

# 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.

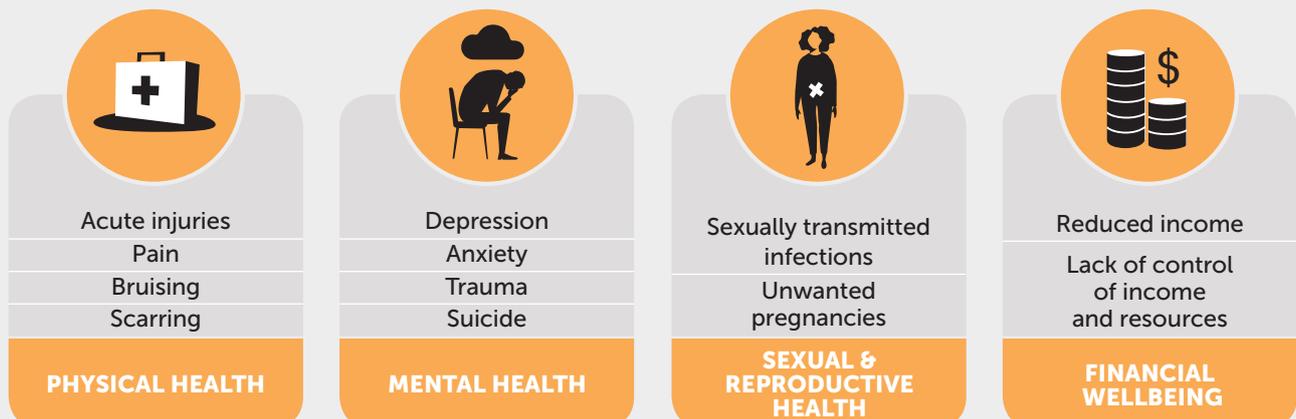
## What can investors and companies do?

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**

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

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

**Disclaimer.** No representation, warranty or undertaking expressed or implied is made in respect of any information contained herein or the completeness, accuracy, or currency of the content herein. Social Development Direct, the EBRD, CDC, and IFC do not assume responsibility or liability with respect to the use of or failure to use or reliance on any information, methods, processes, conclusions, or judgments contained herein, and expressly disclaim any responsibility or liability for any loss, cost, or other damages arising from or relating to the use of or reliance upon this publication. In making this publication available, Social Development Direct, the EBRD, CDC, and IFC are not suggesting or rendering legal or other professional services for, or on behalf of, any person or entity, nor are they agreeing to perform any duty owed by any other person or entity to another. Professional advice of qualified and experienced persons should be sought before acting (or refraining from acting) in accordance with the guidance herein.

**Dissemination:** The EBRD, CDC and IFC encourage dissemination of their work and readers may reproduce and distribute these materials for educational and non-commercial purposes, provided that appropriate attribution is given and this disclaimer is included.

© European Bank for Reconstruction and Development 2020. All rights reserved. | © CDC [2020]. All rights reserved. | © International Finance Corporation 2020. All rights reserved.