

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN  
AT WORK IN TRANSPORT

# SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

With comments from  
women transport workers



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*The author and ETF wish to record their particular gratitude to the late Fionnuala Boyle, who conducted the data analysis for this report. She will be remembered with respect.*

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**The ETF represents more than 5 million transport workers from more than 230 transport unions and 41 European countries, in the following sectors: railways, road transport and logistics, maritime transport, inland waterways, civil aviation, ports & docks, tourism and fisheries.**

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# Introduction

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This supplementary report draws together the written comments of women transport workers who responded to the ETF's survey. The survey is documented in the ETF's report *Violence Against Women at Work in Transport*, which was presented to the ETF Congress in May 2017.

The ETF survey was completed by 1444 women transport workers from across Europe, of which 911 women transport workers disclosed at least one recent experience of violence at work. The survey found that one quarter (25%) of women transport workers believe that violence against women is a regular occurrence in the transport sector. Just over a quarter (26%) of women transport workers believe that harassment is considered to be 'part of the job' in transport. The survey gives shocking accounts of verbal threats and intimidation, sexual harassment, and sexual and physical assault against women workers, often with devastating effects on the health and well-being of women transport workers.

The summary report and analysis of the data from the ETF survey can be found at: <http://www.etf-europe.org/etf-4009.cfm>

As there was such an extensive range of comments made by women transport workers in the ETF survey, ETF decided it would be important to draw together these comments into a single document for reference purposes, and also to show the alarming extent of violence against women transport workers.

The written comments that are replicated in this report were selected on the basis that they were both relevant to, and are a reflection of, the responses given in the survey. Written comments from 305 respondents are replicated in this report – they are identified by sector and country worked in, and each respondent is given a unique identifier (a number ranging from 1 to 305). Two types of violence are presented in the report:

1. violence and harassment against women by colleagues, managers and supervisors, and
2. violence and harassment against women by customers.

# Women transport workers' experiences of workplace violence and harassment

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## Violence and harassment against women by colleagues, supervisors and managers

### ***A pervasive culture of sexual harassment and sexual intimidation in the workplace from co-workers, supervisors and managers***

The ETF report, *Violence Against Women at Work in Transport*, documents a pervasive culture of sexual harassment and sexual intimidation in the workplace. This takes the form of repeated, hostile and offensive verbal, non-verbal and physical forms of violence, including sexual harassment. Many of the comments below reflect both the pervasive nature of violence and harassment, and also women's lack of trust that workplace violence and harassment will be tackled effectively. This is based on a widely held view that harassers are protected in the workplace and that sexual harassment is part of the job.

The following are a selection of quotes to show the extensive and pervasive culture of sexual harassment and intimidation in the workplace from colleagues/co-workers, supervisors and managers, giving some shocking examples of persistent and often severe forms of violence and harassment.

### *In the maritime transport sector:*

***"I had my breasts groped and another co-worker forced himself on me ... I experienced prolonged stalking and harassment."***

— *Maritime transport, International, 301*

***"I've had people come on board, trying to discreetly take photos of the women on board without permission. I've also had someone come on board who repeatedly told me how beautiful I was, I was coming down from the bridge, about to pay off and he stopped me."***

— *Maritime transport, International, 298*

***"Male colleagues get drunk and seem to think it is okay to hit on me and/or try to get into my cabin."***

— *Maritime transport, International, 299*

***“I have worked in the Merchant Navy for 6 years. In that period I have been sexually assaulted – namely spontaneous groping of my breasts over my work overalls by port workers. When I was 18 a cook on board attempted to force himself on me.”***

— Maritime transport, International, 300

***“Each of the above [threats, intimidation, verbal abuse, offensive behaviour and sexual harassment] seems to be the norm and to challenge it only increases the amount or puts my position at risk. It starts with the degrading comments about women in general then laughing at how I fit into that category then progresses onto belittling...”***

— Maritime transport, UK, 56

***“A Captain once shouted at me for full 20 minutes (I timed it) and [he] threatened to fire me several times for handing in an assignment a little late, when I was a cadet.”***

— Maritime transport, UK, 146

***“[There is] abuse and offensive behaviour every day, [I was] threatened with violence once.”***

— Maritime transport, UK, 147

***“Everyday verbal abuse, offensive behaviour, threat of violence from British crew once.”***

— Maritime transport, UK, 148

***“Several incidents: slapped on the behind by Master when I was a junior officer; grabbed by the collar and shouted at by the Chief Officer; unwanted sexual advances from various crew members – pestering for personal contact details from offshore ...”***

— Maritime transport, UK, 149

***“An outside contractor said: ‘Will you give me a striptease tomorrow? On the table?’ Getting unwanted messages on Facebook from crew members calling me ‘sexy’ and telling me I looked ‘hot tonight.’”***

— Maritime transport, UK, 150

*In the civil aviation sector:*

***“Gross use of language about certain parts of the body, intimidation ... indecent suggestions, waiting in the car park and grabbing me tightly and then calling it a ‘joke’, etc. It is the normal state of affairs that comments are made openly***

***about certain parts of the body, you get asked about your (sexual) experiences, etc. Afterwards you still have to work with the perpetrator and colleagues, which only makes it worse ... I have reported nothing."***

— Civil aviation, Belgium, 229

***"On one occasion, fellow employees have become frustrated at work and lashed out with offensive language."***

— Civil aviation, UK, 144

***"My cabin boss wanted to know my name and instead of asking me, he grabbed my woollen cardigan close to my chest to read my name tag ... I didn't report it"***

— Civil aviation, Switzerland, 250

***"The employer puts workers under massive pressure. Young workers in particular should not miss anything."***

— Civil aviation, Switzerland, 251

***"The worst is they don't even think they are being inappropriate ... I've had to jump through hoops and prove that I'm at least twice as good as my male colleagues to get the same respect from the first time I took a flight lesson ... This is not isolated it's every few months, especially when the male pilots feel uninhibited at post flight drinks ..."***

— Civil aviation, France, 258

***"A few years ago, when I worked as a flight attendant I was a subject to constant sexist jokes and invitations with sexual subtext, considering it part of the job. Although dealt with the situation successfully, I did not like it at all!"***

— Civil aviation, Bulgaria, 221

*In the ports and docks sector:*

***"An attempt to rape me was unsuccessful, I had attended self-defence classes and was able to defend myself. I was in shock for a few days, but I had to work through it because there was no one I could go to with the problem (I am the only woman in the workplace where the incidents occurred). My boss threatened me because I didn't want to have sexual contact with him and he also threatened not to give me any more work...He did so, too, but he couldn't keep me without work because there was too much pressure on the company and too few staff ... If you can't prove the facts it's difficult. If you tell about what happened you often get even more problems ... so not making a report was the 'easiest' solution."***

— Ports, Belgium, 228

*In the urban public transport sector:*

***“Colleagues think that it is given that they can touch or even to try to kiss, just like that. Without any encouragement on my part.”***

— Urban public transport, Germany, 268

***“Four men and I were sat in the break room, the men were talking in their own language when one of them suddenly said, ‘If you remove your contraceptive implant, you will be beautiful again and it is time for you to become a mother!’ I had not even mentioned that I use contraception. I was reading a book and I was deeply saddened by the comment. Then the men continued to talk in their language. A completely unknown man came up to me and put his hand over my stomach and said, ‘I love you but you have to watch what you eat’ And of course, it was just me and him in the break room at the time, but I reported the incident anyway, but nothing happened. I avoid socialising with my colleagues during breaks.”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 14

***“Several co-workers sexually harassed me daily, but only one of them harassed me physically. For a long time he kept sending me text messages, pictures of his penis. And then one day we were the first two starting the shifts he grabbed me when I passed by him to leave the room. All he said was, ‘I just have to’. Then he held me and started kissing and groping me. I managed to shove him away, run down the stairs and out to the parking area where I knew another colleague was on duty. I made him accompany me to the bus. It took a while before I was able to tell anyone at work but eventually I had to because I struggled with anxiety attacks and had to be on sick leave.”***

— Urban public transport, Norway, 25

***“My body is commented on and analysed by male colleagues. It happens too often to call it an occasional episode.”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 15

*In the railway sector:*

***“I was raped by a colleague and [the employer] sacked me.”***

— Railways, UK, 126

***“I think my employer assumes that being verbally abused and assaulted is part of the job and some managers think if you can’t cope then you should find another job, and some of them will openly tell you this.”***

— Railways, UK, 44

***“On a work closed Facebook account, I was threatened and name-called. Although I was not on that account, I have seen the comments, which were given to me by a work colleague, and said that I ‘deserved’ everything that happened to me; and the C word was used a lot.”***

— Railways, UK, 116

***“Kicked and poked by a male member of staff. Name calling.”***

— Railways, UK, 85

***“Some of the guys were slapping my bottom, hugging me unexpectedly. I just laughed it off at the time but reflecting back I now know that I was being taken advantage of.”***

— Railways, UK, 35

***“I was verbally abused, intimidated, threatened and shoulder barged by a male colleague.”***

— Railways, UK, 99

***“My boss is an older man and takes us into a room to tell us off, [it is] very intimidating. Lads in the office make sexual jokes that I’m always the butt of.”***

— Railways, UK, 157

***“As a female treated with less respect than my male counterparts.”***

— Railways, UK, 158

***“I was bullied while in one position, by a few individuals. They physically threatened me. I moved jobs to move away from that department. I’ve also had abuse thrown at me in depots on occasion.”***

— Railways, UK, 124

***“It happened to me, my managers insulted me because I defended workers ... I received threatening e-mails with prohibitive time to perform a task without further explanations on how to perform the assigned task ... it seeks to mentally distress me ... My employer listens in on conversations on the phone with colleagues ... I felt underappreciated, humiliated and demotivated.”***

— Railways, Bulgaria, 222

***“Bullying from a senior manager.”***

— Railways, UK, 127

***“Pretty much every day I get verbal abuse or offensive behaviour. Sexist comments from male colleagues. One manager (now left) once made a comment that a woman’s place was in the kitchen and having her husband’s children, women shouldn’t be working on their own.”***

— Railways, UK, 129

***“Verbal abuse by a colleague over a period of three years, which I managed to resolve by speaking to them and being honest about their behaviour. Intimidation and threats regarding making work difficult by a manager.”***

— Railways, UK, 119

***“Male colleagues thinking it’s okay to sexually objectify you. Customers swearing and being aggressive.”***

— Railways, UK, 131

***“Inappropriate calendars and posters in the workplace.”***

— Railways, UK, 133

***“I was touched on buttocks by older member of lower management when I was new to the workplace.”***

— Railways, UK, 137

***“My boss used his position to ‘get closer physically.’ ”***

— Railways, Germany, 261

***“Verbal attacks with a verbal content, sexual assaults and the like. Touching of the rear and breasts, threats on the part of superiors if I complain: ‘A woman must be able to cope when she works in a men’s profession.’”***

— Railways, Germany, 262

***“Verbal daily, sexual harassment about 3–4 times a year, offensive attacks so far 3 times, threat/coercion about 5–6 times a year and psychological violence so far about 2 times.”***

— Railways, Germany, 263

***“Verbal harassment of a sexual nature, touching the breast and rear, threats.”***

— Railways, Germany, 264

***“Insults and fondling.”***

— Railways, Germany, 265

***“In the beginning, I often had to listen to remarks like, ‘You can sit on my lap and then you can start working.’”***

— Railways, Germany, 267

***“A few years ago I had to speak to my supervisor about a colleague who told everyone he was coming to my house when my husband was at work on a regular basis and spending the night ... I was embarrassed as the people he said it in front of laughed and treated it as a big joke, but it made me feel nervous being in his company.”***

— Railways, UK, 79

***“I found pictures and posters demeaning of women and led to inappropriate remarks and comparison between the female workers and the posters.”***

— Railways, UK, 96

***“Female facilities constantly destroyed by male co-worker because the money spent to add female facilities to the depot was supposed to provide a quiet room. I’m often left feeling less than male equals on training days as trainers often ask me what else we’ll be taking away from them.”***

— UK, Railways, 51

***“It was once or twice when I was new on the job and didn’t feel confident enough to stand for myself. It was coming from colleagues rather than passengers. The threat was about ‘beating me outside work’, and the sexual harassment was intended to be a joke.”***

— Railways, UK, 54

***“Colleagues telling me they didn’t know if they could hold themselves back if we had night shift together (we’re only two people at night).”***

— Railways, UK, 61

***“Constantly harassing me and asking me to do things sexually that I don’t want to do, as I am not interested in the person.”***

— Railways, UK, 52

***“If you class offensive behaviour as bad language, booking office staff experience this constantly. I have been verbally abused on some occasions, often being called names, in ways my male colleagues probably would not experience.”***

— Railways, UK, 69

***“Continuous verbal threats from my boss and my colleague for not being able to do my job. He promised me I would never attend courses any more, and this has been the case ... I am constantly denigrated.***

— Railways, Italy, 130

***“It was my own fault!!!!????”***

— Urban public transport, Norway, 30

*In other sectors:*

***“I have an older colleague who is very physical with most women at the workplace. He has repeatedly been touching my butt and waist. I do not know if I would call it sexual harassment, but it feels uncomfortable and inappropriate in a workplace. He stands very close when he talks to you and you must often move backwards ... Another colleague has drawn the attention of the management to his inappropriate physical actions ... this means that I’ve become a little extra observant and I try to keep my distance.”***

— Warehouse worker, Norway, 28

***“Verbal aggression is a weekly occurrence, unfortunately you get used to it. It really happens a great deal. I have become hard. Ten years ago, it affected me deeply in my soul. Now I laugh about it. I try to commiserate with aggressive people. An established customer found it necessary to target me for two years and regularly called me names. It is very tiresome. When he began talking about me with my co-workers, I finally lodged a complaint with my line manager.”***

— Road transport, Belgium, 230

*Women workers as the ‘butt’ of their male colleagues’ low job satisfaction*

***“I have had verbal aggressive words from colleagues who don’t like their job at the moment and the bad mood has chipped away at them and they blow off steam, often at colleagues ... It does not feel as safe at work as before, and less fun to go there. I understand that the current work situation is eating away at people. I prefer to talk with the person directly instead. If it happened again and became a pattern, I would of course report it. However, is very uncertain whether anything would be done about it?”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 3

***“Yes, but not so terrible that I can’t handle it. Sometimes male colleagues like to slap me on my arse ... not something I asked for!”***

— Maritime transport, Norway, 32

It is important to note that the workplace extends to work-related social events, where harassing and offensive behaviour may also take place:

***“I was an apprentice and one of the men on the course would always verbally harass me. At our work Christmas do I was surrounded my male colleagues who whipped out their penises and trapped me and another girl in the circle.”***

— Railways, UK, 51

## Experiences of violence and harassment from customers

The ETF survey reveals extensive and alarming incidents of violence and harassment against women transport workers by customers. The risk of violence increases significantly if a worker is working alone, when they face customers, for example, when workers carry out ticket checking, drive buses and trams alone, or when they work in ticket offices alone. Respondents give many examples of incidents of violence and harassment, which include shocking details of physical violence and sexual assault, verbal death threats, threats of violence, rape threats and threats to family members, as well as regular and daily verbal abuse, often of a highly sexualised nature. Sexual propositioning, sexual innuendo, lewd comments about a woman’s body and breasts, sexual comments are reported regularly by respondents. One respondent stated that it was too upsetting to give information about what had happened to her.

### *Violence and harassment from customers is seen as part of the job*

Many respondents stated that violence and harassment from customers is part of the job:

***“Mostly it [verbal harassment] can shock you, but then you believe it comes with the job.”***

— Railways, UK, 38

***“During a 15-year railway career, I have been sexually assaulted twice, physically assaulted twice and I am now verbally abused on a daily basis, especially on late night trains. It leaves me feeling vulnerable and shaken.”***

— Railways, UK, 39

***“All staff suffer abuse from customers but the abuse women have to put up with is more sexual and revolting.”***

— Railways, UK, 34

***“Generally irate passengers, usually drunk, who think it’s okay to be rude, hurtful, nasty or judgemental.”***

— Railways, UK, 48

***“Verbal attacks and threats / coercions happen very often and are almost part of the ‘daily business’! There were bad incidents, which then led to a court ruling! Unfortunately, there are often doubts about the legal interpretation of the judges.”***

— Railways, Germany, 293

***“Dealing with members (and the public), abuse is part of everyday life. People telling you you’re useless, harassing you by constantly calling/arriving at the office without an appointment, everyday sexism etc.”***

— Trade union, UK, 152

### *Verbal harassment and abuse from customers*

Verbal harassment and abuse, often of a highly sexualised nature, is the most common form of violence experienced by women transport workers and many respondents reported that it happens on a daily basis and is considered “part of the job”. Several women reported on verbal threats of rape and physical violence, and sexualised offensive remarks. Other transport workers spoke of offensive behaviour and threats of physical violence.

***“Every day someone calls you are a whore, passengers want to f\*\*k my mum and such.”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 6

***“I was sworn at in my face, he was really close to me, waving arms around like he was going to hit me, and then he threatened me when he realised I would inform my manager.”***

— Railways, UK, 59

***“Verbal attacks are unfortunately part of the daily job in the customer centre, to list them all would take too long ... In one incident there was a physical attack on a worker in the customer centre by a customer.”***

— Railways, Germany, 271

***“Verbal abuse is something we deal with men and women alike on the railway, particularly once disruption begins ... it has been an eye opener to see human behaviour at its lowest.”***

— Railways, UK, 54

***“Bad language because trains are delayed or cancelled. People seem to think it’s our fault and that it’s OK to swear and shout at us.”***

— Railways, UK, 98

***“I have been insulted (e.g. told, ‘You are you stupid!’)”***

— Civil aviation, Switzerland, 252

***“Verbal abuse from a customer over a full train that was delayed due to the driver not wanting to take it due to the excess passengers in vestibule behind his cab door.”***

— Railways, UK, 4

***“Weekly occurrence of verbal abuse and intimidation by customers angry about disruption, ticket prices – in most cases, things out of my control.”***

— Railways, UK, 76

***“It’s usual to be verbally abused by passengers. I have to deal with lots of drunk passengers and deal with offensive behaviour and threats on a daily basis.”***

— Railways, UK, 80

***“There are occasional instances of customers who are verbally rude, especially during any disruption. Also, occasional offensive behaviour in the form of drunken passengers, people attempting fare evasion and once in a while couples being a bit too sexual.”***

— Railways, UK, 102

***“Verbal abuse is regularly used against us, due to ticketless travel, delays etc.”***

— Railways, UK, 113

***“On a daily basis we’re subjected to verbal abuse.”***

— Railways, UK, 118

***“Irate passengers, who almost always calm down and apologise.”***

— Railways, UK, 102

***“Passengers who travel without tickets behave arrogantly and rudely. Others use abusive language when I refuse to do the ‘breaking into smaller bills’ which is not included in my duties, or if I cannot always give them directions on some places in the cities, especially in Sofia, which they want to visit.”***

— Urban public transport, Bulgaria, 223

***“Daily we are subjected to arrogant behaviour by passengers.”***

— *Urban public transport, Bulgaria, 224*

***“This morning, a passenger told me that he wanted to have all my data and then he would go to court because I had told him he had to pay to ship his luggage.”***

— *Civil aviation, Italy, 136*

***“Verbally aggressive passengers. The police nowadays do not want to come any more for verbal aggression.”***

— *Civil Aviation, Belgium, 232*

### *Sexually explicit and offensive comments and behaviour from customers*

Many comments reveal shocking levels of offensive and highly sexualised forms of harassment. Examples were given of sexually explicit behaviour, such as one man who exposed himself to a woman bus driver and several cases of men undoing their trouser zippers or urinating in front of a woman worker. It frequently involves customers invading the personal space of a woman.

***“He was name-calling and I was actually pushed and shoved and blocked into a corner with the man looming over me.”***

— *Railways, UK, 76*

***“[In the last five years] I have experienced three physical aggressions and incalculable verbal aggressions. Four times men showed me their private parts.”***

— *Railways, Italy, 127*

***“Verbal violence and intimidation from passengers: ‘You do not know who I am’, ‘I’ll call my lawyer and I’ll sue you’, pictures being taken secretly’, ‘You’re a bitch’, ‘You deserve a cancer’, ‘You deserve not to have children,’ ‘Ugly fat woman’, ‘Did you look at yourself in the mirror?’”***

— *Civil aviation, Italy, 136*

***“Constant verbal abuse daily, threats usually by males of all age groups, been physically injured four times by males and once by a female. Called names everyday about my gender and sexual orientation.”***

— *Railways, UK, 123*

***“Comments about my breasts, bottom felt, and if I could be bought. Speaking close to my face, called a ‘f\*\*king bitch!’”***

— Railways, UK, 49

***“There was a difficult situation in the train, where passengers have become loud and aggressive and have spat on me. I was cursed as a witch ... as well as a dumb woman and asshole.”***

— Railways, Switzerland, 253

***“[One passenger said] ‘No, not a girl driving, girls can’t drive a bus ... shouldn’t you be at home taking care of your husband and children?’”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 20

***“[A passenger made] inappropriate comments when I bent over to pick something up.”***

— Railways, UK, 64

***“Swearing mostly and demeaning comments about women and the job you do.”***

— Railways, UK, 68

***“Often I have had aggressive behaviour towards me from customers, who are polite to male staff members but not women. On one occasion, there were threats of violence from a customer, insisting I come out of the ticket office. And he will “show me what disrespect is.”***

— Railways, UK, 136

***“A customer flashed at me after using the toilet.”***

— Railways, UK, 137

***“Every day it seems that us females are demeaned on a regular basis. I have had all of the above done to me over the years and it seems to be getting progressively worse too!!”***

— Railways, UK, 138

***“Late night trains, men making inappropriate sexual comments, also verbally abused for challenging people on fares and if trains are delayed.”***

— Railways, UK, 112

***“Was asked by a customer to have sex in the toilet. Lewd comments on breasts. Football fans singing sexual comments including my name.”***

— Railways, UK, 153

***“Drunk customers demanding a kiss, being asked if I was a stripper, called a c\*\*t and a bitch, asked if I do anal, roared at, told to ‘f\*\*king come here’. Many incidents.”***

— Railways, UK, 154

***“When I have been working I have had a certain member of the public trying to kiss me on two different occasions and one actually made contact with my face. I have been shouted at and been called a f\*\*king c\*\*t by a member of the public.”***

— Railways, UK, 155

***“Asked to have sex in the toilet. Remarks about chest size.”***

— Railways, UK, 156

***“There are several different examples. [I have] been told that I’ve got a dildo shoved up my arse. Been asked to take 50 pounds for a blow job. Had a man do the tongue between index finger and middle finger to indicate licking me out”***

— Railways, UK, 157

***“Constantly verbally abused when there’s disruption being called luv, darling, sweetheart etc. by men/ colleagues. Have had coffee poured over me, have had names called to me, like ‘fat bitch’ when dealing with passengers.”***

— Railways, UK, 141

***“Comments about my appearance and unnecessary advances.”***

— Railways, UK, 141

***“Regularly get verbal abuse, threats and intimidation for just doing my job ... The sexual harassment has been non-physical, just verbal and gestures.”***

— Railways, UK, 145

***“There have been many incidents. One involved a drunk man trying to hug me and two of my colleagues, and commenting on the size of my breasts.”***

— Urban public transport, UK, 151

*Intimidation and threats of violence, death or rape from customers*

Intimidation and threats of violence, death and rape are a common form of verbal harassment experienced of women transport workers. The comments below show just how serious these threats are.

***“In April 2015, I had a cruel experience, where I was threatened with death by an angry passenger. He was suddenly furious because he didn’t want me to drive across the bridge in Elverum, and he threatened to kill me several times. I got great help from the police who arrested him. One of my passengers also filmed it all. After this incident, I got very good help from my manager and several of my colleagues.”***

— Urban public transport, Norway, 2

***“Day to day we deal with threats, verbal abuse, mainly at weekends.”***

— Railways, UK, 159

***“[I received] death threats and was pursued outside of work, [I was] abused and cornered.”***

— Railways, Germany, 294

***“When a passenger refused to pay because he had no ticket to board a train, he threatened me and said that he would ‘cut my throat’. The police officer in station heard what was happening and arrested him.***

— Railways, UK, 61

***“[I was screamed at and received a death threat from a passenger], then he pulled my telephone out of my hand and began to yell and insult my superior, who I was talking to, as I was trying to fix things on the floor. It created anxiety in doing my job properly.”***

— Railways, Italy, 135

***“Have experience of all [threats, intimidation, verbal abuse, offensive behaviour and sexual harassment], latest one is I have a male come through the station yelling at me to smile, or if I don’t do something regarding their smart card overcharge get abuse from that too.”***

— Railways, UK, 58

***“A man threatened to anally rape a disabled passenger and then me. He threatened to kill me.”***

— Railways, UK, 140

***"I've been spat at twice, called every offensive name. A man slapped my backside as I walked through the train. [I have] been threatened to have my head smashed in. A woman told me she hoped I get raped. A passenger ripped up his tickets and threw them in my face."***

— Railways, UK, 91

***"The worst I've ever experienced is having a guy shout at me in front of a carriage full of passengers he hoped that I would die and that I would get raped. Over and over. This then followed by him calling me every swear word he could think off. Just because I told him his ticket was [invalid] ... After my train left the station I was left in a state of shock, unable to process what had just happened. Then I just started crying uncontrollably and shaking. I had to be taken off the train. For a few weeks after I was scared to go on that route again."***

— Railways, UK, 53

***"A customer on the train called me many different offensive names, was screaming at the top of his voice in my face, barged me and threatened to punch me and had his hand in a fist up to my face. All I did was ask if he had a ticket and he just bombarded me."***

— Railways, UK, 128

***"Daily threats, spat at, verbally abused most days, pushed out of gateline, have been threatened with a knife, along with being physically assaulted."***

— Railways, UK, 90

***"I was threatened with a knife"***

— Railways, Germany, 291

***"Often swore at, verbally abused and threatened."***

— Urban public transport, UK, 120

***"Intimidation, abuse of power, yelling, telling you how to do my job. 'If I had a gun I would shoot you now'"***

— Civil aviation, Belgium, 231

***"Threats and verbal abuse are commonplace. Offensive behaviour occurs, say, monthly. Physical violence is less common. One assault in 10 years."***

— Railways, UK, 60

***“This has occurred twice in three months. First occasion two men threatened me after a young boy came into my station asking for help as they were threatening him. I was told, ‘I will fuck you up. No one will protect you, not the police or your staff: They laughed.”***

— Urban public transport, UK, 139

***“I was threatened with a knife and reported the case to the police.”***

— Railways, Germany, 272

***“A man threatened to push me down an escalator. A man spat in my face.”***

— Railways, UK, 37

***“Masked youths harassed and threatened me and a passenger on Halloween. They isolated my bus so that I couldn’t start it by letting the air out. I was left alone in the dark waiting for a fitter to arrive ... No one asked me after this incident how I was.”***

— Railways, UK, 89

***“The most recent case of abuse towards me was around two weeks ago when a drunk passenger swore at me and threatened to track me down and harm me and my family.”***

— Railways, UK, 85

### *Physical violence and abuse from customers*

A significant number of respondents reported that they had experienced physical violence. For example, being spat at (reported by over 50 respondents), hair pulling, punching, being shot at, rubbing up against a woman’s body, men exposing themselves to a woman, sexual assault, are amongst the range of examples given of physical violence. Many respondents to the survey spoke of repeated forms of physical violence and abuse. Often physical violence and abuse is preceded by verbal aggression and threats from passengers. Examples of physical violence, which often includes verbal threats and having to deal with extremely angry and violence passengers, as the following quotations show:

***“I was grabbed by an angry passenger by my shirt”***

— Railways, UK, 55

***“During ticket inspection, a passenger grabbed me at the rear and hit me in the face ... I reported to the police.”***

— Railways, Germany, 273

***"A youth passing in a car shot at the window when I was at the wheel ... I was angry at first, afterwards came thoughts of what might have happened."***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 7

***"He sat in the middle of the back seat, continued to drink and started to smoke too. He also had his zipper open, exposing himself."***

— Urban public transport, UK, 71

***"I have been pawed at, threatened with a knife, putting up with constant verbal abuse, threatened, slapped and pushed."***

— Railways, Germany, 274

***"Being punched in the back by a commuter who was frustrated that the train station was closed due to overcrowding"***

— Railways, UK, 58

***"I have been shot at, had stones thrown at me, been verbally and physically threatened. Been spat at and sexually harassed."***

— Road transport, UK, 33

***"A customer who did not have a train ticket thumped me in the face. Just because I told her she did not have a train ticket."***

— Railways, UK, 60

***"Being sworn at, kissed – and abusive customers."***

— Railways, UK, 159

***"I was touched on the backside by a 15-year old."***

— Railways, UK, 47

***"Spit in the face."***

— Railways, UK, 41

***"I was recently assaulted on a platform for refusing travel to two people who had just trespassed."***

— Railways, UK, 57

***"I was physically assaulted by a man whilst doing my job and was dragged from the train, sworn at and verbally abused by this man whilst doing my job."***

— Railways, UK, 62

***“A passenger shoved me in the ribs because a conductor refused them travel.”***

— Railways, UK, 65

***“Passenger grabbing and pinching my butt while walking by.”***

— Tourism, Belgium, 233

***“In our job, it’s a daily fact that passengers insult you verbally or get aggressive. Most of the time it’s because they are not [abiding by the] regulations and rules the airline applies. Three years ago a passenger attacked me at the gate. I was 27 weeks pregnant.”***

— Civil aviation, Belgium, 234

***“When I was on the schoolchildren’s services I was sworn at by a few, pushed and they put up a lot of opposition, even when they did already have a ticket or pass.”***

— Maritime transport, UK, 72

***“College students fighting near my cab door and I nearly got hit in the process of their fight in the face with their fist. Also a drink man nearly elbowed my face through my cab door.”***

— Road transport, UK, 75

***“The worst case was when a passenger threw a glass bottle at me.”***

— Railways, UK, 81

***“I was verbally and physically assaulted in May 2016 by a female customer. She screamed abuse and spat in my face all because my ticket machine failed to print her ticket on demand and she missed her train.”***

— Railways, UK, 88

***“I have been assaulted in the workplace and also been groped, mostly the weekends or festive periods.”***

— Railways, UK, 118

***“Assaulted by customer who was drunk. Verbally abused by customers on numerous occasions. Grabbed and sexually harassed by customer.”***

— Railways, UK, 100

***“Brick in face causing lifetime disfigurement. Various assaults the most recent resulting in long term leg nerve problems and pain.”***

— Railways, UK, 104

***"I get lots of verbal abuse almost daily and I've had a man trying to touch my face, and he got abusive when I wouldn't let him."***

— Railways, UK, 105

***"Been punched by a passenger, groped by male passenger, sworn at and had a bottle thrown at me."***

— Railways, UK, 109

***"I have been verbally abused and spat at."***

— Railways, UK, 110

***"I have been sworn at many times, been confronted by male/female passengers on the platform, threatening to beat me up."***

— Railways, UK, 107

***"Sworn at, verbally abused, touched inappropriately."***

— Railways, UK, 121

***"Sworn at by customers, touched and tried to be kissed, approached by a gang while doing a security check, I didn't stick around to find out why when they asked, 'What are you doing out of the station, sweetheart?'"***

— Railways, UK, 176

***"I have been sworn at repeatedly whilst carrying out my duties. I have been groped from my shoulder down to the top of my bum and I've been threatened by two male passengers."***

— Urban public transport, UK, 134

***"Have been pushed and grabbed by my collar by a customer. Been spat at. Been harassed, threatened and intimidated by a customer that kept coming back. Customers swear and name-call literally every day, quite a few times per day."***

— Railways, UK, 138

***"I was slapped by a passenger across the face."***

— Railways, UK, 142

***"Pulled off a train backwards by a passenger and he tried to kiss me."***

— Railways, UK, 143

***"Very often travellers open the cabin door, because most cabins cannot be locked. This is startling and diverts our attention from the traffic."***

— Urban public transport, Bulgaria, 225

### *Risks in dealing with intoxicated passengers*

Many respondents spoke of regular insults and verbal abuse from travellers which is exacerbated by alcohol and drug use. Many recounted the problems they faced in having to deal with verbally aggressive and physically violent drunken customers. Unacceptable behaviour, including sexual harassment (sexually abusive and demeaning verbal comments, sexual intimidation and threats, sexually explicit hand gestures, bottom pinching, groping) and threats of violence and rape often take place on late night trains or buses, when passengers or groups of passengers are drunk.

The following are a selection of comments of the risks of violence faced by women workers because passengers are intoxicated:

***“Traveller without a ticket, drunk, swears and smokes in the train. [I received] insults and burns on my left forearm from the cigarette.”***

— Railways, Austria, 296

***“Late trains on Friday and Saturday full of drunks with no support. So, abuse is a regular occurrence.”***

— Railways, UK, 117

***“Offensive behaviour in sexist comments and drunken passengers who are slightly intimidating.”***

— Inland waterways, UK, 118

***“Working late night barriers, you are exposed to the public who drink heavily, on a normal evening you are sworn at, shouted at, told that they will see us again, meaning in an intimidating way. I have been groped by a woman and kissed.”***

— Railways, UK, 132

***“Drunken passenger exiting the train verbally assaulted me with sexual comments and then made a grab at me, pulling my hair as I stepped away from him.”***

— Railways, UK, 135

***“I have had three incidents this year all on train by drunk male passengers from being verbally abused threatened and nearly spat on. Two of these resulted in arrests; one got away with a warning.”***

— Railways, UK, 106

***“Passenger was high on drugs, and was lashing out. He kicked out and hit me.”***

— Railways, UK, 107

***“Verbal, sexual harassment, threats and offensive behaviour happens most days in my job role. Working with the public who are often under the influence of alcohol and drugs or who have mental problems is a daily occurrence.”***

— Railways, UK, 101

***“Usually these incidents involve intoxicated men who become verbally aggressive if you do not take kindly to their sexual harassment. I’ve been spoken to disgustingly especially on late night trains where it is the norm to face abuse ... I feel a lot of anxiety when working on a train where there are groups of drunken men.”***

— Railways, UK, 70

***“A man who I refused to serve alcohol to because he was being aggressive to other customers asked me if I was on my period because I was being moody and not serving him more booze.”***

— Railways, UK, 74

***“Once there was a guy on the bus who had fallen asleep and was either under alcohol or drug influence. He missed the last stop and became aggressive and wanted me to drop him off in a place that was unsafe. Told him that I would drop him off as soon as it was safe. He then took a couple of swings at me ... and finally he took hold of the steering wheel and tried to steer the bus to the roadside. I managed to stop the bus, without anything serious happening and he took off as soon as I opened the door.”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 7

***“Passengers who had drunk too much, and then misbehaved verbally, and insulted me. Passenger took pills with alcohol and then became so aggressive towards me before landing that I had to flee to the cockpit for the landing.”***

— Civil aviation, Switzerland, 254

***“[I have had] threats plus verbal assault under alcohol!”***

— Civil aviation, Switzerland, 255

***“The most recent was a drunk who started shouting abuse at fellow passengers, he then missed his stop, then started shouting at myself, culminating in the remark, ‘Just f\*\*k off and drop dead’. It shook me up, because I’d done nothing wrong. He’d failed to indicate he wanted to get off. As soon as he rang the bell, I stopped at the next bus stop. Luckily only a short distance away.”***

— Urban public transport, UK, 71

***“Name calling, threats of physical/sexual assault, tickets thrown in your face because you refuse to let people travel without the necessary travel papers or tell them they have missed their booked service.”***

— Railways, UK, 61

***“Drunks wanting to board train, when it was unsafe to travel, and after being told they are not allowed to travel!”***

— Railways, UK, 50

***“Customers and employees around use abusive language, have seen a drunk man showing his private parts.”***

— Railways, UK, 52

***“A traveller without a ticket was drunk, was swearing and smoking in the train ... he was first sat completely bent over the table and then suddenly threw a punch with his fist.”***

— Railways, Austria, 297

***“A group of drunken travellers insulted me obscenely and chased me down the train.”***

— Urban public transport, Germany, 275

***“I sent a customer out of the regional train because he was very aggressive; he was collecting bottles and bothering customers at their seats. He pushed me and I was afraid. No one offered any help although the train was crowded ... I will not say anything again [as dealing with difficult situations is so risky].”***

— Railways, Germany, 276

***“During the ticket control, a traveller pulled down his pants, took his belt and hit me.”***

— Urban public transport, Germany, 275

### *Risks in dealing with frustrated customers /customers without tickets*

Many examples of verbal and physical violence arose because customers either had outdated tickets, tickets for the wrong train or because they refused to pay for a ticket; in some cases problems occurred because of ticketless travel. In other cases, public transport delays and overcrowding, particularly in rail transport, also led to some customers taking out their anger and frustration on transport workers. Often bus drivers are threatened by passengers if the bus is running late. Respondents spoke of the violence and harassment occurring because of things that were beyond the control of the individual worker, such as increases in ticket prices, overcrowding, cancellation of buses or trains and delays. Many of these problems are relating to shortages in staff and workers being in more isolated work situations, where previously they may have worked alongside a co-worker.

***“Due to staff cuts we are more vulnerable now than before as well as the passengers.”***

— Railways, UK, 81

***“Verbal attacks by dissatisfied passengers, e.g. due to missing special meals or because they cannot sit where they want to, but more generally complains against the company to let off steam. Personal attacks.”***

— Civil aviation, Germany, 277

***“Frustrated passengers who are dissatisfied and take it out on the crew.”***

— Civil aviation, Germany, 278

***“I stopped a guy who did not pay and told him that he must pay. He hit me across the arm, and my arm hit the wall edge ... I got a real bruise. The guy then started to shout and told me I was a f\*\*king bitch. Then he pushed off and kicked the payment device.”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 5

***“I always get offensive remarks from passengers when I don't let them travel for free. They say things like 'bitch,' 'whore,' 'haven't you had any dick in a while?' I have even been spat at two times when denying free-riders. Violence has been close when I refused. It is an intimidating atmosphere and verbal insults occur in most cases when I refuse to let passengers ride free. ”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 8

***“You unfortunately suffer a lot of verbal attacks and threats for doing your job and asking the travellers to show a valid ticket or step off the bus ... Often when you reject travellers who do not have valid tickets, they call you 'whore' or 'c\*\*t'. Or they ask you if you had not got laid for a long time. One***

***threatened to set his dog on me if he weren't allowed on the bus. I have been spat on. I have been told that somebody really ought to kick my ass, but I was already so ugly. A guy entered the bus and placed his genitals on the cashtray. Another guy tried to pick me up and wanted to make out while I was driving."***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 16

### *Risks of violence faced by women working weekends and late shifts*

Working late into the night can also be risky for women transport workers. In one case a UK railway worker who finished her shift after midnight was verbally attacked by a customer who had waited for her shift to end. Even though there was CCTV footage of the incident, she was not shown the footage. It was a stressful experience, exacerbated by a lack of concern by the company:

***"I was shaken; the most upsetting thing is that the company did not show any concern ... personally I felt alone at my workplace."***

— Road transport, UK, 57

***"[Problems occurring on a Saturday night], the first time I was bitten on the hand by a passenger. The second time I was threatened with death by a male passenger, and was very glad that I was in an enclosed cockpit. The third time I gave lifesaving first aid to a passenger who had been shot, and the perpetrators were not arrested yet."***

— Urban public transport, Norway, 27

***"We have to now lock ourselves away in a secure area away from the platform if there is severe disruption after the evening peak. We can no longer be visible or helpful as our efforts are not appreciated."***

— Railways, UK, 45

### *Strategies used by women transport workers to be safe*

Women transport workers regularly have strategies to avoid potentially dangerous situations, such as not walking through trains for football matches unless an alarm is pulled, or not approaching anyone who is illegally begging or busking. Strategies used by women bus drivers and ticket checkers included being constantly on guard and being attentive to what is going on around them, changing shifts or bus routes, and stopping working late and night shifts.

***“Often they spit and jostle you – sometimes they try to attack you. Often they succeed ... On the train I’m afraid and I step from one compartment to the other looking back”***

— *Railways, Italy, 153*

***“A passenger followed me because we were late and then ran after me [through the train]. He said I had to drive him home and waited for me at the final stop. I was alone on the train ... I am more careful now and I would not take the train alone at night.”***

— *Railways, Germany, 279*

***“I try to remove all objects from the service desk which could be thrown at me.”***

— *Railways, Germany, 280*

***“I have been called a mannish woman (butch) ... often I have been threatened. It makes you feel insecure and you get scared that the next time it could be the same. Often you just let the passengers with the wrong tickets continue their journeys because you do not want to expose yourself to verbal attacks.”***

— *Railways, Germany, 280*

***“I don’t let it bother me too much; I just accept it. It is only when you really think through what happened that you realise you have been exposed to something that is not okay. However, I’m good at speaking out and mark my displeasure.”***

— *Urban public transport, Sweden, 21*

***“I’m afraid and keep pepper spray in my bag.”***

— *Urban public transport, Norway, 29*

# Effects of violence on women transport workers

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The ETF survey provides alarming evidence of the profound and lasting physical and psychological effect of violence and harassment on women workers, which was exacerbated if the issue was not tackled and dealt with quickly. The following are a selection of comments made about the physical and mental ill health effects of violence and harassment.

## Physical and mental ill-health

It is not uncommon for transport workers to experience serious and lasting effects on their physical and mental health and wellbeing:

***“Mental stress which led to sick leave.”***

— Railways, Germany, 271

***“Sleep disorder and anxiety.”***

— Railways, Germany, 286

***“I was offered psychological help and was advised what my next steps are.”***

— Railways, Germany, 286

***“Severe diseases: heart attack, anxiety disorder, suicide attempt”***

— Railways, Germany, 269, harassed by a manager and colleagues

***“Morally I am down and I feel constantly sick. I have aches and stomach cramps.”***

— Railways, Italy, 216, harassed by manager and colleagues

***“Blood pressure, nervous breakdowns and a lot of things that I do not want to comment on.”***

— Civil aviation, Bulgaria, 222, abuse by a co-worker

***“I was very stressed and I had panic attacks. I was unable to go to work without worrying that I would have to work with the involved party ... it made work very hard and distressing.”***

— Railways, UK, 93, harassed and abused by customers

***“I was attacked several times over the years. Last year I was sexually assaulted and it was devastating ... now I take medication and have seen a psychologist and psychiatrist. I struggle to resume a normal life.”***

— Railways, Italy, 175, physically and sexually assaulted by a passenger

***“I now have hand tremors, even after a small incident... I have to stop a few minutes before continuing the job.”***

— Railways, Italy, 164

***“[I had a recent nervous breakdown following the constant insults from passengers]... every day you argue with travellers without tickets. You get insults, threats and bad words are normal. Sometimes you receive spitting in the face and shoving.”***

— Railways, Italy, 138

***“It was a colleague who attacked me in the canteen before the first shift in the morning. He groped me, kissed me while he held me down. I managed to push him away. This incident was taken seriously ... I struggled with anxiety and depression. Was on sick leave for a while.”***

— Urban public transport, Norway, 30

***“I hated going to work and was scared the entire time [following an attack by a passenger on the gateline]. I felt enough was not done to protect me.”***

— Railways, UK, 69

***“[The violence] made to feel worthless and low.”***

— Railways, UK, 125

***“It sits like a thorn in my side”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 5

***“I felt scared, sad, downhearted, attacked...”***

— Urban public transport, Norway, 31

***“One feels very insecure some days.”***

— Railways, Germany, 281

***“I became more anxious and my self-confidence suffered greatly.”***

— Railways, Germany, 282

***“Anxiety, sleep disorders, panic attacks, and anxiety about going to work.”***

— Railways, Germany, 283

***“It makes you sick. Nightmares and unjust treatment remain unforgotten.”***

— Railways, Germany, 284

***“Stress and fear [after constant harassment by customers].”***

— Urban public transport, Bulgaria, 225

***“[After I was sexually assaulted by a colleague] I received counselling for stress and anxiety, following a diagnosis by my GP.”***

— Maritime transport, International, 301

***“Shaken and disempowered.”***

— Railways, UK, 66

***“Made me feel angry.”***

— Railways, UK, 67

***“Being shouted at, belittled, undermined ... sexist language ... all lead to stress, tears, a feeling of inadequacy and I am considering leaving the job because it’s so hard to be female.”***

— Urban public transport, UK, 73

***“A guy at the bar was trying to flirt’ with me. He was telling a customer that came to the bar that I was going to give him a blow job in the toilet. I quickly said no I’m not, and apologised to the other customer ... It made me feel worthless and embarrassed in front of other customers.”***

— Railways, UK, 74

***“I feel devalued and have lost confidence, I am demotivated and my mental health has been at its lowest for most of this year.”***

— Railways, UK, 77

***“I often take it to heart, go quiet and talk myself down.”***

— Road transport, UK, 91

***“It caused stress and depression”***

— Railways, Italy, 157

***“I was so stressed ... and often I fell ill. I had to fight alone, I was isolated and put on sick leave by the company that did not fulfil its legal obligations when I reported the facts. People in the company did not want to testify in my favour, not even my union shop steward ...”***

— Other, France, 304

Some women were frightened because they faced threats when they came off duty, including when they were walking home from work. Others said that they felt they were being stalked at work, which caused stress and anxiety:

***“At one point I had to stop driving one specific line because there was a man who always waited at the last stop of the line. I felt bad and was worried about what could happen to me.”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 16

***“I had a hard time coming back to work, was very afraid it would happen again.”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 19

***“I still feel nervous, especially if I am doing lone station working. I’ve been stressed, it’s affected my sleep, weight and my behaviour. I tend to fail aspects of my job role from fear of a confrontation or threats.”***

— Urban public transport, UK, 94

***“Made me scared and made me feel unsafe to move.”***

— Railways, UK, 49

***“[There are from people travelling without tickets], they create unpleasant episodes that create fear, discomfort, especially the psychological stress, anxiety and fear ... they offend and threaten me as a woman.”***

— Railways, Italy, 173

***“Sense of helplessness and insecurity.”***

— Railways, Italy, 174

***“Shocking and disturbing.”***

— Railways, Switzerland, 256

***“It is demeaning.”***

— Railways, UK, 52

***“The behaviour [of customers] has belittled my ideals and me physically ... It is demoralising and demeaning.”***

— Customer care representative, Italy, 140

***“I felt humiliated.”***

— Railways, Italy, 141

***“When verbally abused, I have felt shaken up afterwards if I felt the imminent danger of violence ... When I have been spat upon, I have gone home because I felt shaken up and disgusted and just wanted a shower and scrub clean.”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 8

Most respondents spoke of being upset. For some women, a lack of seriousness given to the tackling of violence and harassment by colleagues, union representatives and managers, further impacted on the trauma and stress experienced.

***“I was more upset at how this was handled by my management than I was by the incident itself. The man was allowed to continue his journey and the manager didn’t even get his details for my police report.”***

— Railways, UK, 84

***“[In the customer call centre the harassment is daily] ... You remain upset all day long. You get depressed. You feel powerless because you have to keep up professional behaviour.”***

— Ports, Italy, 218

***“I’m sad, upset and angry, but also disappointed ... I have only reported two incidents. One yesterday, the other one year ago. I am an elected union rep myself ... The last report was on a union officer.”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 20

Others spoke of being angry and that had become jaded:

***“Insulted me, I felt indignant and angry.”***

— Urban public transport, Bulgaria, 223

***“I’m affected in the way that I sometimes get completely crazy pissed-off, or start to shake from the shock.”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 9

***“Sometimes you get really angry, but mostly pretty jaded.”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 6

Some women had been forced to take time off work with stress and ill-health.

***“[Lost confidence and poor health resulting from name calling] Having to deal with aggressive passengers and being punched in the face, I was screamed at and pushed by passengers, being called stupid ... I work for a big company and do not feel protected.”***

— Railways, UK, 88

***“The last physical attack took me off work for ever – I’m still not right today.”***

— Railways, UK, 78

***“Seriously depressed, 11 months off work, felt stressed and very nervous, anxious ... I had to leave the merchant navy after 17 years, due to ill health from the abuse, harassment, anxiety and depression I had suffered.”***

— Maritime transport, UK, 95

***“It is doubtful whether one can bear it until retirement!”***

— Railways, Germany, 259

***“[I was] spat at during ticket control and called a whore, pushed out of the train which led to physical injuries and disability.***

— Railways, Germany, 288

***“[Having been sexually harassed by several colleagues and taking two years’ sick leave and another three years of rehabilitation] I am now more sensitive to attacks of various kinds. I feel worse. I sleep worse. I have become afraid. I have not regained the energy I had before the sexual harassment. In particular, sexual harassment and the constant harassment from passengers break you down. The great lack of support from the employers makes it sometimes very heavy.”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 11

There is also a wider impact on other family members and relationships:

***“It still affects me now. I don’t trust men, it helped ruin a six-year long relationship with my boyfriend. I get anxious, struggle to sleep, lost out on promotion due to lack of confidence.”***

— Railways, UK, 51

***“Negatively, not only on me but my whole family. Continuous tension, quarrels, high blood pressure, nervous breakdowns.”***

— Civil aviation, Bulgaria, 226

## Loss of trust in an employer and colleagues

***“The sexual harassment from my boss made me feel like I’m not taken seriously as an employee. It destroyed my trust and made me question whether the whole company is like this. I find it hard to network now, as I don’t know if people have other motives.”***

— Urban public transport, UK, 92

***“I have no confidence in my superiors, I look with suspicion my colleagues, I live a state of anxiety during operation, especially during the evening or night shifts.”***

— Urban public transport, Italy, 139

***“Violence from customers has affected me in a negative way. Very often, I’m afraid, I do not feel safe on my job.”***

— Railways, Italy, 137

***“It made me feel in danger.”***

— Railways, Italy, 138

## Wanting to quit the job

Often women quit the job when they have had enough of being sexually harassed. One school bus driver in Sweden said that ten drivers have already quit their job because of harassment by the supervisor. She said:

***“I feel bad when I go to work [because of the harassment from the supervisor].”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 22

***“Violence has affected me negatively ... I don’t go to work happy any more.”***

— Railways, Italy, 132

***“One time when I sat and ate and read newspaper, a colleague came up from behind, he settled over me and bent me over the table pressing my face into my sandwich as he stood behind me and humped me like dog. Pinching butts and boobs, whistling and making comments like, ‘Women only become bus drivers to catch men’, etc. In the end this ruined me and I had to change job. I worked for that company for seven years and no one intervened.”***

— Urban public transport, Norway, 30

***“Is this why many women leave their jobs, so they will not be harassed? Because they do not want to fight and report those who have done it? And at the end maybe they choose to take their lives? Suicide is so common in Sweden and now I have to consider why. How do you think we can continue to work with such people? Is it a good working environment?”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 1

***“It [explicit pictures of me being passed around the canteen] made me want to quit my job, I felt isolated and bullied.”***

— Railways, UK, 68

***“I have had a great deal of verbal abuse in the form of shouting in my face, finger pointing and waiving very close. Whenever this happens I feel like looking for another job, but I can't afford to leave. I'm stressed and feel like taking a long time off sick. I've contemplated going to the doctors to explain how I feel!”***

— Railways, UK, 45

***“I have quit my job as a team leader and have developed a hateful relationship to people. I'm cynical and from time to time I have little or no inclination to go to work.”***

— Urban public transport, Norway, 30

***“It [being spat at in the face by a customer] made me want to give my job up at the time. I felt repulsed and unclean”.***

— Railways, UK, 89

***“Not a positive experience [being harassed by a colleague], because one thinks about it after the work and I considered changing my profession. I believe that my depression also comes from it.”***

— Railways, Germany, 287

## Effects on work performance and on the quality of service provided by transport workers

Several respondents spoke of the effect of offensive verbal abuse and insults that prevented them from doing her job properly.

***“Verbal abuse and insults related to the sexual sphere as ‘suck me, bitch’, etc. spitting in the face and shoving ... I cannot any longer implement regulations for customers, and I often ignore any problems in order to avoid a confrontation.”***

— Railways, Italy, 219

***“[As a result of constant harassment] I'm very distant and reserved towards passengers.”***

— Urban public transport, Germany, 289

***“Apprehension about other customers.”***

— Railways, UK, 60

***“I'm just doing my job and it annoys me when I'm sworn at. Sometimes I become slightly aggressive.”***

— Railways, Germany, 290

# Reporting cases and making complaints of violence and harassment

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**M**any respondents to the ETF survey stated that in their experience violence against women is so widespread and pervasive in the transport sector that it is difficult to report and challenge it. The ETF survey found different reasons for not reporting an incident, including a fear that they would not be taken seriously by managers or union representatives, that it would have a negative impact on work relationships and that it could have a negative effect on future promotion and career development opportunities. Some women were embarrassed about reporting unwanted sexual behaviour to their union or employer and others unaware of how to report an incident. In addition, many expressed a fear of losing their job or being victimised if they complained. Very few women reported the incident to a union representative. In some cases, respondents to the survey reported that the company dealt with the issue very quickly and without the involvement of a union representative.

The following are a selection of comments about women respondents' experiences of reporting violence and harassment:

***"I have been taught to deal with problems myself and to seek assistance as a last resort."***

— Urban public transport, Bulgaria, 224

***"Violence in Stockholm is extensive, and ultimately it's all about turning off your emotions to be able to work."***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 10

***"I once went to court because a guy touched my backside four times, with all video evidence, but he was acquitted."***

— Railways, UK, 122

***"Of course, at that time I was exposed to severe stress and anxiety. The most frustrating thing in such a situation is that I had the courage to tell the truth, but the opposite managerial side lacks any morality ... the company level decisions are made subjectively."***

— Urban public transport, Bulgaria, 227

Some respondents spoke of a loss of trust in their male colleagues and in the company, and isolated themselves to prevent further harassment.

***“A colleague pinned me down and tried to kiss me. The sexual incident gave me a hard time sleeping and I lost all trust in male colleagues, and in the way the company handled the case.”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 12

***“Every month I put this point on our [trade union] agenda and try to change the attitude of our employer, and try to move him to take action that can change the situation ... I’ve been fighting already for several years over this, but still nothing changes.”***

— Civil aviation, Belgium, 235

***“In most cases, management react when a problem has occurred, but there is little done around prevention. Suggestions included giving information to customers that abuse against staff is not tolerated.”***

— Railways, UK, 88

***“I was not given the good advice, support and guidance I needed.”***

— Other, Belgium, 236

An overwhelming finding from the survey is that there is under-reporting of sexual harassment by co-workers, supervisors and managers. Some of this stems from the issues discussed earlier about the pervasive culture of sexual harassment in the sector, which lead women to fear retaliation and further victimization, and not being taken seriously.

***“I was sexually assaulted by a member of staff, of which I reported to my manager and the police. It was NFA’d due to lack of evidence. This happened about four years back but I still fear him. Only two days ago I had to face being alone in a room with him ... I didn’t report the sexual assault for about a year after it happened, as the person who did it was well liked among my colleagues. I didn’t think people would believe me and I wasn’t sure what would happen if I did report it.”***

— Railways, UK, 53

***“To report [sexual harassment] would isolate me further within the crew; I would be seen as a whistle-blower, changing the dynamics of a male-dominated work environment, where the general belief from the vocal majority is that they are accommodating me, not that I’ve earned the right ... I didn’t notify my trade union for the same issues as above – whistle-blowers generally have to give up their position through isolation.”***

— Maritime transport, UK, 43

***“I could not report the sexual intimidation by my manager, as it was too subtle to prove and there were no witnesses.”***

— Railways, France, 306

Furthermore, in cases of sexual harassment by co-workers, supervisors and managers some companies are seen to perpetuate this culture of sexual harassment by covering up cases:

***“In the company, there is a culture of actively hiding the sexual harassment by men. Men in leading/managerial positions are often the ones who violate women.”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 18

***“If you defend yourself as a victim, you quickly become the perpetrator in our system. Does one have to put up defencelessly with everything?”***

— Railways, Germany, 292

***“Due to my bad experience, I believe that the perpetrators enjoy more protection, and as a woman one must fear the consequences, if one complains ... I know from experience!”***

— Railways, Germany, 283

***“The employees no longer have the confidence to speak out.”***

— Civil aviation, Switzerland, 251

***“When I reported the sexual assault at work it had an effect that I didn’t see coming. I kind of expected it a little bit, but not on the scale that it turned out to be. I was absolutely destroyed by the rumours and lies that people spread around about me.”***

— Railways, UK, 53

***“I started working in the new garage, and one of my colleagues wanted us to use the sauna together, and he would massage me and he would sign me out early so that I could go home earlier. I reported him to my supervisor but the supervisor just talked to him and wrote a letter saying that he was not allowed to do it again. But according to the law, the employer must ensure that it will not happen again ... Two months ago, his friend who is our team-leader, talked bad about me behind my back. Four of my colleagues heard him. According to him, I work badly because I’m a woman and I sleep with one of my colleagues. This case is ongoing but I cannot believe in anyone else now, now that I know that they protect him.”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 1

***“In the case of harassing bosses or colleagues, no! If I complain they make my life miserable. And those who previously have been reported get no penalty. I have seen it several times.”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 15

***“I feel really bad all the time and every other night I cry because sometimes I ask myself: is it right to report or just be quiet? Who will listen to us?”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 1

***“The one person who could have backed me, backed my attacker. Who would believe my word over both of theirs? My attacker was a young father – charming and charismatic to everyone else. Most of the 220 male apprentices looked up to him.”***

— Railways, UK, 51

***“It would have attracted unnecessary attention, maybe with no positive outcome”.***

— Railways, UK, 52

***“I thought I had found the solution to a problem. When I suggested this to the boss, he scolded me and informed me that he was the boss and I was not. I was frustrated – a little angry.”***

— Urban public transport, Norway, 26

An important finding from the survey is that reporting on violence and harassment from customers is only taken seriously if there are physical injuries, in which case reports are regularly made to the police. Other cases of sexual harassment, including intimidation and sexually offensive and threatening verbal abuse, appear not to be treated so seriously.

***“I asked a colleague to call [the employer], but he failed to do as he said “it would cause to much paper work...he is my union rep.”***

— Railways, UK, 50

***“I have witnessed all of these things [violence, intimidation, sexual harassment etc.] and reported them every time they happen. Nothing seems to come out of it”***

— Railways, UK, 103

## Reporting to a trade union

In the majority of cases women did not report cases of violence and harassment to their unions. Reasons given included not knowing who to report to in a union, not being a union member, not trusting union reps – who were seen to be either ineffective or more likely to support management than a woman worker – and not seeing the relevance of a union rep. Admin workers particularly felt unsupported by their union reps.

Positive comments were also made about unions. For example, several respondents spoke of how their union rep or shop steward had encouraged workers to report cases and make complaints.

***“[My union rep] attended the meeting with my manager with me.”***

— Railways, UK, 59

***“My union rep was fantastic; the perpetrator was stood down and I received practical as well as emotional support.”***

— Urban public transport, UK, 63

***“The union works all the time on finding solutions to different problems in the workplace.”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 17

***“Fantastic. I could call them anytime and they also made sure I was accompanied by a colleague the first few shifts following the incident.”***

— Urban public transport, Norway, 27

***“The union asked how I was and if I needed anything and to know they were there for me.”***

— Road transport, UK, 91

***“I received help and support from the youth representative of FTTUB.”***

— Urban public transport, Bulgaria, 225

***“They stood behind me and told me that if I wanted to lodge a complaint they were ready to support me and to do whatever is necessary.”***

— Railways, Bulgaria, 220

***“They [the union] defended me, with the support of a colleague from [the company] who, in the work place, has mediated to make sure that these situations will not arise again.”***

— Environmental hygiene worker, transport company, Italy, 217

***“They [my union] listened to me and declared they were available to defend me in case of further problems.”***

— Railways, Italy, 155

***“As member of Filt-Cgil, I reported the problems discussed at the women’s coordination meetings. My union took charge of the requests and asked for separate toilet facilities ... As for the attitudes, the situation has changed and improved with the increasing number of female workers in every sector, even technical ones, and with a higher presence of young workers; they are more respectful of their colleagues.”***

— Railways, Italy, 156

However, some respondents made negative comments about their union:

***“A colleague (who is a union officer), has harassed me sexually, and has tried to make me spy and sneak on other colleagues.”***

— Urban public transport, Norway, 2

***“The union does nothing. They have no desire for real change.”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 10

***“I cannot stand talking about the incidents, I’m still so disappointed about how my union failed me.”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 18

***“I cancelled my membership to the unions many years ago because I believed that unionists should, at least for some hours a day, do their job instead of staying comfortably seated on a chair talking about things they do not know.”***

— Railways, Italy, 153

***“Unions were not even informed because at that time I lost my confidence in unions.”***

— Railways, Italy, 216

***“Nothing, they [the union] didn’t even ask [after I had experienced racist and sexist abuse]. When I pointed out the need to write an occupational injury report, the health and safety rep shouted that if that was so f\*\*king important, why didn’t I just write it myself?”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 13

***“Five years ago ... I received threats from colleagues belonging to other trade unions, as I was a worker representative of [another company] and, moreover, a woman ... It has strengthened me and convinced that nothing will stop me, and I will continue to fight for women’s rights.”***

— Environmental hygiene worker, transport company, Italy, 154

***“The trade unions do know what goes on late night trains and have done nothing about it. Maybe they could consider having more than one ticket examiner on late night trains in order to create a safer environment.”***

— Railways, UK, 36

## Company policies and reporting

Several respondents made comments about what companies should do to address rising levels of violence and harassment in the workplace. Comments include the following:

***“It would be necessary to reinforce ... security in the case of known trouble trains (at night, football games, festivals, demonstrations). Regular de-escalation training is required!”***

— Urban public transport, Germany, 281

***“The atmosphere has changed a lot during the last 10 to 15 years. I don’t think what happened to me then is possible now.”***

— Civil aviation, Switzerland, 257

In relation to workplace policies and procedures:

***“There is a procedure, but it is cumbersome and workers prefer to avoid it.”***

— Railways, Bulgaria, 222

***“The truth is that almost all my colleagues, as well as the people who are in charge, support us and are continuing to work and update the policy on violence and harassment in stations ... which has increased security in the station.”***

— Railways, Spain, 305

# Factors impacting on the safety of women transport workers

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## Changes in work organization and more precarious employment

**T**he risk of violence has increased with organizational changes, including the closure of ticket offices and more isolated working, lower staffing levels and greater work pressure:

***“Late night trains, working alone with the public, this sort of thing happens regularly. No platform staff around to assist, etc.”***

— Railways, UK, 92

***“[I have] over 44 years of various experiences of sexual harassment by superiors and colleagues. Bullying after organisational changes and Works Council activities. In this context, threats such as ‘if you do not adjust, we will change the tune.’”***

— Railways, Germany, 266

***“The employer puts workers under massive pressure. Young workers in particular should not miss anything.”***

— Civil aviation, Switzerland, 239

***“It happens all the time on the gateline of underground stations. Being called names, shouted at and told we are scum. It is much worse since the ticket offices shut, as we can’t solve as many problems for customers as they used to. It doesn’t affect me, except to make me more cynical.”***

— Railways, UK, 82

An increase in precarious jobs, such as those with zero-hours contracts and temporary contracts, increases women’s vulnerability to sexual harassment.

***“When you are on a zero-hour-contract, you’re careful about what you say because you might not get any more work.”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 23

***“[My manager turned up on my doorstep at home]... he wanted to check up on me and he told me that if I went to bed with him, I could advance in the company.”***

— Urban public transport, Sweden, 4

***“Bullying and blackmail ... I was asked to sign things on official business, in the engineering area, otherwise ... I would lose my job.”***

— Railways, Germany, 269

## Changes in security and policing

Several transport workers spoke of improvements in security in recent years with CCTV, better police attendance in stations and better company policies. However, this was not the case for all respondents:

***“[Management has failed to protect workers, and even where security staff are in place, they are] not empowered to refuse a service or eject abusers ... workers in front-line customer contact are expected to just take abuse and let it wash over them, without being able to defend nor stick up for themselves.”***

— Railways, UK, 61

## The effect of staffing levels on safety

Several workers referred to changes in staffing making the workplace less safe for women, who are increasingly expected to work alone in potentially dangerous situations:

***“A train guard can’t work alone on train ... I can’t understand how a single person can be asked to keep order and preserve his/her safety on a train.”***

— Railways, Italy, 220

***“We used to have two guards on the trains ... A visibly upset man came onto my train, very angry because my colleague on the previous train had ‘asked him to leave’. He was freaking out, and I was alone in the car with him ... fortunately, by supporting him, I was able to calm him down.”***

— Railways, Italy, 145

***“I think that today my company doesn’t do enough to limit the problem, nor do the unions do enough. With staffing reductions made in the number of on-board personnel and ticket office operators, stations are deteriorating and trains are very dangerous, most of all at night time. There are no more police***

***stations, apart from at some big railway stations ... Any action taken has not been useful in limiting the problem. Personnel on-board are alone and can't do anything to defend themselves in case of danger."***

— *Railways, Italy, 144*

## Wider societal problems and attitudes to women

Although all transport workers face risks of violence at work, women experience particular types of violence and also are targets of violence because they are women.

A wider societal culture of unequal gender roles and relations, of harmful gender stereotypes, and of gender inequalities was seen by many respondents as contributing to a culture of violence and harassment against women transport workers. Many respondents spoke of the male chauvinist atmosphere in the workplace, where discrimination against women and a culture of sexual harassment negatively affect the working environment. This is particularly the case in a traditionally male-dominated sector such as transport, and although women are a growing proportion of transport workers, a culture of violence against women is used to perpetuate the myth that transport is an industry only for men.

***"I am the only woman at the terminal and that causes the men to act tough with one another... [I have been] abused and threatened, I have had to listen to filthy language while the others just laughed."***

— *Road transport, Belgium, 238*

***"The general public seem to think it's OK to intimidate or harass female workers. They say things that they normally wouldn't dare, had it been one of my strapping male colleagues."***

— *Urban public transport, UK, 64*

In male dominated environments women were made to feel like they were outsiders. One woman stated that:

***"Sometimes I felt ashamed to be a woman. I felt like a burden and outsider, even though I can do the job and have done it for four years."***

— *Maritime transport, UK, 118*

Another woman said, in this male dominated sector, women were expected to work harder and complain less:

***“When you start in the job, it really affects you, but sadly, nowadays you expect, particularly Friday and Saturday nights, which are the worst. You become desensitised to it. The intimidation / violence isn’t what you expect when you take on the role... in order to be treated like a man, though, you must work harder and complain less. This is the industry in which we work. It is a poor state really.”***

— Railways, UK, 86

A woman driver in the railway sector in Italy experienced ongoing verbal sexist and demeaning remarks simply because she was a woman:

***“They do not recognise my role and professionalism as a woman. For instance, some colleagues address me as “madam” instead of “driver”, as they usually do when addressing a man ... Having to care for the family disadvantages women, as compared with male colleagues.***

— Railways, Italy, 214

Young women are often most affected, as one woman recounted from an experience from more than five years previously:

***“I was very young and with no experience when my boss used to be influenced in negative ways by those who wanted to take my place ... At the time I was intimidated; over the years it has made me stronger.”***

— Railways, Italy, 215

One woman bus driver who had experienced verbal harassment and intimidation from her boss and different forms of violence and harassment from customers felt that women were poorly protected from violence in the workplace:

***“I was a victim of different kinds of violence in the workplace, from verbal intimidation and insults from my director, to offensive threats and physical violence from customers. I think that we, female workers, are really alone, at the mercy of anyone wants to make advances to us or tell us everything that goes on in his mind.”***

— Urban public transport, Italy, 123

One woman team leader spoke of the effect of harassment from other staff if they don’t get their own way – she believed that this happened because she is female in a more senior position:

***“I have been sworn at, verbally name-called, been told I’m useless, and I have been intimidated and been treated badly because I am female. It makes you question your own worth. And I felt down for a little while. I would not let anyone get away with it now. It’s only a small percentage of staff. It just makes you feel low, as you are only trying to do your job to the best of your ability.”***

— Railways, UK, 87

An important finding from the ETF survey and confirmed in other recent surveys, is that migrant, black and minority ethnic women face higher risks of violence and harassment. The issue of intersectionality, notably of taking into account multiple discriminations, is particularly relevant to the transport sector, where in several countries large numbers of black and minority ethnic women work in customer-facing transport jobs. Several women spoke of their experiences of sexist and racist abuse:

***“I’ve been spat at, had racial abuse, been told they’re going to wait for me after work, I’ve been followed onto the platform and have been verbally abused. I could go on...”***

— Railways, UK, 97

***“Borderline racial abuse. Black colleagues being shouted at more than white especially female (a white male colleague pointed this out to me). A great deal of verbal abuse in the form of shouting in my face, finger pointing and waving very close.”***

— Railways, UK, 158

***“I have been called the ‘C’ word and racially abused ... Work is becoming stressful and affecting my performance, and I want to leave.”***

— Railways, UK, 80

***“I have been physically, racially and verbally abused at work a few times so far. Even now it makes me cry thinking about it. I wasn’t expecting to be physically and racially abused in a European country in the 21st century.”***

— Railways, UK, 81

***“Verbal and racist comments aimed towards my religious and ethnic background have lowered my self-confidence.”***

— Railways, UK, 83

***“Because I’m from Romania they call me “Gipsy” or tell me to go back to my country.”***

— *Railways, UK, 130*

***“Obviously it was not funny at all being called ‘Darky.’”***

— *Urban public transport, Sweden, 24*

***“I have comments like ‘that’s a big melon you’ve got’. Being the only female and also black, doesn’t give me the courage, as I’ve had discrimination from front line managers.”***

— *Railways, UK, 90*