



FEMICIDE IN THE WORLD OF WORK

Introduction:

Women workers in both formal and informal sectors face varied forms of gender-based violence (GBV) and harassment. According to the findings¹ of a 2022 survey led by International Trade Union Federation (ITUC) in 79 countries, 73% of unions surveyed pointed out that violence and harassment in the world of work has increased in the last five years, while 80% of the trade unions believe that gender-based violence has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Women are disproportionately impacted by GBV and harassment in the world of work due to harmful gender stereotypes, multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, and unequal power relations.² If unaddressed, violence and harassment can lead to Femicides in the world of work. In some countries, murder is the second

leading cause of death for women at work³, while the proportion of women killed by homicide at work is twice that of total workplace fatalities in women.⁴ Women are more likely than men to be murdered at work by "boyfriends, spouses, exes, or other relatives,"⁵ as the perpetrator knows where to find the victim, making it easier to carry out the killing.

Heightened Vulnerabilities and Nuances:

Intersecting forms of discrimination associated with factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, migration status, race, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity can make women workers more vulnerable to GBV and Femicides. The lack of social and legal protections increases the risks, especially for informal women workers in precarious and stigmatized forms of employment. Migration status and exploitative

AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO FEMICIDE

In 2021, the Center for Women's Global Leadership ([CWGL](#)) marked the 30th anniversary of the [Global 16 Days Campaign](#), with a special anniversary theme of [Ending Femicide](#), which is recognized under international law as the gender-related killing of women and girls. This year, the Campaign, along with its allies, is [continuing](#) its advocacy to end Femicide. Vulnerable women and girls face a heightened risk of Femicide that is associated with multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. This fact sheet spotlights Femicide in the world of work across the formal and informal sectors and recommends certain actions.

practices such as the Kafala System are known to lead to restricted mobility and freedom of association for **domestic workers**, which in turn can make them prone to lethal violence, as illustrated by the brutal murders of domestic workers in Cyprus, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Kuwait, Ethiopia, and in other countries documented from 2018-2021.⁶ According to UNODC, female **sex workers** have the highest homicide victimization rate of any group of women studied and are 18 times more likely to be killed than women in other professions.⁷ The lack of recognition of sex work as legitimate work increases the vulnerability of sex workers towards sexual and physical violence from State actors.⁸ This leads to high level of impunity for the killings of sex workers.⁹

Similarly, the frequent absence of decent conditions of work in global supply chains and Free Trade Zone/Special Economic Zones, along with the exclusion of workers from legal and social protections can create heightened risks and vulnerabilities. These risks are often ignored¹⁰ by business entities, global brands, and recruitment agencies that prioritize efficiency and profits over the welfare and rights of workers. The opportunistic targeting and killing of young women workers in the “maquilas” -- the special free-trade manufacturing zones in Mexico -- was erroneously linked to the women being perceived as sex workers because they “walked the streets to get to work. “The exploitation of women workers in the garment supply chains presents another example. The garment sector is highly feminized with women comprising about 80% of the global workforce.¹¹ Precarious working conditions in global supply chains contribute to **garment workers** being subjected to economic

exploitation, violence and harassment, which has worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹²

Femicide is also perpetrated against women who work in the formal sector such as women judges, parliamentarians, trade union leaders, journalists, and activists who publicly condemn and advocate against gender-based violence or injustices.

Women human rights defenders are often perceived as challenging traditional notions of family and gender roles in society, a perception that can generate hostility from State actors and from the public, the media and non-State actors. These targeted killings may be undertaken as a form of punishment and control and often go unpunished. In Mexico, from December 2018 to September 2021, 23 women human rights defenders were murdered.¹³ In 2021, two women Supreme Court judges in Afghanistan were shot dead by unidentified gunmen.¹⁴ Similarly, in 2021, the number of female **journalists** killed while reporting doubled, and accounted for 9% of all media related casualties worldwide – the highest percentage since 2017.¹⁵ In addition to killings, women journalists face “rampant sexism and discriminatory practices that pervade the newsroom,”¹⁶ which leads to various forms of GBV such as sexual harassment and rape, threat of rape, and online abuse. Similarly, in 2016, based on a global study in 39 countries across the Asia-Pacific, Africa, Europe, the Americas and the Arab region, Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) documented how women **parliamentarians** are subjected to physical, sexual, and psychological violence.¹⁷ More than 40% of female MPs interviewed¹⁸ by IPU stated that they had received threats of death, rape, beatings, or abduction while serving their terms, which can culminate in Femicides, if unchecked.

The ILO identifies certain sectors, occupations and work arrangements that are more likely to create exposure to violence and harassment “such as night work, work in isolation, health, hospitality, social services, emergency services, domestic work, transport, education and entertainment.”¹⁹ For instance, women **transport workers** face a high incidence of violence and harassment from colleagues, supervisors and the public as transport is a “male-dominated sector” and their workplaces are “often mobile and isolated.”²⁰ With the shift to remote and home-based work for many women workers across sectors, following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the implications of domestic violence for women workers now using their own homes or private spaces as their place of work demands even greater attention. Certain groups of workers are more at risk of lethal violence than others such as domestic workers and home-based workers whose workplaces are their employers’ homes.²¹

Case Studies:

The case of Francisca Chagas da Silva

The death of Francisca Chagas da Silva, a union leader and women human rights defender in Brazil demonstrate how women in positions of power have been targeted and murdered. She belonged to the Afro-Brazilian community and was a “Quilombola from the community of Joaquim Maria in Maranhão.”²² Francisca was also a leader of the Union of Workers and Rural Workers of Miranda do Norte.

“Francisca’s body was found in a puddle of mud, naked and showed signs of rape, strangulation, and stabbing. According to the Brazil Human

Rights Defenders Committee, ‘Francisca’s life was taken because she was a human rights defender and her body was violated to show that she, as a woman and a black woman, should not dare to occupy that leadership space.’”²³

The case of Joanna Demafelis

Joanna Demafelis was a domestic worker from the Philippines who started working in Kuwait in May 2014. She was employed by a couple - a Lebanese man and his Syrian wife. Though she earned around 10 times her salary²⁴ in the homeland, she had restricted mobility in the Middle East. As per the Kafala system in Kuwait, her visa was tied to her employer/sponsor. The couple who had employed her also confiscated her cell phone and she was “allowed access only every three months.”²⁵ Demafelis went missing in September 2016, and the 29-year-old’s body was later discovered in an abandoned apartment in Kuwait City in February, 2018. Her employers, the couple had fled the city but were later arrested and sentenced to death.²⁶

“In February [2018], Kuwaiti authorities discovered Demafelis’s body in the freezer of an abandoned apartment belonging to a couple who had hired her. According to local media, there was evidence the woman had been tortured and strangled.”²⁷

Promising Practices:

Addressing Femicide in Garment Supply Chains

Jeyasre Kathiravel was²⁸ an Indian Dalit woman garment worker and union member organizing against gender-based violence at Eastman Exports, a supplier unit in India for the global fashion brand H&M. Jeyasre faced months of sexual harassment by her supervisor before she

was murdered in January, 2021.²⁹ The "Justice for Jeyasre" Campaign³⁰ was launched after Jeyasre's death by her trade union Tamil Nadu Textile and Common Labour Union (TTCU) which is an affiliate of Asia Floor Wage Alliance (AFWA), AFWA, and Global Labor Justice-International Labor Rights Forum (GLJ-ILRF). On April 1, 2022, the Campaign achieved a landmark victory when TTCU, AFWA and GLJ-ILRF signed the legally binding Dindigul Agreement³¹ with Eastman Exports and H&M to implement a program to end gender-based violence and harassment, resulting in protection for 5,000 garment and textile workers in Tamil Nadu. Among its provisions, the Dindigul Agreement to Eliminate Gender Based Violence and Harassment (GBVH) includes a comprehensive definition of GBVH adapted from the 2019 ILO Violence and Harassment Convention No. 190 (C190), enables collective action by workers on GBVH through AFWA's Safe Circles program, including union-led trainings and union-selected shop floor monitors, and an independent investigation mechanism that builds on the strengths of India's Prevention of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace (POSH) Act.

Addressing Domestic Violence and Femicide in the World of Work

Unilever, the multinational consumer goods company has a comprehensive "Global Domestic Violence and Abuse Policy," which includes provisions such as 10 days of paid leave ["Safe Leave"] for victims of domestic violence during each calendar year. Victims of domestic violence can also request the company that they be relocated to another Unilever location or site. The policy helps employers develop safety plans to ensure that the "that victims are never working alone and can be escorted to their parking

spots."³² Additionally, to ensure financial security, the victims of domestic violence are given an option to "change their pay cycle and bank details at any time."³³

International Standards:

Governments, employers, and workers made history when ILO Convention 190 (C190), the first international treaty³⁴ to address violence and harassment in the world of work was adopted in 2019. It establishes the right of every worker to a world of work free from violence and harassment, thereby recognizing it as a human rights violation. C190 is accompanied by 2019 Violence and Harassment Recommendation No. 206 (R206) which provides a roadmap to prevent and address GBV and harassment³⁵, the precursors to lethal forms of violence like Femicide. However, activists need not wait until C190 is ratified to implement its provisions or use it as a means to expose violations of workers' rights.³⁶ C190 can be used in conjunction with Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)³⁷ and other international instruments such as the Home Work Convention (ILO C177) and the Domestic Workers' Convention (ILO C189) to demand safe workplaces for women workers within specific sectors.

CEDAW is one of the most widely ratified international treaties and it requires States to eliminate discrimination against women "in the field of employment in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights."³⁸ The CEDAW Committee has increasingly taken cognizance of the precarious working conditions of informal women workers, including on GBV and harassment they face and has issued

concluding observations to the governments.³⁹ To learn more about the recommendations of the CEDAW committee, see the [Advocacy Guide](#) and [Resource](#) from 2020.



Action Menu:



Governments:

- Ratify C190 and implement the provisions of C190 and R206 to put in place national laws, policies and regulations which address violence and harassment in the world of work.
- Adapt and use the newly developed statistical [framework](#) developed by UNODC and UN Women to collect comparative data on various types and forms of Femicide at the national level in private and public spheres, including the world of work.

The statistical [framework](#) developed by UNODC and UN Women for measuring Femicides acknowledges that the gender-related killing of women and girls can occur within different perpetrator-victim relationships, across both private and public spheres. These include intimate partners, family members, perpetrators with a relationship of authority/care to the victim, friend/acquaintance/work relationship and other known/unknown perpetrators. Thus, "work relationship" is highlighted as a potential data block for gathering information and this can inform the collection of data on Femicides in the world of work.⁴⁰

Trade Unions and Employers:

- Negotiate workplace policies or collective bargaining agreements which align with C190 and R206 and lobby the governments to effectively implement the Convention.
- Integrate GBV and harassment into Occupational Safety and Health frameworks at the workplace.
- Implement workplace policies that address the impact of domestic violence in the world of work and include domestic violence in workplace risk assessments. To learn about promising practices in this area, see the Advocacy Guide from 2021 [here](#).



Civil Society Organizations:

- Advocate and work closely with governments, trade unions and employers for the ratification and implementation of the provisions of C190 and R206. For more information, please see the Global 16 Days Campaign's Advocacy Guides on C190: [ILO Convention 190: GBV in the World of Work, C190 and Informal Women Workers](#), and [Domestic Violence and the World of Work](#). You can also watch the Global 16 Days Campaign's CSW66 parallel event: [Femicide in the World of Work: How the Gendered Aspects of Lethal Violence are being Ignored](#).



Individuals and communities:

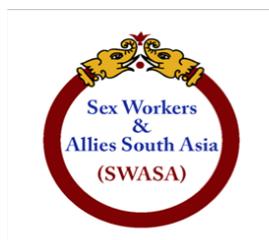
- Draw the attention of government officials to the killings of women workers from both formal and informal sectors. Use the Communications procedure for Special Procedures Mechanisms to prompt formal inquiries. Access the website [here](#) and the online form [here](#). Write to them directly at urgent-action@ohchr.org.
- Meet with journalists to discuss and share information about C190 and other relevant ILO instruments and explain why they are important in the current context to address Femicides of women workers, from both formal and informal sectors. Adapt information from this Fact Sheet and combine with local statistics and testimonies from women workers.
- Join or initiate Twitter chats, Tweetathons, Facebook/Instagram live conversations, or other social media calls to action and engage @16DaysCampaign accounts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, using hashtags #LetsEndFemicide, #RatifyILO190 and #16DaysCampaign.
- Sign and disseminate the Global 16 Days Campaign petition calling on the United Nations (UN) to declare December 6 as the International Day to End Femicide. Petition link [here](#).

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This Fact Sheet is dedicated to the women who have been victims of Femicide in the world of work as well as their families, friends, and communities who continue to fight for justice and demand action and accountability to make a world without violence possible.



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