

# Women on the Rise

Gendering the World of Work

Policy Brief





# Introduction

Adopted in 1995, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA)<sup>i</sup> is a blueprint for women's rights and empowerment, and gender equality. Thirty years after its adoption, the twelve critical areas of concern within the BPfA remain pertinent today. In the run up to Beijing+30<sup>ii</sup>, these twelve critical areas, which are interdependent and interrelated, have further been clustered and organized by UN Women into six thematic areas<sup>iii</sup> to inspire concerted action from multiple stakeholders.

Women's labor—both productive and reproductive labor—is a cornerstone of the gender equality agenda. However, systemic gender-based discrimination and violence can impede progress towards this goal and is compounded for those from marginalized communities. A landmark moment in 2019 sought to bridge the gap between efforts to advance gender equality in general terms, and women's specific rights as workers, when International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted its first international treaty to address violence and harassment in the world of work: ILO Convention 190 (ILO C190)<sup>iv</sup>. Resulting from decades of activism led by women within trade unions and labor movements, and supported by women's rights movements and organizations, the struggle for the adoption of ILO C190 brought together trade unions, feminist organizations, governments, and the private sector to take action towards eliminating gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) in the world of work.

In addition to the universal ratification, implementation, and integration of ILO C190 into domestic legislation and international frameworks, it is critical for ILO C190 to also be included within the upcoming deliberations

on Beijing+30, as part of bolstering the global agenda for gender equality. The recommendations offered to governments and multilateral institutions in this policy brief provide solutions to ensure that women are less vulnerable to violence and harassment in the world of work.

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## Violence and Harassment at Work

**More than one in five people (almost 23%) in employment have experienced violence and harassment at work, whether physical, psychological or sexual.**



(Source:<sup>v</sup> ILO, LRF & Gallup, 2022)

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## Focus

This policy brief highlights women's paid and unpaid labor as the cornerstone of gender equality, and specifically addresses GBVH in the world of work. The brief demonstrates the links between ILO C190 and two critical areas of concern within BPfA: violence against women, and women and the economy.

This policy brief is addressed to governments and multilateral institutions, with a view to influencing commitments from Member States on Beijing+30, during the 69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69) in March 2025, at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) focused on the review of Sustainable Development Goals 5 (gender equality) and 8 (decent work) in July 2025, as well as at the 80th session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA 80) in September 2025.

## Gender Equality and Labor

At the heart of the devaluing of women's labor within respective cultural, social, economic, and political spheres is the persistent discrimination they face because of their gender. In turn, systemic gender-based discrimination often results in gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) in both private and public spheres, including in the world of work. When unaddressed, these can lead to femicides: the gender-based killing of women and girls. The heightened vulnerabilities that impact women's labor can stem from their multiple and intersecting identities, such as, but not limited to, gender, race, ethnicity, caste, class, sexuality, gender identity, age, migration status, and (dis)ability. Depending on the context, these determinants can make women particularly vulnerable to the incidence of GBVH in both formal and informal sectors. Additionally, systematic informalization disguised as formal work in low-wage sectors disproportionately impacts women workers, such as women in the garment sector, with no employment contracts and/or lack of national labor protections. In such scenarios, the binary distinction between formal and informal sectors disappears.

When addressing gender-based discrimination and inequality, solutions have been sought within current macroeconomic policy frameworks that most often exclude women's paid informal labor and unpaid labor. To this end, the gender-equality markers and indicators that are currently used are still positioned within women's economic empowerment paradigm, which directly and indirectly exclude addressing the true value of the entirety of different forms of labor undertaken by women. This calls for a shift in thinking that acknowledges the link between production and social reproduction<sup>vi</sup> and the recognition of women's paid and unpaid labor as a key contributor to achieving gender equality. Predominantly, women perform the majority of care work, both unpaid and paid, including domestic work, early childhood education, social work, health care services, disability services, and long-term care for the elderly.<sup>vii</sup> These care services are often undervalued and underpaid, and can be the source of discrimination and violence against women.

The critical link between gender equality and labor must not only be recognized but also be integrated within systems by all institutions to achieve gender equality. To this end, key developments such as the adoption of ILO C190 in 2019 are critical to ensuring that GBVH is addressed to ensure women thrive in the world of work, which in turn would accelerate gender equality. Economic justice for women cannot be achieved without decent work, and decent work is impossible if fundamental principles and rights at work, such as the freedom of association, collective bargaining, the right to organize and to work in a safe and secure environment, are not upheld.<sup>viii</sup>

## Gender-Based Violence and Harassment in the World of Work

Gender-based violence against women, whether physical, sexual, or psychological, is an extreme manifestation of structural inequality and discrimination in civil, political, economic, social, and cultural spheres that stifles gender equality. Inequality and discrimination are compounded due to women's multiple

and intersecting identities and span across lifecycles, making them vulnerable and prone to violence in the home, within the community, and by the State.

Violence can take many forms, such as invisibility, neglect, devaluation, harassment, physical and/or sexual harm, torture, and, in its extreme form, femicide. Existing data<sup>x</sup> points to how natural and manmade catastrophes such as climate disasters, armed conflicts and health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic can exacerbate violence against women. While the violence from both public and private spheres moves fluidly and women carry its impact between their homes and work, the policies, programs, and services geared towards addressing and preventing gender-based violence continue to bear an artificial separation between the two spheres, making gender equality an impossibility.

Movements such as #NiUnaMenos and #MeToo have exposed the widespread prevalence of violence and harassment against women in the world of work. Whether occupying influential and powerful positions such as politicians, judges, or journalists, or working in highly feminized sectors in global supply chains, or as part of the informal sector as street vendors or domestic workers, women face varied forms of violence and harassment, including femicide in the world of work.

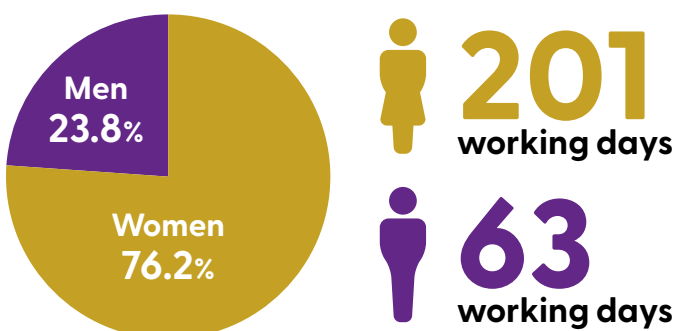
Certain groups of women workers, such as migrant workers, either in the informal or low-wage formal sectors, face heightened forms of vulnerability. The violence and harassment directed at them, whether during internal migration or during international migration (either within the countries of origin, transit, and/or destination) further traps them in a vicious cycle, resulting in limited options for better work or a higher quality of life. When women's labor, particularly unpaid labor, such as care work and housework, is unrecognized as a contribution to economic development and growth and is, therefore, devalued, women workers who take on these positions tend to be severely underpaid and overworked. This leads to them being treated as disposable, which in turn further compounds the level of violence and harassment they face, with little to no recourse to safety, limited access to financial and legal resources, and access to justice. Providing them with

social protection along with a living wage and access to decent work can help break the cycle of violence.

The remedies sought by women workers to address GBVH in the world of work come with consequences. According to the ILO, globally, only half of the survivors disclosed their experiences to another person, and this was often after suffering repeated incidents.<sup>xi</sup> Women who file grievances can at times face retaliation within their homes and communities, which makes them further reluctant to report the incidents. Similarly, women workers seeking accountability for violence and harassment have been subjected to job loss, demotions, isolation, and less safe working conditions. There is evidence<sup>xii</sup> that when women have access to collective bargaining and freedom of association, they are more likely to file grievances about GBVH, demand accountability against perpetrators, and experience continued job security.

## Unpaid Care Work

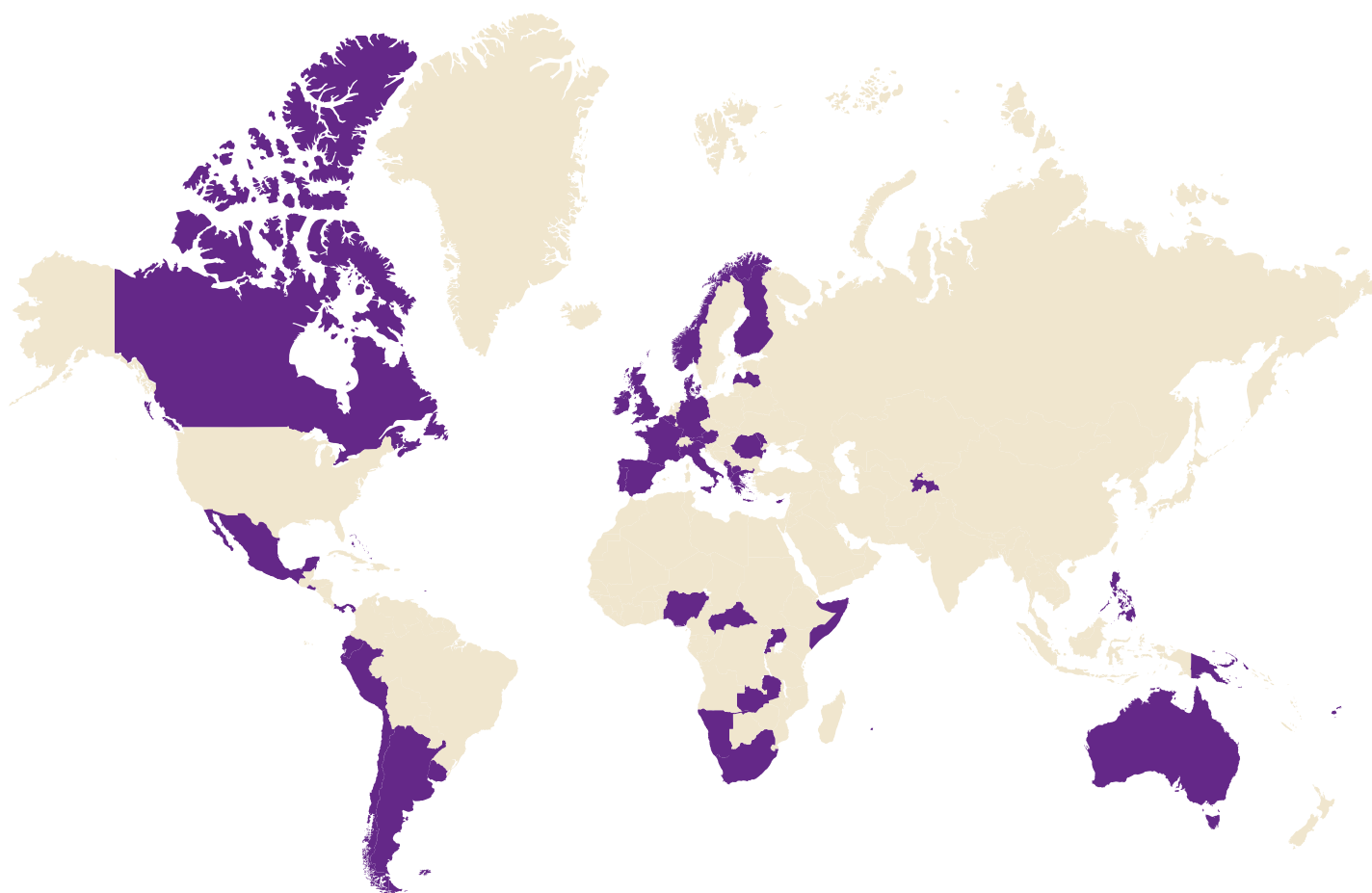
**Globally, women perform three-quarters (76.2%) of unpaid care work, dedicating an average of 4 hours and 25 minutes per day, compared to men's 1 hour and 23 minutes. This represents 201 working days (based on an eight-hour working day) per year for women compared to 63 working days for men.**



(Source: ILO, 2018)<sup>x</sup>

## Countries that have ratified ILO Convention 190

(as on March 4, 2025)



- |                              |                      |  |
|------------------------------|----------------------|--|
| 1. Albania                   | 18. Finland          | 35. Peru   |
| 2. Antigua and Barbuda       | 19. France           | 36. Philippines  |
| 3. Argentina                 | 20. Germany          | 37. Portugal   |
| 4. Australia                 | 21. Greece           | 38. Republic of Moldova                                  |
| 5. Austria                   | 22. Ireland          | 39. Romania  |
| 6. Bahamas                   | 23. Italy            | 40. Rwanda   |
| 7. Barbados                  | 24. Kyrgyzstan       | 41. Samoa  |
| 8. Belgium                   | 25. Lesotho          | 42. San Marino   |
| 9. Canada                    | 26. Mauritius        | 43. Somalia  |
| 10. Central African Republic | 27. Mexico           | 44. South Africa   |
| 11. Chile                    | 28. Montenegro       | 45. Spain  |
| 12. Cyprus                   | 29. Namibia          | 46. Uganda   |
| 13. Denmark                  | 30. Nigeria          | 47. United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland |
| 14. Ecuador                  | 31. North Macedonia  | 48. Uruguay  |
| 15. El Salvador              | 32. Norway           | 49. Zambia   |
| 16. Estonia                  | 33. Panama           |  |
| 17. Fiji                     | 34. Papua New Guinea |  |



# Pathways & Intersections: Gender and Labor

## ILO Convention 190 and Recommendation 206 (2019)

**WORLD OF WORK** includes both public and private spaces, where workers are paid, take breaks, facilities they occupy in the course of work, any work-related trips, events or social activities, technology-enabled communications, employer-provided accommodation, and commuting to and from work.

**Violence and harassment** in the world of work refers to a range of unacceptable behaviors and practices that result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, and includes gender-based violence and harassment.

**A worker** is a person working irrespective of their contractual status; in training; interns and apprentices; terminated employees; volunteers, jobseekers and job applicants; and individuals exercising the authority, duties or responsibilities of an employer.

**Domestic violence** can affect employment, productivity and health and safety of a worker and therefore, governments, employers' and workers' organizations and labor market institutions are obligated to address domestic violence.

**Freedom of Association (FOA) and Collective Bargaining (CB)** contribute to preventing and eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work.

## Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 8 (2015)

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls **by ending all forms of discrimination and all forms of violence** in the public and private spheres.

Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies.

Ensure equal rights to economic resources, including land and other forms of property, financial services, and inheritance.

**Promote decent work for all by protecting labor rights**, safe and secure working environments, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment.



## Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: Critical Areas of Concern (1995)

Violence against Women is a manifestation of the historically **unequal power relations between men and women**, which results in discrimination.

Women and the **economy include unpaid work which is undervalued** and underrecorded and women perform the majority of these tasks.

Women must occupy key decision-making in finance, labor, and other economic spaces.

**Basic worker's rights, including Collective Bargaining (CB) and Freedom of Association (FOA)** is a means to eliminate inequalities and improve working conditions.



## Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women - CEDAW (1979)

**Discrimination against women** means any distinction, exclusion or restriction in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

**Right to work** is an inalienable human right



## CEDAW: Gender-Based Violence (GBV) against Women

Gender-based violence (GBV) affects women throughout their life cycle and includes acts or omissions intended to cause death or physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm.

It manifests across private and public spheres, including technology-mediated settings.

GBV is often exacerbated by displacement, migration, global economic activities, including supply chains, the extractive and offshoring industry, militarization, foreign occupation, armed conflict, violent extremism and terrorism.

## Forward-looking Strategy

The objectives for achieving gender equality are embedded within human rights principles and included in the BPfA and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Addressing GBVH in the world of work cuts across both agendas. ILO C190 brings together and elevates the agenda to eradicate GBVH in the world of work, and when used in conjunction with Recommendation 206<sup>xxiii</sup>, it acts as a powerful tool for the advancement of gender equality. Additionally, gender runs as a cross-cutting theme across the SDGs, including goals that directly pertain to labor. For example, Goal 8<sup>xiv</sup> (decent work and economic growth) is found to be unsustainable<sup>xv</sup> if it does not address gender equality (Goal 5)<sup>xvi</sup>. What this demonstrates is how a combination of normative and rights-based frameworks such as BPfA, SDG Goals 5 and 8, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW<sup>xvii</sup>) treaty, along with General Recommendation 35<sup>xviii</sup> on gender-based violence against women, and ILO C190 can collectively accelerate progress towards gender equality. The pertinent regional instruments also play a critical role in accelerating much needed progress and are the cornerstones on which the achievement of gender equality can be sustainably built across all regions of the world.

The world of work is constantly shaped by concurrent developments such as the rise in international migration, the burgeoning growth of the 'platform economy,'<sup>xix</sup> ideologies that undermine women's human rights, and risks posed by climate change. Additionally, the increased flexibility in terms of online work across time zones has changed the world of work, thereby exposing women to new forms of technology-facilitated gender-based violence.<sup>xx</sup> To illustrate, extant studies show how climate change can exacerbate violence against women workers and heighten their socio-economic vulnerability.<sup>xxi</sup> BPfA offers foresight in this regard as it points to the potential implications of environmental risks and their disproportionate impact on women.<sup>xxii</sup> These old and new challenges present opportunities to re-design gender-responsive policies and programs that holistically address GBVH, within public and

private spheres, and center a decent work agenda for women from both formal and informal sectors. Central to this pursuit is increasing women's participation and decision-making spaces by recognizing their agency, feminist leadership, and collective power.<sup>xxiii</sup>

## Recommendations for Governments and Multilateral Institutions

The political and economic commitments to accelerate gender equality for ALL women throughout their lifecycle requires the recognition and valuing of their unpaid and paid labor across all spheres.

**The 30th anniversary of the adoption of BPfA in 2025 provides Member States the opportunity to recommit and reinvest in the advancement of the gender equality agenda by integrating ILO C190 standards to address violence and harassment in the world of work along with Goals 5 (gender equality) and Goal 8 (decent work) of the SDGs.**

The following recommendations are specifically geared towards national governments and multilateral institutions where appropriate. We encourage Members States and multilateral institutions to integrate these recommendations across relevant ministries and departments and include them within their Beijing+30 commitments towards the advancement of gender equality and the realization of human rights for ALL women.

1. Recognize women's labor, paid and unpaid, formal and informal, taking into account their situations of vulnerability, including but not limited to gender, race, ethnicity, caste, class, sexuality, gender identity, age, migration status, and (dis)ability to advance the global agenda for gender equality.
2. Mandate gender parity in decision-making and women's leadership across all ministries and within all relevant political, economic, and social spheres.
3. Institute a zero-tolerance policy on gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) in the world of

work within the executive, legislative, and judiciary branches of the government.

4. Integrate provisions of ILO C190 within regional systems, frameworks, agreements and policies that are designed to advance development, gender equality, and the elimination of GBVH.
5. Ensure that national gender equality mandates encompass women's labor, including the recognition, reduction, and redistribution of unpaid labor, via investments in childcare services and infrastructure; legislation on decent work and a living wage; universal social protections for unpaid and informal workers; and the prevention of GBVH in private and public spheres, including in the world of work.
6. Utilize the term and definition of the "world of work" in policies and programs within Ministries, and national investment bureaus, tasked with the purpose of advancing economic development and growth.
7. Integrate the definition of the "world of work" within the ministries of labor, migration, and foreign affairs in their legislations, policies, and practices to ensure the safety and security of women workers at all levels, including informal workers employed by the leadership of these institutions during diplomatic missions.
8. Adhere to international standards through the following:
  - a. Ratification and implementation of ILO C190 and ILO Convention 189<sup>xxiv</sup>
  - b. Implementation of CEDAW Committee recommendations received through the reporting process.
  - c. Implementation of thematic and country specific recommendations from the UN Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls.
  - d. Achieving targets and meeting the indicators of SDG Goals 5 and 8.
- e. Adoption and implementation of relevant regional instruments.
9. Repeal all discriminatory laws against women that compromises their enjoyment of human rights, including their right to work.
10. Integrate provisions of ILO C190, including Recommendation 206, and Freedom of Association (FOA)<sup>xxv</sup> and Collective Bargaining<sup>xxvi</sup> within all public institutions and private entities engaged in third party contracting.
11. Initiate funding efforts and scale up investments to address violence in the world of work within state-supported programs and services that focus on GBVH to ensure that the responses to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and violence which occurs in the public sphere are aligned.
12. Collaborate with women in trade unions and feminist civil society organizations to implement a 'Survivor-Centered Approach' when designing and implementing policies, programs, services, research and data gathering, training, and accountability mechanisms to address and reduce gender-based violence.
13. Utilize Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)<sup>xxvii</sup> standards along with human rights due diligence to alleviate risks to the safety of formal and informal women workers.

### Additional recommendations for multilateral institutions

1. Foster alignment among UN entities that address GBVH to include violence and harassment in the world of work and ensure coherence in reporting between Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and violence that occurs in the public sphere.
2. Ensure policies and programs that focus on women's economic empowerment include women's paid and unpaid labor, decent work, and the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work.



3. Encourage active participation of women labor leaders in Expert Group Meetings on gender equality as well as women's human rights and feminist leaders within Expert Group Meetings on women's labor and the world of work.
4. Recommend the ratification and implementation of ILO C190 to advance gender equality and address and prevent GBVH.
5. Ensure that any funding initiatives dedicated to addressing gender-based violence against women incorporates a comprehensive framework that recognizes the inextricable link between violence in the private and public spheres and seeks to address the interlinkages holistically.



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