

Gender and grievance mechanisms A practical guide



Grievance mechanisms are a way in which people can raise concerns about their human rights linked to business operations. When designed well, grievance mechanisms can help identify risks and provide a pathway to issues being addressed quickly and effectively. Research from the University of Nottingham shows that many grievance mechanisms are developed without any expressed gender-sensitive consideration. This significantly reduces the likelihood that women will report issues such as discrimination, sexual harassment, or health-related concerns, limiting their access to remedy.

How can your business ensure that grievance mechanisms are effective for all female workers?

1. Engage female workers

Design your grievance mechanism with input from female workers.
Understand their lived experiences and what they consider safe, confidential, and effective.

2. Prioritise accessibility and trust

Ensure all workers know how to access the mechanism and trust it. Provide safe reporting channels and include women in the grievance-handling team whenever possible.

3. Understand gender-specific risks

Raise awareness on women's rights and issues such as discrimination, harassment, gender-based violence, and women's health. This is essential for appropriate response and prevention.

4. Know when to escalate

Equip grievance handlers with the knowledge and authority to escalate issues appropriately, including to the public authority when necessary.

5. Guarantee anonymity

Allow anonymous reporting, especially for sensitive gender-related issues. This reduces fear of exposure.

6. Prevent retaliation

Proactively assess and mitigate risks of retaliation. Ensure that reporting a grievance does not lead to intimidation or reprisals.

7. Think gender everywhere

Even in maleprevalent workplaces, always offer a safe channel for women to report concerns.

8. Consider handlers' appropriateness

Ensure those receiving grievances are aware of gender-specific risks. Avoid relying solely on automated systems or untrained personnel for first contact in cases involving sexual harassment, violence.

9. Ensure organisational learning

Use collected grievances to identify patterns and root causes. Feed insights into policy and operational changes to prevent future harm and improve the workplace.

10. Integrate gender into risk assessments

As part of your human rights due diligence, conduct gender-specific risk assessment across your operations to identify systemic issues before they escalate into grievances.

References

The provision of non-state-based grievance mechanisms is part of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), Pillar III, Principles 28-31. Gender-specific guidance on the UNGPs include:

- Gender Guidance for the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, UN Human Rights
- Report of the Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises to the Human Rights Council, UN Human Rights Council

For more business guidance on access to remedy visit



