EUROPEAN TRANSPORT WORKERS' FEDERATION

ETF 2026 Survey on Violence and Harassment Against Women Transport Workers

Summary report by Dr Jane Pillinger and Dr Sarah Murphy

1. Introduction and profile of respondents

The survey conducted online in 2025 and 2026 represents predominantly frontline, unionised, operational women workers in high public-contact roles, which is the group most exposed to third-party violence and harassment.

- 1,744 women transport workers from 27 European countries participated in the survey. 86% were trade union members.
- The survey covered 10 transport sectors, with the largest participation from: railways, road transport, civil aviation and urban public transport.
- 56.6% of respondents were frontline workers, working in customer-facing roles.
- The majority of respondents were from the 35-54 years age range, reflecting the age distribution of the transport workforce.

2. Prevalence of violence and harassment

The survey evidenced that transport workers face a shockingly high prevalence of violence and harassment, ranging from everyday verbal abuse and hostility to serious assault.

- 71.1% of respondents report experiencing violence and/or harassment in their current workplace. This is a significant increase since the 2017 survey, where just over half of women transport workers reported experiencing at least one form of violence and harassment at work.
- Exposure is widespread across sectors, with the highest exposure reported for dockers at 82.1%, followed by railway workers at 81.1%, and civil aviation workers at 80.3%.
- Frontline workers report the highest exposure (83.4%).
- Many respondents describe violence as routine, embedded in daily work and "part of the job".
- Verbal abuse is identified as the most common form of violence and harassment at 75.4% (see Chart 1).

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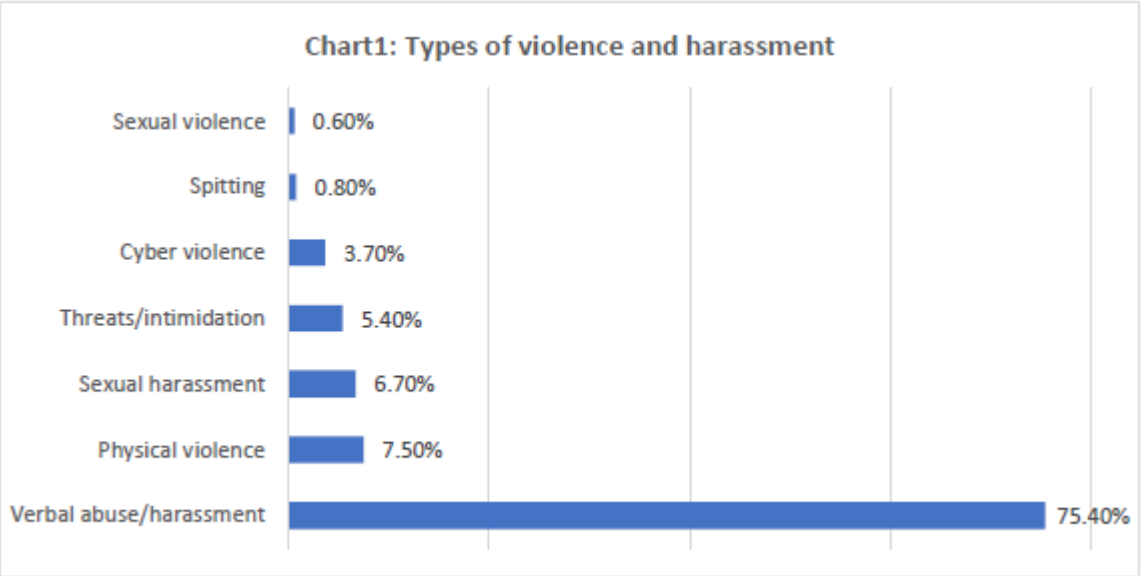

- Nearly half of those experiencing violence and harassment experienced it within the last month, and 17.3% experienced it within the last week, showing that worker experiences of violence and harassment are regular and ongoing, with cumulative negative effects for many workers.
- Worryingly, over half (53%) of respondents considered workplace safety to have worsened in recent years, while only 14% reported that the workplace was safer (Chart 2).
- For respondents reporting worsening safety, reasons given include increasing customer aggression (25.2%) and a range of structural factors, including worsening working conditions, staff shortages, and increased workload. These findings suggest that reduced staffing levels and organisational pressures may compound exposure risks, particularly in customer-facing roles.
- Among respondents who reported that safety had improved, the most commonly cited reasons relate to stronger management response and clearer procedures, followed by training and awareness initiatives. A smaller number referenced improved security measures (e.g. CCTV, guards, police presence) and increased staffing levels.
- Overall, improvements in safety appear to be associated with organisational change such as clearer policies, visible management engagement, and preventive training, suggesting that when employers take proactive measures, workers perceive tangible safety gains.

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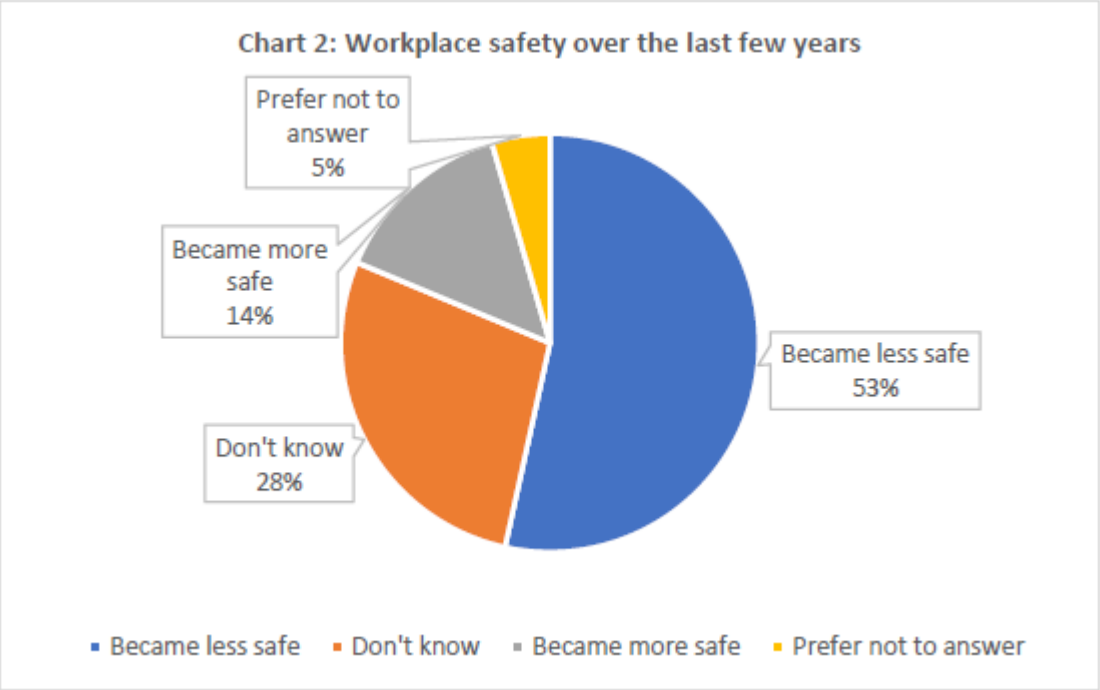

3. Perpetrators of violence and harassment

- Over half (54%) of the reported incidents of violence were perpetrated by customers; 8% by a manager or supervisor; 15% by a colleague; and 23% by others (see Chart 3).
- Customer/service user perpetrated abuse is pronounced in cases of physical violence (80.4%), threats and intimidation (75.1%), and verbal abuse (72.6%), highlighting the significant and disproportionate exposure of frontline workers to third-party violence and harassment.
- Psychological harassment, discrimination and sexual harassment are more likely to be perpetrated by colleagues and managers.

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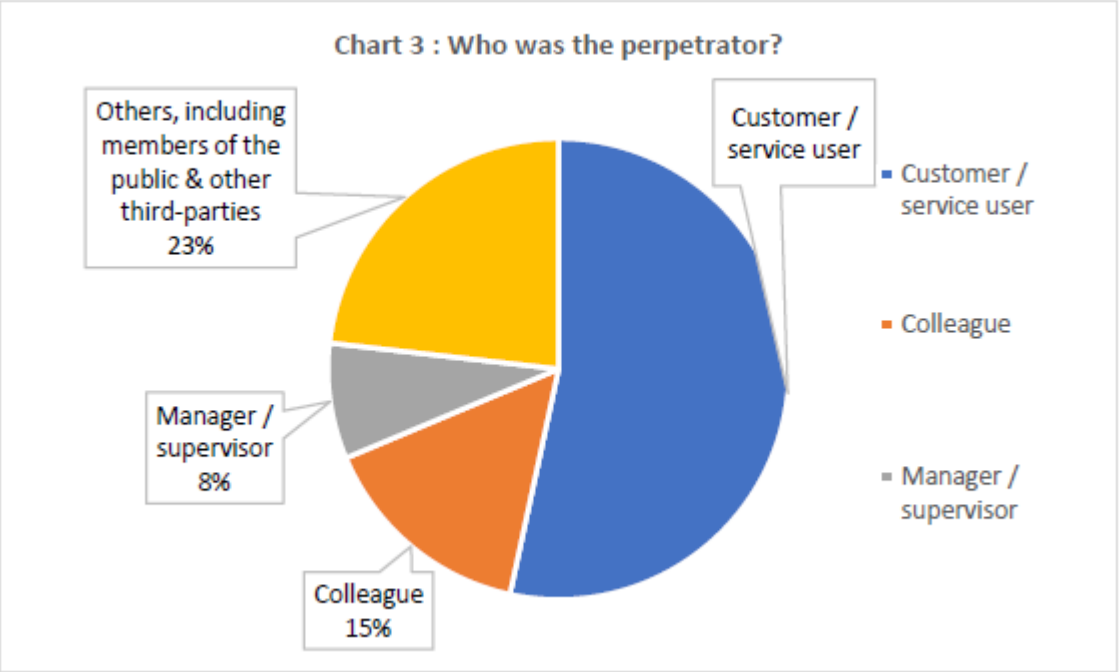

4. Violence and harassment from customers/service users

Gendered exposure to violence and harassment

Gender remains the most frequently cited reason for exposure to violence and harassment, followed by age and workplace culture factors such as stereotypes and sexism in the workplace. Customer attitudes and power imbalances also feature prominently.

- 75% of respondents believe violence and harassment from customers/service users is more likely to happen to them because they are women.
- This is strongest in road transport (62.5%), urban public transport (61.3%), and railways (52.4%).
- The causes of this are attributed to: gender stereotypes and sexism (73.9%), customer attitudes (61.6%), power imbalances (40.1%), and minority status/male-dominated sectors (35.5%).
- These findings show that violence and harassment are strongly shaped by structural gender inequality, sexism, and unequal power relations.
- Overall, women workers agree or strongly agree that stereotypes and sexism against women transport workers (74.3%) and a male chauvinist atmosphere (66.8%) are present in the sector.
- 47.2% agree or strongly agree that violence and harassment are 'part of the job', suggesting the normalisation of violence for a substantial number of transport workers.

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Women workers' voices: Gendered exposure to violence and harassment

"When a woman is in a position of authority, customers question her legitimacy." (Other sector, Spain)

"The environment is internally male chauvinist. Younger women in particular are treated differently." (Railways, Italy)

"Male colleagues are treated with more respect by passengers." (Urban Public Transport, Netherlands)

Impact on health and well-being

The vast majority of workers experiencing violence and harassment report significant negative effects on their health and well-being.

Customer / service user Colleague 15% Manager / supervisor 8% Others, including members of the public & other third-parties 23% **Chart 3 : Who was the perpetrator?** Customer / service user Colleague Manager / supervisor4

Exposure results in sustained psychosocial harm and, in some cases, severe trauma and suicidal ideation. Effects extend beyond the workplace into workers' private lives.

- 56.0% report a general negative impact.
- 17.8% report anxiety/fear/feeling unsafe.
- 11.1% report stress/psychological strain.
- 8.2% report anger/frustration.
- 4.1% report depression/low mood.
- 3.3% report a negative impact on their work performance.
- 2.1% report physical health symptoms.
- 0.8% report trauma/PTSD.

The cumulative nature of repeated harassment results in chronic psychological strain and emotional fatigue. In some cases, the explicit gender-based undermining of professional authority highlights how harassment intersects with structural gender stereotypes and male chauvinist workplace cultures.

A majority of respondents (61.6%) have considered leaving the sector to some degree, including 23.2% who have thought about it "a lot."

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Women workers' voices: Impact on health and well-being

"I don't always feel safe at work or walking home after a shift. Sometimes I have nightmares…"(Railways, Sweden)

"It makes me feel small as a woman. I have had passengers saying to me that they don't take orders from me." (Civil Aviation, Norway)

"It stays with you long after the incident is over." (Urban Public Transport, Belgium)

"I feel more anxious now when interacting with passengers." (Civil Aviation, Italy)

"It affects your sleep. You replay the situation in your head." (Road Transport, Denmark)

"You feel unsafe even when nothing is happening." (Urban Public Transport, Netherlands)

"The stress builds up. It's not one incident — it's the constant repetition." (Railways, International/Multi-country)

5. Reporting of violence and harassment from customers/service users

The findings reveal a significant gap between experiencing violence and engaging in formal reporting systems. There is both low reporting and low satisfaction with reporting. Workers rely more on informal peer support than on institutional mechanisms.

- While 59% stated that their company had a reporting procedure, only approximately one quarter of respondents formally reported the incident, while the majority did not.
- Among those who did report, this was primarily to immediate supervisors or managers, with fewer engaging HR departments, internal reporting systems, or trade union representatives.
- Reasons for not reporting include 65.7% who believed that reporting would not change anything, 43.1% who did not consider it serious enough, and 30.7% who feared negative consequences. A further 18.6% did not know how to report, and 15.9% stated that procedures were unclear. 13.1% had no trust in their employer's response.
- Among those who reported, only 35.9% were satisfied, and 64.1% were dissatisfied with the outcome.
- Over a fifth of workers (21%) reported negative consequences for them personally from reporting.
- A significant majority, over two-thirds (69%), stated that official reporting did not result in negative consequences for the perpetrator of violence/harassment.
- Worryingly, reporting did not lead to a safer workplace for the majority of respondents (73%) who reported violence and harassment.

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Women workers' voices: Experiences of reporting violence and harassment

"I would not be believed. There is no clear information about the official procedure." (Railways, Belgium)

"There is no information about the official procedure and what steps should be taken." (Logistics, Germany)

"There is no clear guidance on who is responsible for handling these cases." (Civil Aviation, Italy)

"The focus shifted to my behaviour rather than the passenger's." (Road Transport, France)

"The police told me to report the man, but my company discouraged me." (Civil Aviation, Norway)

6. Overall conclusions

- Violence against women in transport is widespread, gendered, and normalised.
- Third-party violence and harassment have become systemic problems in passenger transport sectors and in customer/service user-facing roles.
- Repeated exposure leads to cumulative physical and psychosocial harm.
- Reporting systems lack trust and credibility, and there is a lack of clear guidelines regarding accountability for incidents of violence and harassment experienced by workers.

The findings point to the need for:

- Gender-responsive OSH risk assessment, taking account of the gendered nature of third-party violence and harassment (from customers/service users).
- Trauma-informed and gender-responsive workplace policies, including clear reporting systems that workers trust, and with anti-retaliation safeguards.
- Stronger emphasis on prevention, embedded in gender-responsive risk assessment management, security and system-wide change that addresses the structural causes of gender-based violence and harassment.
- Sector-specific prevention strategies, including addressing staffing levels, training, de-escalation training and security back-up.
- Alignment of policies with ILO Convention 190 standards, embedded in the employer's duty of care to prevent all forms of violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment.
- Raise awareness of and use the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention No. 190 framework to ensure effective, comprehensive, and gender-responsive strategies, embedded in worker consultation and social dialogue. **This is particularly important, as only 16% of the survey respondents reported awareness of ILO Convention No. 190, while over 80% were unfamiliar with it.**

The full report, to be completed by the end of March 2026, will include more detailed information from the survey, including a breakdown of some data by sector.

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