



Advice:

Protocol for the Prevention and Eradication of Harassment in Fishing Vessels

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Background, rationale and objectives

The long-distance fishing industry is undergoing significant demographic, social and operational changes. The growing participation of women and other under-represented groups in roles, including marine scientific observation, technical positions, officer ranks and crew functions, requires updated onboard workplace conduct and safety frameworks.

Harassment and intimidation (such as sexual, gender-based discrimination, psychological abuse...) on board fishing vessels constitute violations of fundamental labour and human rights and may also create operational safety risks. In confined and isolated environments, unresolved interpersonal misconduct can escalate into safety incidents, reduced crew cohesion, psychological harm and reputational damage to the fleet.

Harassment in all its forms not only violates the fundamental rights of workers but also compromises the vessel's operational safety and the reputation of the EU fleet.

Harassment and violence at work constitute violations of fundamental human and labour rights, safe working conditions and non-discrimination.

This advice is based on the ratification and implementation of standards set out in the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention No. 190, the ILO Convention 188, the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) guidelines and the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) protocols, and it aims to transform work culture in long-distance fishing. It is also consistent with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) and the FAO Guidance on Social Responsibility in Fisheries and Aquaculture Value Chains (*to be adopted*), which articulates internationally recognized principles for decent work and human rights through fisheries value chains, and reinforces the need for effective measures to prevent and address harassment and violence at work across all fleet segments, including distant-water fisheries.

Preventing and eradicating harassment is therefore not only a matter of regulatory compliance but a core component of safe operations, decent work, social sustainability and generational renewal in the sector.

This Advice promotes the adoption of structured, enforceable and monitored anti-harassment protocols adapted to the specific realities of long-distance fishing operations.



Objectives

The objectives of this Advice are to:

- Promote zero tolerance for harassment and bullying on board fishing vessels;
- Encourage the adoption of practical prevention and response protocols;
- Strengthen reporting and protection mechanisms;
- Align industry practice with applicable international standards;
- Support a safe, respectful and inclusive onboard working environment.

Scope of application

This Advice applies to all long-distance fishing vessels involving EU operators, including shipowners, managers, charterers and associated companies.

It covers all persons embarked for professional purposes, including masters, officers, crew members, trainees, observers, scientific personnel, inspectors and supernumeraries, regardless of nationality, gender, rank, contractual status or duration of embarkation.

Reference regulatory and policy framework¹

This Advice is aligned with the principles and standards established under the following international frameworks:

- [ILO Convention 190](#): A world of work free from violence and harassment.
- [ILO Convention 188](#): Work in fishing (well-being and safety).
- Amendments to IMO STCW-F Convention²: with regard to mandatory training in social awareness.
- ITF protocols³.
- UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs).
- [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#).
- [Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence \(the Istanbul Convention\)](#).

Internal company protocols should be consistent with these standards.

¹ The LDAC recommends that any internal protocol be strictly aligned with the conventions included in this section.

² MSC 560 (108) Resolution adopted on 23 May 2024 introducing in all training centres a new mandatory competence in Basic Safety Training for all seafarers pursuant to Rule VI/1 of the STCW Code.

³ https://www.itfglobal.org/sites/default/files/resources-files/Womens_BPG_Spanish.pdf , [ETF Workplace Policy Guidance Addressing Violence and Harassment | ITF Seafarers](#)

Definitions⁴

For the purposes of this Advice:

Harassment means any unwanted conduct, verbal, non-verbal, physical, psychological or digital, that violates dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading or unsafe environment.

Sexual harassment means any unwanted conduct of a sexual nature affecting dignity or creating an offensive or unsafe environment.

Retaliation means any adverse action taken because a person reported or supported a complaint.

Areas for improvement and key recommendations

In order to ensure a real and positive change, the LDAC proposes the following recommendations as areas for improvement:

1) Core principles for any form of harassment

- Zero tolerance for harassment;
- Respect for dignity and equality on board
- Confidentiality;
- Non-retaliation;
- Fair and timely handling of complaints;
- Victim-centred protection;
- Continuous prevention through training.

2) Clarity of concepts, statement of principles

- **Clarity of concepts:** To establish precise definitions of sexual harassment, gender-based harassment and workplace bullying, adapted to the reality of isolation on board.
- **Statement of principles:** Companies should adopt a written, public zero-tolerance anti-harassment policy signed by management. The policy should be visible and available on board, communicated before embarkation, and provided in languages understood by the crew.
- Each vessel must have a visible "Zero Tolerance" statement signed by the shipowner and communicated to the entire crew before boarding.
- **Recognition of power imbalances:** Reporting channels should be provided for all crew members without any risk of reprisal.

⁴ Further information regarding definitions can be found in **ANNEX II**



3) Preparation of secure reporting protocols and feedback channels

- **Confidentiality and security:** To set up reporting mechanisms that ensure anonymity and protection against potential retaliation.
- Reporting procedures should be available in languages understood by the crew and clearly explained before departure.
- Protocols should define a clear responsibility chain including:
 - Onboard reporting contact (Master or designated officer);
 - Company safeguarding contact;
 - Independent shore-based reporting contact outside vessel hierarchy.Contact details must be displayed onboard and provided before departure.
- As a right, crew members should have at their disposal the channels defined by the Shipowner for filing the corresponding complaints.
- **Emergency procedures:** To define immediate action protocols that allow the shipowner to take measures in response to the situation on board the vessels, taking into account the nature of the vessels.
- **Responsibilities of shipowners:** Shipowners have a duty of care to prevent and address harassment and violence on board. This includes the obligation to: act quickly on any report (or suspicion) of harassment; ensure that victims are protected from retaliation; cooperate fully with competent authorities and investigations; take reasonable measures to ensure safe living and working arrangements on board, including privacy, adequate lighting and secure accommodation spaces where feasible. Cooperation with flag State, port State and relevant authorities should be ensured in cases involving serious misconduct or potential criminal offences.
- **Victim protection:** Protocols should ensure that victims of harassment have access to: medical and psychological support when needed; information on their legal rights and available complaint mechanisms; the possibility of disembarking or being reassigned without financial penalty or loss of wages, if it is necessary for their safety;
- Protocols should define immediate measures⁵ to protect victims in accordance with the characteristics of the situation and the operation in question through the usual channels for reporting complaints.
- Retaliation must be explicitly prohibited and subject to disciplinary action.

⁵ This section will be discussed and addressed in a subsequent specific document.



4) Awareness-raising by means of awareness campaigns and mandatory training

- Training should be competency-based and integrated into mandatory safety and social responsibility training.
- **Certified training, when possible:** To implement hands-on training modules on diversity and respect for all levels of officers and crew. Pre-boarding briefings, scenario-based exercises and bystander intervention techniques should be included. Training completion should be recorded and periodically refreshed.
- **Good practice guides:** To edit and distribute printed and digital handbooks in the languages of the crew explaining what constitutes harassment and how to intervene as bystanders (bystander intervention).

5) Monitoring and compliance assessment

- Anti-harassment measures should be included in social audits (already included in C188), safety management systems and compliance reviews. These audits should, where possible, include confidential interviews (already carried out by C188) with crew members without the presence of senior officers.
- **Active participation:** of crew representatives and vulnerable groups to identify gaps and improve effectiveness.
- **Monitoring and assessment:** To identify shortcomings, legal loopholes or inefficiencies in the preventive and policy measures of the protocol(s) in force, ensuring that it is an effective tool for worker protection.

Monitoring should use measurable indicators such as training coverage, audit findings and anonymised reporting statistics.

6) Continuous review and participation

Protocols should be reviewed regularly with participation of crew representatives and vulnerable groups to identify gaps and improve effectiveness.

7) Alignment with updated (international) training competency standards

Training programmes should reflect updated competence requirements on recognition of unacceptable behaviour, impact on safety, response protocols and reporting channels. Training centres should update syllabi and be subject to periodic verification.

8) European Commission invitation to encourage Member States and companies to:

- **Implement their protocols in accordance with existing regulations:** Ensuring that anti-



harassment protocols are accompanied by prevention and equality plans.

- **Audit the training centres:** To ensure that providers of basic fisheries training courses update their syllabus in line with table A-VI/1-4 of the STCW-F Convention.
- **Provide continuing training:** Even if old certificates are still valid in some cases, current crews are encouraged to undergo refresher sessions or briefings that cover these new contents before boarding.
- **Provide onboard support materials:** To provide summarised guides and signage in the languages of the crew that strengthen IMO standards of competence regarding respect and social harmony.
- **Clear consequences for misconduct:** Protocols should define disciplinary and contractual consequences for perpetrators, proportionate to the severity of the behaviour, and ensure that cases involving possible criminal conduct are referred to the competent authorities.
- **Ensure coherence with EU external fisheries policy:** The European Commission should promote the inclusion and effective implementation of measures to prevent and address harassment and violence at work within the social clauses of Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs) and their implementing protocols. Compliance with these obligations should be considered as part of the social sustainability criteria used to assess EU external fisheries action.

The LDAC considers harassment prevention and eradication a necessary condition for safe operations, social sustainability and sector credibility. Structured and enforceable onboard protocols should become standard practice across long-distance fisheries. The implementation of structured, enforceable and monitored anti-harassment protocols should therefore be actively supported by EU institutions, Member States and industry operators.



ANNEX I — Example of a Model Onboard Anti-Harassment Protocol

Purpose: This model template provides a practical structure that vessel operators and companies can adapt and implement as an onboard Anti-Harassment Protocol. It is designed for long-distance fishing vessels operating with multinational crews and extended embarkation periods.

1. Vessel Policy Statement

This vessel applies a strict zero-tolerance policy toward harassment, sexual harassment, bullying, intimidation and retaliation.

All persons onboard have the right to dignity, respect and a safe working and living environment. Any form of harassment or abusive conduct is prohibited and may lead to disciplinary action, removal from duty, disembarkation and reporting to competent authorities where applicable.

This policy applies regardless of rank, nationality, gender, contract status or function on board.

The Master and the Company commit to enforce this protocol.

Signed:

Company

Representative:

Master:

Date: _____

2. Scope of Application

This protocol applies to:

- Skippers and officers
- Crew members
- Trainees and cadets
- Scientific observers and inspectors
- Technicians and supernumeraries
- Any other embarked personnel

It applies in all onboard spaces, work activities, rest areas, digital communications and work-related interactions.



3. Definitions

Harassment: Unwanted conduct (verbal, non-verbal, physical, psychological or digital) that violates dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile or degrading environment.

Sexual harassment: Any unwanted conduct of a sexual nature affecting dignity or safety.

Retaliation: Any negative action taken against a person for reporting or supporting a complaint.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

4.1 Skipper

- Ensures protocol is implemented on board
- Ensures crew awareness before and during voyage
- Receives or delegates complaint handling
- Activates immediate protection measures

4.2 Designated Onboard Contact Officer

- Acts as first contact point for complaints
- Keeps confidential records
- Reports to Master and Company safeguarding contact

4.3 Company Safeguarding Contact (Shore-Based)

- Receives reports directly from vessel or individuals
- Ensures independent oversight
- Coordinates investigation and follow-up

4.4 All Crew Members

- Must comply with conduct standards
- Must cooperate with investigations
- Are encouraged to report incidents or risks
- Should support affected persons where safe to do so



5. Reporting Channels

Reports may be made through any of the following:

- Directly to the Skipper
- To the Designated Onboard Contact Officer
- To the Company Safeguarding Contact (email / phone / satellite)
- Through a confidential company reporting line (with anonymity as an option if victim chooses to)
- Through an independent external contact where available

Anonymous reporting should be accepted where feasible.

Contact details must be posted:

- On notice boards
- In crew common areas
- In induction materials

6. Reporting Procedure

1. Incident or concern is reported.
2. Report is logged confidentially.
3. Immediate safety risk is assessed.
4. Protection measures are activated if needed.
5. Company safeguarding contact is informed.
6. Investigation process is initiated.

7. Immediate Protection Measures⁶

Depending on circumstances.

⁶ This section will be discussed and addressed in a subsequent specific document.



Protection of the affected person takes priority over operational convenience.

8. Investigation Process

- Conducted impartially and confidentially
- Shore management involved where serious
- Statements collected and documented
- Evidence preserved where possible
- Both complainant and respondent heard
- Findings documented in writing

Indicative timeline:

- Initial assessment: within 48 hours
- Full review: as soon as operationally feasible

9. Confidentiality and Data Protection

All reports and investigation records must be handled confidentially and shared strictly on a need-to-know basis.

Records must be stored securely by the company.

10. Protection Against Retaliation

Retaliation against any person who reports, supports or participates in a complaint process is strictly prohibited.

Any retaliation constitutes a separate disciplinary offence.

11. Disciplinary Measures

Confirmed misconduct may result in:

- Formal warning



- Removal of duties
- Suspension
- Disembarkation
- Contract termination
- Reporting to authorities where required

Measures must be proportionate and documented.

12. Training and Awareness

Before embarkation or at voyage start, all onboard personnel must receive:

- Protocol briefing
- Behaviour standards explanation
- Reporting channel information
- Bystander guidance

Short conduct guide

- Reporting contact card
- Poster summarising rights and reporting steps
- Multilingual quick reference sheet

14. Monitoring and Review

The company should review protocol effectiveness at least annually using:

- Incident statistics (anonymised)
- Crew feedback
- Audit findings
- Training coverage

Protocol updates should be communicated fleet-wide.



15. Protocol Acknowledgement Form

I confirm that I have received, read and understood the Onboard Anti-Harassment Protocol and reporting channels.

Name: _____

Rank/Role: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____



ANNEX II: INFORMATION REGARDING DEFINITIONS

Core EU definition:

Harassment is deemed to occur *where unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic takes place with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person and of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.*

This definition appears (with nearly identical wording) in:

- Equal Treatment in Employment Directive (2000/78/EC)
- Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC)
- Gender Equality Directives (including 2006/54/EC and related updates)

The definition used by the International Labour Organization (ILO) which comes from ILO Convention No. 190 — Violence and Harassment Convention (2019).

ILO definition (Convention No. 190, Article 1)

“Violence and harassment” in the world of work refers to a range of unacceptable behaviours and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single occurrence or repeated, that aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, and includes gender-based violence and harassment.

Sexual harassment

The EU legal definition of sexual harassment comes from Directive 2006/54/EC (Gender Equality in Employment), Article 2:

Sexual harassment means *any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature* which has the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

This definition appears across multiple EU equality directives, including:

- Directive 2006/54/EC — Equal treatment of men and women in employment
- Directive 2004/113/EC — Equal treatment in access to goods and services



The International Labour Organization (ILO) does not give a separate standalone legal definition of “sexual harassment” in the same way the EU directives do. Instead, sexual harassment is included within the broader concept of “violence and harassment” in ILO Convention No. 190 (Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019) and its ILO definition framework (Convention No. 190)

Article 1 defines:

“Violence and harassment” as a range of unacceptable behaviours and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single occurrence or repeated, that aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm.

Recommendation No. 206.

Retaliation

The EU legal concept of retaliation is usually called “victimisation” in EU equality law. It is defined in the anti-discrimination directives of the European Union.

EU definition of retaliation (victimisation)

A standard wording used across EU equality directives (such as Directives 2000/43/EC, 2000/78/EC, and 2006/54/EC) is:

Victimisation means any adverse treatment or adverse consequence suffered by a person as a reaction to a complaint or to proceedings aimed at enforcing compliance with the principle of equal treatment.

Example source (verbatim style — Directive 2006/54/EC, Article 24)

Member States shall introduce measures to protect employees from dismissal or other adverse treatment by the employer as a reaction to a complaint or to proceedings aimed at enforcing compliance with the principle of equal treatment.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) does not use a single universal, stand-alone definition of “retaliation” in the same way the EU equality directives define victimisation. Instead, the ILO addresses retaliation through the concept of protection against reprisals in its conventions and recommendations, especially those dealing with violence and harassment, discrimination, and freedom of association.



Core ILO formulation (reprisals / retaliation)

Across ILO instruments, retaliation is generally framed as:

Any adverse action or threat of adverse action taken against a person because they reported, complained about, participated in proceedings, or exercised a protected right under labour standards.

Key source — ILO Convention No. 190 (Violence and Harassment, 2019)

Convention No. 190 requires Member States to ensure:

- Protection for complainants, victims, witnesses, and whistleblowers
- Safeguards against victimisation and retaliation
- Measures to prevent reprisals against those who report violence or harassment

ILO wording in guidance texts and Recommendation No. 206 includes protection against:

- dismissal
- intimidation
- disciplinary measures
- discrimination
- any other retaliation or reprisal linked to reporting or complaints

Other ILO instruments that include anti-retaliation protections

- Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111)
- Termination of Employment Convention, 1982 (No. 158)
- Freedom of Association Convention, 1948 (No. 87)