

Discussion Panel: NO ROOM for violence and harassment in the workplace!

NEWSLETTER

**March 6,
2024**



Teatri Kombetar (Holli)

Ora 16:00

Paneli: S'KA ORAR per dhune dhe
ngacmime ne vendin e punes!

Discussion Panel: NO ROOM for violence and harassment in the workplace!

On 06.03.2024, at 16:00, the [Gender Alliance for Development Center](#), with the support of the [Swedish Government](#) through [Olof Palme International Center](#), organized a Discussion Panel titled: “NO ROOM for violence and harassment in the workplace!” in support of the project: “Furthering Women’s Labour Rights and Protection, with a special focus on women workers in garment.” This activity was organized in the framework of FemFEST 2024, in collaboration with BASHArt.

The main purpose of the panel was to discuss the nuances and complexity of violence and harassment in the workplace, as well as engagement in a cooperative dialogue which aims to identify innovative approaches and action steps for improving safety in the workplace and fostering a culture of dignity and respect.

This panel also aimed to raise awareness among the officials and the public regarding the importance of this issue and to promote a joint commitment to create a safer, fairer and more respectful work environment for all employees, with a special focus on women employees.

The event was opened by Mrs. Plejada Gugashi, representative of Olof Palme International Center as panel moderator, who emphasized the importance of reacting to violence in the workplace, and was followed by a discussion by the panelists: Mrs. Mirela Arqimandriti, Executive Director, Gender Alliance for Development Center (GADC); Mrs. Eda Beqiri, State Labor Inspectorate; Mrs. Gertjana Hasalla, representative of the Center for Labor Rights (CLR); Mr. Ilir Xhemalaj, Executive Director, National Union of Telephone Operators (SKOT); as well as a representative of garment and footwear sector employees and a representative of cleaning sector employees.



Plejada Gugashi - Olof Palme International Centre

We wanted to come together in this week of FEMFest for a very simple reason. We talk a lot about violence against women in intimate or family relationships and very little about violence and harassment against women in the workplace. Meanwhile, violence in the workplace is a widespread phenomenon that affects all sectors to varying degrees, for both men and women, and especially women and girls regardless of their social and economic status, or their academic training. Violence at work is a human rights violation and affects not only individual wellbeing and economic performance, but also the family and society.



Together with our partner organizations, during the last 5 years we have had an increased focus on violence in the workplace, raising awareness of this phenomenon and promoting the transformation of the sad/bitter realities that women and girls face. But we are still very far from the desired reality. The legislation addressing workplace relationships has made important steps forward. The issues of violence and harassment in the workplace are addressed in a number of laws and policies, including Law no. 10 237 /18.2.2010 "On Occupational Safety and Health" (LSSHP), the Law on discrimination, and recently Convention no. 190 of the International Labor Organization, on the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work, which was adopted in 2022.

But on the other hand, great challenges remain to be addressed and serious efforts need to be made to respect and fulfill in practice the right of every individual for a world of work free of violence and harassment. This requires the commitment of all stakeholders of the world of work, government and public institutions, trade unions, and civil society organizations.

We are here in an open discussion away from dogmas, in an honest and real conversation, regarding what happens to women and girls in the workplace. How possible is it for us to challenge the reality of a work environment where sexual harassment, insults, pressure, and threats occur? What should be done better, differently, or more, in order to address this phenomenon?



Mirela Arqimandriti - Gender Alliance for Development Center

Unfortunately, violence and harassment exist in Albanian workplaces. These issues may take many forms, including physical violence, verbal abuse, sexual harassment, harassment, discrimination, and more.

Both men and women may be victims of violence and harassment in the workplace, even though certain groups, such as women, LGBTQ+ individuals and minorities, may be more vulnerable to such behavior.

Violence and harassment in the workplace can have severe impacts on the victims, leading to physical and mental health problems, reduced productivity, lack of work, dissatisfaction at work and a toxic work environment. This may also contribute to a culture of fear and distrust among employees, thus affecting the general morale and wellbeing.

Employers have a legal and ethical responsibility to provide a safe and respectful work environment for all employees. The International Labor Organization Convention on violence and harassment in the world of work, adopted in 2019, and ratified by Albania, stands as a beacon of hope and an action framework in fighting against these scandalous acts.

This Convention recognizes that everyone has the right to a workplace free of violence and harassment, regardless of gender, race, religion or any other characteristic.



One of the main focuses of this Convention is on preventing and addressing gender-based violence and harassment, recognizing the disproportionate effects it has on women and marginalized groups. It emphasizes the importance of creating a culture of respect, equality, and zero tolerance towards any form of violence or harassment.



Gertjana Hasalla - Center for Labor Rights

Mrs. Hasalla, representative of the Center for Labor Rights, emphasized that civil society organizations play an important role in addressing issues of workplace violence and harassment, because they often serve as the voice of workers for their rights and promote just policies and legal measures to protect employees from situations of violence and harassment in their work environments.

But in order to further advance in addressing these issues, civil society organizations should collaborate with the government, justice institutions, trade unions and other organizations to design and implement the most effective measures for the protection of employees from workplace violence and harassment.

Mrs. Hasalla also mentioned findings from the national study on “Harassment and violence in the Albanian world of work” which was carried out in June - November 2021. The findings from this study show that violence and harassment at work are considered as widespread phenomena at a large scale throughout the country for 1 in 4 study participants (23%), and the vast majority of interviewees or 84% of them think that there are more violence and harassment cases than those reported. The most prevalent form of violence/harassment, that in dependency relationships, is reported mostly in the sectors of education (62%) and call-center (55%), while in the healthcare sector it is 33%.



Ilir Xhemalaj - National Union of Telephone Operators (SKOT)

Mr. Ilir Xhemalaj in his speech focused more on the situation in the telephone operators sector. He stated that, based on the national study, the highest incidence of violence between two opposite genders is reported in the call center sector (61%), while that between colleagues of the same gender is reported in the garment and footwear sector (40%). Mr. Xhemalaj stressed that for the trade unions, it is important to include in the collective labor contract, specific articles and clauses on the protection from violence and harassment in the workplace. Clauses for protection from violence and harassment at work must be also included in internal company regulations and be overseen by the Occupational Safety and Health Councils. This would ensure a responsible approach to the management of risks in work environments. In addition, companies conducting risk evaluation should also include such clauses. This would help in identifying and implementing the necessary measures to reduce risks and create safer environments for employees.



No Room for violence and harassment in the workplace!

Employees of the cleaning sector and of the garment and footwear production sector

The representative of the cleaning sector workers stated that, to her knowledge, in the cleaning sector there are no sexual harassments but there is psychological violence in most of the cases, as well as physical violence in limited cases. Pressure in this sector is mostly exerted upon the workers regarding payment and work hours. The representative of the cleaning sector workers stated that the level of information among employees in this sector is very low and comes only from civil society organizations. She expressed her wish for the creation of a trade union for workers in the cleaning sector.

In the same vein, the representative of garment and footwear sector workers stated that there are no known cases of sexual harassment in this sector either, but that violence is evident in other forms, from pressure regarding the wage, to increase of unpaid working hours, and psychological pressure, etc. She also mentioned a recent case at a factory in Allias, where the workers had been threatened that they would be forced to work standing up. The representative of the textile and shoes production sector workers also stated that employees of this sector receive information only from civil society organizations and that there should be more such initiatives.



Eda Beqiri - The State Labor Inspectorate

Mrs. Beqiri shared with the participants that the analyses of the State Inspectorate of Labor have shed light on a disturbing reality in the workplace, emphasizing that violence and harassment are concerns that affect a large number of employees. It is interesting to note that verbal violence is ranked second in frequency, which shows that this form of negative behavior in the work environment is widespread. But this is difficult to prove, so the problem should be addressed in the right manner.

A higher sensitivity of women to verbal violence has been identified compared to men. This shows that women tend to feel more the effects of this kind of behavior in their work environment. This crucial information is important in order to address the issue of workplace violence and to take measures for the promotion of a safe and healthy work environment for all employees.



No Room for violence and harassment in the workplace!

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Violence and harassment in the workplace are serious problems that affect all sectors of the industry and women are especially vulnerable. It is important to focus on identifying and addressing these problems in order to ensure a safe and respectful work environment for all employees.
- The current legislation has made important steps forward in addressing workplace violence, but great challenges still exist, which must be addressed in order to ensure the effective implementation of these laws and policies.
- It is important that employers take on their legal and ethical responsibility to provide a safe and respectful work environment for all employees. This involves the inclusion of specific clauses on protection from violence and harassment in the collective work contracts and in the internal regulations of companies.
- Civil society organizations play an important role in addressing issues of violence and harassment in the workplace and should work closely with the government, justice institutions, trade unions and other organizations to design and implement more effective measures for the protection of employees.
- Studies show that verbal violence is a widespread problem in work environments, with women being especially sensitive to it. This emphasizes the need to adequately address this problem and to ensure a culture of respect and zero tolerance towards any form of violence or harassment.
- Information and awareness among employees regarding their rights in the workplace are crucial in order to address issues of violence and harassment. This suggests a need for new initiatives to increase the level of information and awareness in work environments, including the creation of unions for workers in the affected sectors.

It is important to keep supporting the work and initiatives aiming to change the culture of work and to promote a safe and healthy environment for all employees, including the drafting of policies and concrete measures to prevent and address any form of violence and harassment.



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The toll-free number for reporting cases of rights violation in the workplace: 0800 18 18