

The #MeToo movement has put the issue of sexual harassment in the international spotlight. But more than one in three countries have no laws against harassment in the workplace.¹ And where laws do exist, they are often weak or ineffective. As a result, hundreds of millions of women and other vulnerable people face the daily threat of violence, abuse and harassment.

As well as the fear and suffering this causes on an individual level, the lack of legal protection holds back women's economic potential – meaning families, businesses and national economies all lose out. Violence and harassment cost companies too, through increased absenteeism, staff turnover, litigation and compensation, as well as

reduced productivity and reputational damage.

A global convention – internationally agreed standards that countries commit to applying in their national contexts – is a way to make work safe for women and men everywhere. When a convention is ratified it becomes legally binding, meaning that if someone suffers harassment or violence, governments and companies can be held to account. An integrated global approach will be a huge step towards preventing violence and harassment in all their forms, and to providing survivors with the support they need.

A Global Problem:

1/3 of countries do not have laws prohibiting sexual harassment at work.¹

In Cambodia, nearly 1 in 3 women garment factory workers report experiencing sexually harassing behaviours in the workplace over the last 12 months.²

What's being proposed?

In June 2018, the ILO – the United Nations body where 187 states set labour standards – saw countries agree to establish a global convention on violence and harassment in the world of work. The convention will be

1. <https://www.worldpolicycenter.org/events-and-launches/preventing-workplace-discrimination-and-sexual-harassment>

2. <http://insights.careinternational.org.uk/publications/i-know-i-cannot-quit-the-prevalence-and-productivity-cost-of-sexual-harassment-to-the-cambodian-garment-industry>

accompanied by a “recommendation” providing guidance on how to implement these legal commitments.

In late 2018 the ILO held a round of consultation on the draft of the convention. A report on the consultation and treaty text was then published in early March. This now forms the basis of the final negotiations at the International Labour Conference – the highest decision-making body of the ILO – in Geneva on 10-21 June 2019 .

As things stand, we have a fantastic chance to secure a strong, progressive convention and recommendation – but we know some countries and employers will attempt to water it down. Over the coming weeks, we need to fight hard to secure a global treaty that truly protects the world’s poorest and most vulnerable women, wherever they work.

What needs to be resolved?

We need a strong, inclusive convention that covers violence and harassment in all its forms and gives protection to all workers, from the field to the factory, from the office to the home, or wherever they may be vulnerable. While there’s widespread agreement on the need for a convention and recommendation, the scope and the language of some provisions remain up for debate. The current text is strong – but parts still need to be agreed, and some countries have expressed reservations or opposition to certain aspects. Key issues that need to be addressed include:

DEFINING “VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT”

Some employers and governments argue that, rather than encompassing “a range of unacceptable behaviours”, violence and

harassment should be defined separately. We disagree – the current agreed definition is informed by expert opinion and compatible with existing and any future national laws. It captures the full continuum of violence and harassment in its many diverse forms, psychological and sexual as well as physical, and usually gender-based.

THE SCOPE OF THE “WORLD OF WORK”

The proposed convention currently has a broad understanding of the world of work, encompassing not only the traditional physical workplace but also work-related social activities, commuting, and public and private places of work, including the home. This comprehensive understanding of the nature of work is appropriate for the instruments, in order to be relevant to the realities of workers around the world.

PROTECTIONS FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS

One area still to be resolved is whether to identify categories of workers disproportionately affected by violence and harassment and requiring protection, particularly LGBTI people. Dialogue is needed to ensure the text is inclusive and protects the rights of the most vulnerable leaving no one behind.

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How is CARE involved?

CARE is committed to promoting the empowerment of women and girls, and to engage with men and boys, to transform unequal power relationships and address gender inequality.

CARE has been campaigning for a strong ILO convention and is an observer NGO in the negotiations. Across the world, CARE has been working with allies to press governments and employers to agree on a progressive and inclusive ILO convention and recommendation. It's been our biggest ever global advocacy campaign, with activities ranging from petitions and media coverage, to consultation responses and policy papers, to meetings with ministers, business organisations, companies and trade unions. Importantly, we're working to amplify the voice of women, and to support women workers and women's rights organisations to participate in the ILO process.

The proposed convention text and the official commentary have been released and CARE's advocacy will intensify in the weeks ahead.

What happens next?

Time for discussion will be limited during June's [International Labour Conference](#), so it's vital that governments, employers and trade unions engage in informal discussions beforehand. We'll be working with them to identify sticking points and potential solutions, so that negotiations can concentrate on reaching consensus to secure the best deal possible.

By June 21, we could be celebrating the first global agreement to end violence and harassment in the world of work. After that, we'll be pushing for countries to ratify the ILO convention and bring it into law as soon as possible – giving everyone the right to be safe from violence and harassment at work.

Quotes

“It’s about striving towards a basic human right to safe work that also makes economic sense.”

Caroline Kende-Robb, Secretary General, CARE International

“The question isn’t whether we need a global treaty to protect women from abuse and harassment at work, but rather, why we don’t yet have one. It’s time to put that right.”

Caroline Kende-Robb, Secretary General, CARE International

“At national and international levels our present workplace laws are not working to protect women. We are now in the final push for a convention that can be taken forward in every country to change the lives of so many millions of women who suffer violence and harassment at work.”

Glen Tarman, Head of Global Advocacy, CARE International

“Nobody should have to put up with abuse to earn a living. A global treaty offers hope to those who face violence and harassment in the world of work, and means those responsible can be held to account.”

Glen Tarman, Head of Global Advocacy, CARE International



Nancy Farese / CARE



ABOUT CARE INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY:

By implementing a global and coordinated advocacy strategy, CARE believes that we can multiply the scope of our impact beyond programme funding and technical support to influence the national and international policies that affect the lives of the poorest and most vulnerable communities around the world.

CARE recognises that women play a pivotal role in the global fight against poverty and our advocacy strongly focuses on gender equality and women's empowerment. We advocate on the following global advocacy priority areas: women, peace and security; women and food security; sexual, reproductive and maternal health and gender and climate change. Global advocacy is also carried out to respond to humanitarian crises.

As a global confederation working in over 90 countries, CARE is uniquely placed to undertake advocacy at different levels from local communities to international institutions. In the countries where we work, our advocacy aims to influence local and national policies by working closely with decision-makers and other stakeholders. At the international level, we aim to influence regional and international processes that have an impact on the lives of the poorest.

For more information visit:

<https://www.care-international.org/what-we-do/advocacy-1>