

THE INCONVENIENT TRUTH

The Pandemic of Violence and Harassment in Commerce





commerce

This report has been produced and issued as a part of the “There Is No Store for Violence and Harassment in Commerce**” project conducted by UNI Commerce with the support of Union to Union, and UNI Commerce’s Swedish affiliates Handels and Unionen.**

UNI Commerce is the global union for the retail and wholesale industry. We represent more than 160 trade unions and more than four million workers worldwide.

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Introduction

From the Epidemic of Violence to the Pandemic of Violence

*"When you have 85% of retail staff reporting they have been subjected to verbal abuse from a customer and 14% reporting they have been subject to physical violence, you know we've got an epidemic on our hands." **

Gerard Dwyer, National Secretary of the Australian Commerce Workers Union (SDA)

Months before the word "pandemic" became so commonplace in our lives, the issue of violence and harassment of commerce workers was already recognized as a global problem.

In January 2020, the UNI Commerce Global Steering Committee unanimously adopted a proposal on initiating a campaign against violence and harassment in retail stores. Then two months later, on International Women's Day, we launched the *"There Is No Store for Violence and Harassment in Commerce"* campaign. **

Just a few days later, the WHO declared Covid-19 a pandemic. Governments and the general public soon recognized that food retail workers are "essential workers." In every country, during every lockdown, these workers risked their lives and their health to ensure our communities had the necessities for survival.

Unfortunately, it took a pandemic for the importance of their work to get recognized. The pandemic continues, and retail workers continue to be on the frontline.

There is a truth that we need to highlight. It is an "inconvenient truth" because the violence, harassment and abuse against frontline commerce workers has skyrocketed with the pandemic and "the epidemic of violence" has become "a pandemic of violence" in our sector.

As the evidence from more than 20 countries across all continents shows, while commerce workers around the globe continue to keep people supplied with their vital needs, even during the strictest of lockdowns, they have been deliberately coughed on, spat at, verbally attacked, emotionally harmed, racially abused, threatened, struck by goods, physically attacked, stabbed, and even shot to death by customers.

Some 44% of those employed in the commerce sector are women, and gender-based violence in commerce has always been a massive issue. The pandemic made it even worse, both at home and at work.



However, unions are fighting back. As seen in the last part of our report, through dedicated campaigns and tireless work, commerce unions are pushing for better legislation and protection for workers; and they are achieving remarkable progress. They are showing the union difference through organizing, collective actions and collective bargaining.

We hope that this report puts a magnifying glass on what commerce workers are experiencing every day. It shows why workers' voices must be heard and their demands must be met to provide commerce workers with the protection they deserve.

To do this, we call on governments to:

- ✕ Ratify ILO Convention 190
- ✕ Introduce legislation which protects workers

And we're calling on all retailers to:

- ✕ Adopt a zero-tolerance policy for violence
- ✕ Tackle the scourge of gender-based violence
- ✕ Consult and negotiate with unions
- ✕ Take immediate action to put in place the necessary measures to protect their staff

We highlight our commitment to stand united against all forms of violence and harassment in the commerce sector and to fight together until we eliminate all forms of violence and harassment.

Because There is No Store for Violence and Harassment in Commerce!

Mathias Bolton

Head of Department, UNI Commerce

* <https://national.sda.com.au/media-release-industry-first-major-employers-shopping-centres-and-unions-pledge-to-eradicate-customer-abuse-for-good/>

** <https://www.uniglobalunion.org/news/no-store-violence-and-harassment-commerce>

United Kingdom

9 out of 10 workers were abused

Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers of the UK (USDAW) surveyed between 1,500 and 7,000 workers from 2017 to 2019 to identify the extent of violence, threats and abuse against commerce workers. USDAW reported an alarming increase in the level of incidents and abuse towards retail workers between 2017 and 2019. Then, the pandemic outbreak and added more fuel to the fire.



A snapshot from USDAW's Respect Week 2021 © USDAW

The survey findings for 2020¹ were even more shocking:

- ✗ Abuse, threats and violence against retail workers doubled since the start of the coronavirus pandemic.
- ✗ Almost 9 out of 10 retail workers were verbally abused in 2020.
- ✗ 60% of surveyed workers reported threats of physical violence.
- ✗ 9% said they had been physically assaulted which means that 1 out of 10 workers were subjected to physical violence while working during the pandemic.
- ✗ 79% of respondents reported that violence and abuse had become worse or much worse since the start of the pandemic.
- ✗ Pandemic-related issues including enforcing social distancing (24%), queueing to get in store (17%), face coverings (15%), lack of stock (15%) and limiting sales (14%) were the main triggers for violence and abuse in 2020.

The survey findings for 2021² were no better. Interim results from nearly 3,500 retail workers show that:

- ✗ 89% experienced verbal abuse.
- ✗ 64% were threatened by a customer.
- ✗ 11% were assaulted, which is 2% higher than 2020.
- ✗ 46% said they were not confident that reporting abuse, threats and violence will make a difference.

1. USDAW, 2020, "Campaign to end violence and abuse against retail workers", <https://www.usdaw.org.uk/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=630d6f8e-73df-4ca2-a923-7f1251381614>
 2. <https://www.usdaw.org.uk/About-Us/News/2021/Nov/Respect-for-Shopworkers-Week-Usdaw-survey-reveals>

Voices from the frontline:

Here are some comments from shopworkers responding to USDAW's 2021 survey:

"I was threatened to be set on fire."

"I've been physically assaulted, spat at, verbally abused, punched, hand round throat."

"Mocking my intelligence and misogynistic comment about my physical abilities."

"A customer spat in my face, in another incident a customer threw a basket of stock at me."

"Hit with trolleys, verbally abused, called names and pushed."

"Was shouted and sworn at, threatened to be beaten up and set on fire."

"Pulled my top open and stuffed some paper down my chest."

*"Called a c**t because we don't have enough turkeys."*



Australia

1 in 5 workers were coughed on or spat at during Covid-19

The Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association (the SDA) of Australia has been conducting surveys on violence, harassment and abuse of commerce workers as a part of its "No One Deserves a Serve"³ campaign launched in 2017.

SDA members and organizers supporting the "No One Deserves a Serve Campaign" © SDA

In late 2020, the SDA surveyed 2,338 members and 17 employers. The key findings of the survey⁴ read as follows:

- ✖ 88% of respondents had experienced verbal abuse in the previous 12 months.
- ✖ Almost half of the members who experienced verbal abuse in the previous 12 months said it occurred weekly or monthly.
- ✖ Female members were more likely to have experienced verbal abuse from a customer (89%) than male members (83%).
- ✖ Almost 8% of respondents said they had been the victim of physical violence from a customer in the previous 12 months.
- ✖ 11% of respondents said they had experienced incidents of customer abuse that was sexual in nature.
- ✖ 70% of respondents said that abuse and violence was more frequent during COVID-19.
- ✖ More than 1 out of 5 of members (21.5%) said they had been coughed on or spat at during Covid-19.
- ✖ 71% of respondents said the experience of customer abuse and violence had impacted their physical or mental health.
- ✖ Only 58.5% of respondents said they had reported an incident of abuse or violence to their employer.
- ✖ Young workers were much less likely to report an incident of customer abuse and violence because they didn't think it was serious enough or nothing would be done, or it wouldn't be taken seriously.

3. The campaign website: <https://national.sda.com.au/no-one-deserves-a-serve/>

4. <https://www.sdavic.org/news/no-one-deserves-serve-survey-results>



Voices from the frontline:

Here are some comments from workers responding to SDA's 2021 survey:

"Customer said she hoped I would get cancer"

"I was hit on the head with a pvc pipe, and had a packet of deadlocks thrown at me."

"Had a rock thrown at my car after leaving work."

"I was copping verbal abuse from customers at least a couple times a week for doing my job, which culminated in being physically assaulted and suffering concussion. I was off work for a month."

"Customer requested donation that was rejected. Customer said she hoped I would get cancer."

"Customers constantly threaten, swear and throw things at me."

"I was grabbed by my throat by a male customer."

Austria

Commerce, reaching breaking point

GPA Union of Austria conducted a survey with 3,272 participants to identify the main issues facing retail workers during the pandemic. The survey showed that violence and harassment in the commerce sector had increased and that workers had reached the end of their tether.



- ✖ According to the survey⁵, 51.2% of participants reported that *“aggressive, unruly customers”* was a statement that applied to them.
- ✖ Commenting on the survey, Sabina Eiblmaier and Werner Hackl of GPA (chairs of the work councils for INTERSPAR and BILLA) highlighted the severity of the situation as follows: *“The anger and frustration of consumers is increasingly being vented in shops and there are many places where we can no longer guarantee the safety of workers.”*
- ✖ *“Aggressive customers, work overload, staff shortages and lack of recognition, as well as customers’ lack of respect towards our colleagues are the biggest problems,”* said Anita Palkovich, the Commerce Sector Secretary of GPA.

5. <https://www.gpa.at/kollektivvertrag/handel/handelsangestellte/2021/belastungsgrenze-fuer-handelsangestellte-ist-erreicht>

Voices from the frontline:

GPA noted that almost 1,000 respondents shared their personal experiences in additional comments, which was the greatest number of such responses they have ever had. Here are some of them:

“It’s always been like that, but it has got really bad”

“I’d like to see greater support from the authorities or the police, as only a few customers comply with the prescribed measures. Many arrive without masks, are aggressive towards me and my colleagues and NOBODY keeps to the 2m safety distance ... It is also a great psychological burden to be constantly afraid of being verbally attacked by someone just because you are following the rules.”

“I find that the customers take out all their frustration on us shop assistants. It’s always been like that, but it’s got really bad - almost every day there’s one or more customers who behave loudly.”



KASZ is campaigning to ensure respect for retail workers

Hungary

Verbal violence, at least once a week!

The survey conducted by KASZ union of Hungary in 2021 revealed that violence and harassment fuelled by the pandemic was a weekly if not a daily experience for commerce workers.

According to the survey⁶:

- ✖ 20% of respondents reported that they experienced physical violence from a customer.
- ✖ 40% of workers did not report the incident and 86% of the workers who reported the incident did not get any support from their managers.
- ✖ 87% of workers said they experienced verbal abuse by a customer.
- ✖ On being asked "How often are customers rude to you?" 9% said "never", 33% said "once a month", 29% said "once a week", 14% said "once a day" and 15% said "more than once a day".
- ✖ While 19% of respondents said yes when they were asked if they were respected at work. 39% said "no" and 42% said "maybe".

6. Taken from Nikolett Kiss's presentation in UNI Commerce Webinar on Violence and Harassment in Commerce, 17.11.2021

Voices from the frontline:

In the survey, KASZ asked participants "What was the rudest thing that a customer said to you?" Here are some answers:

"I am going to slit your throat"

"I will wait for you outside and I will beat you."

"I am going to slit your throat, you fuc.ing bi.ch."

"You are a slave."

"You have to lick my a.s; this is your job."

"You are all losers because you work in a supermarket."

"Commerce workers are the bottom of the society."

"You don't deserve a 'hello', because you are a sh.t!"

Japan

Unreasonable complaints and harassment skyrocketed during the pandemic

UA Zensen union has been campaigning against violence, harassment and unreasonable complaints from customers in Japan where the pandemic has worsened the situation, as the rest of the world.

Two word clouds produced out of the surveys conducted by UA Zensen in 2017 and 2020 reflect the impact of the pandemic. While “abusive language”, “demands” and “apologies” were the most frequently used words by the respondents in 2017, “mask” and “Covid-19” made the top of the list in 2020.



The impact of the pandemic was even visible in the word clouds

According to surveys⁷ conducted by UA Zensen with the participation of workers and customers:

- ✖ Workers attributed 35.9% of abusive customer behaviour to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- ✖ Among the survey respondents, 15,526 retail workers reported that they were victims of unpleasant behaviour by the customers.
- ✖ More than 60% of respondents (including customers and workers) said that the number of nuisance (unreasonable) complaints against retail workers had increased.
- ✖ Almost one out of two customers (48.3%) reported that they personally witnessed malicious complaints - by customers against retail workers - and 95% of them had unpleasant feelings after witnessing the complaint.
- ✖ The retail sector ranked first in the list of sectors with the highest level of unreasonable complaints against workers by customers or service receivers.

⁷ The statistics and quotes are taken from the presentations made by Kenta Ando of UA Zensen in UNI Commerce Hypermarket Webinar (20 October 2021) and UNI Commerce Webinar on Violence and Harassment in Commerce (17 November 2021).

Voices from the frontline:

UA Zensen's survey also helped to give a better understanding of what commerce workers had to go through during the pandemic. Here are some examples:

“Don’t touch that with your dirty hands!”

When workers asked customers to wear a mask, many customers refused, and used abusive language against workers and pounded on desks and tills.

When workers handled products at the cash register, they were yelled and even told “Don’t touch that with your dirty hands.”

A customer physically attacked a worker in a drug store because the because medicine they had purchased did not have the desired effect. The manager asked the worker to put up with it and keep working.

Sweden

Anxiety, stress and harassment fuelled by the pandemic

According to the Statistics Sweden and the Swedish Work Environment Authority⁸, violence and harassment (especially in the form of sexual harassment) were alarmingly prevalent in the commerce sector even before the pandemic.

- ✖ For example, while 28% of women workers in retail experienced sexual harassment by a third party in the previous 12 months, the overall rate for all women workers in the labour market was 4%.
- ✖ Similarly, 10% of women in retail reported that they had been sexually harassed by their bosses or colleagues in the previous 12 months, whereas it was 3% for all sectors.
- ✖ The survey conducted by Handels Union of Sweden showed the gender-based impacts of harassment. While 49% of women in retail feel anxiety because of the risk of harassment, the rate is 30% for men in retail.

Then the pandemic came in and made retail workers job and life even more complicated. A recent survey⁹ conducted by Handels revealed that commerce workers experienced considerable anxiety due to the risk of being infected with Covid-19. The underlying reasons were strongly related with customer's behaviour as **"customers who do not keep distance"** (83%) and **"customers' ignorant attitudes"** (81%) came top of the list of reasons why workers felt strong anxiety.

8. <https://handels.se/globalassets/centralt/media/pressrum/rapporter/2019/ensam-pa-jobbet.pdf>

9. <https://handels.se/globalassets/centralt/media/pressrum/rapporter/2021/butiksanstalldas-halsa-under-covid-19-pandemin.pdf>



Voices from the frontline:

The following quotes from workers who participated in Handel's survey show that workers were harassed by customers they were trying to help and protect.

"We were insulted by customers we were trying to protect"

"The stress for me has come mostly from the fact that we as workers, who have no authority, must protect customers by making sure they follow restrictions. This has led to a large increase in situations where we are exposed to threats, aggression, insults and so on. It is a great stress to know that a negative response is likely to come when you are obliged to say something in order to protect others."

"The mental part of working in a store has become more difficult, we have a great responsibility towards the customers which means that we must constantly remind them to keep their distance, not create congestion and so on ... often you are treated unpleasantly."

Turkey

Half of commerce workers think that customers are treating them badly or very badly

Dr. Emirali Karadogan of Tez Koop-Is Union conducted a field study¹⁰ of more than 400 retail workers employed in stores and supermarkets in 31 cities to identify and analyse working conditions and measures taken during the pandemic.



Tez Koop-Is members are calling on the government to ratify ILO C190

- ✖ One of the questions of the survey was “How do customers treat you?”. While 3.4% of respondents said, “very good” and 49.5 percent said “good”; other half of the workers had a different response: 33.4% (bad) and 13.7% (very bad).
- ✖ The survey revealed the fact that many disputes (and verbal abuse by customers) were arising from implementation of the safety measures placed in the stores and shops. 63.9% of respondents reported that they had to warn customers if they do not comply with the precautions in comparison to 21% of respondents said that customers were warned by security guards.
- ✖ The survey also showed that union members -covered by a collective agreement- were less likely to end up in disputes with the customers over the enforcement of safety rules as 51.2% of union member respondents said that security guards were warning and dealing with the customers who violated safety protocols. This finding can also be interpreted as the difference made and better protection provided by the trade union membership and collective bargaining.

¹⁰. <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/1896525>



Voices from the frontline:

“I found myself in the police station in the middle of the night while my baby was waiting for me at home”

“A customer bought a sweater, put it on and after wearing it for a while in the shopping mall; she came back and wanted to return it by saying that “it did not fit me”. I explained the rules again, but we had an argument. She took the sweater off, threw it at me and started insulting me. Then she took another one and tried to walk away without paying for it. We ended up in the police station and I had to testify until the midnight. I had a baby at home waiting for me and I was psychologically hurt.”

“I warned a customer to put a mask on. He did not put it on, and he reacted. The security guard came and warned him as well, but he started to shout at us. Then the police were called, and he was escorted out of the store by the police officers.”

“We are told that there will be a limited number of customers in the store, but I work alone. I can control neither the entrance nor the number of customers. When I tell a customer that I can’t let her/him in, he/she jumps into the store by saying that “I will have a quick look.”

Germany

Neither reported, nor recorded but a part of workers' daily life

A young petrol station cashier in Idar-Oberstein of Germany was shot to death by a customer on 21 September 2021, just because he asked the customer to follow the rules and put a mask on in the store.

The killing put a spotlight on the increasing violence and harassment in the retail sector in Germany and triggered a public debate. The Trade and Merchandise Logistic Employer's Liability Insurance Association admitted that the number of incidents of violence and harassment (especially verbal violence) was hard to quantify because they often went unreported.¹¹

"Heroes of Commerce. They Saved Retail. Who Protects Them?"

According to the German Retail Association (HDE) - there were *"no nationwide or fundamental problems"* in shops. However, Orhan Akman (the Head of retail and mail order at Ver.di Union), criticized the employer's organization for being out of touch. *"Such cases do not show up in any official statistics. Companies and politicians are failing workers,"* Akman told public broadcaster ZDF. *"It is mainly women employed in retail who are insulted, threatened, or spat at every day. That is the sad reality."*¹²

11. <https://www.deutschlandfunknova.de/beitrag/gewaltzunahme-wie-sich-verkaufspersonal-im-einzelhandel-schuetzt>

12. <https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/panorama/corona-leugner-gewalt-100.html>

13. <https://www.facebook.com/verdiHANDEL/posts/4044361479004288>



Voices from the frontline:

Ver.di Handels, 23 May 2021¹³

"Workers often feel they have been abandoned"

"Violence against workers in the retail sector existed before the pandemic, but it has got much worse in recent months. Insecurity and stress, which many people suffer from, are sadly too frequently taken out on the women who make up most of the staff in shops and shopping centres." (Ver.di Handels).

"In retail there are millions of customer contacts every day, and unfortunately insults, threats and abuse are part of the daily life of most of the workforce. Aggressive behaviour from many customers has got worse during the pandemic. Workers often feel they have been abandoned when it comes to enforcing Covid regulations and they must deal repeatedly with obstinate customers but get no support. We call on employers to honour their duty of care and take concrete measures to protect workers from assaults of any kind." (Stefanie Nutzenberger, Member of Ver.di National Executive).

Finland

Half of workers were called names or threatened

An alarming rise in violence and harassment in the commerce sector is also evident in Finland. Surveys conducted by the Finnish Commerce Federation and Service Union (PAM) in 2017 and 2020 show that harassment from customers has been increasing particularly.¹⁴



PAM and the Finnish Commerce Federation are running a campaign titled "Let's Behave" to promote appropriate customer behaviour.



A survey¹⁵ conducted by PAM in 2020 with the participation of 374 PAM members employed in the service sector, including commerce, found:

- ✖ Half of respondents reported that they were called names or had received threats from customers in the previous year.
- ✖ 1 out of 10 workers experienced physical violence or threats with sharp objects, such as knife, in the previous year.
- ✖ 56% of retail workers said they had been sexually harassed in 2020, an increase of 6% since 2015.
- ✖ 60% of those who experienced harassment did not report it to their supervisor because many thought it would not matter or make any difference.
- ✖ 1 in 5 respondents said they had changed sector or job because of harassment.
- ✖ Among other findings, the survey also revealed that some workers were trying to get used to harassment in order to survive in the sector.

14. <https://www.pam.fi/media/1.-materiaalipankki-tiedostot-nakyvat-julkisessa-materiaalipankissa/tyosuojeluvaltuutetun-materiaalit/kaupan-harintaohje-eng.pdf>

15. <https://www.pam.fi/en/news/sexual-harassment-is-on-the-rise-say-pam-members-in-a-survey-comments-touching-and-lurid-images.html>



Voices from the frontline:

"Workers were provoked and filmed by unruly customers"

According to the information provided by PAM's working environment expert, Erika Kähärä, some customers visited small stores without masks and got as close as possible to retail workers and other customers. When workers warned them to follow the safety measures and to put a mask on, "Customers started videoing their reactions and gave them very provocative responses which usually made workers get angry. Then they posted these videos on social media and spread them around as evidence of overreacting."

"Suggestive comments delivered with a smirk. You generally get this from men in higher pay grades, who obviously think it's their right." (Sales assistant, PAM Survey, 2020).

South Africa

Precarious employment put workers at more risk of harassment



Lindiwe Alucia Masiteng
(Member of SACCWU and UNI Africa Youth Committee)

In January 2021, Workers World Labour Show aired a special episode on *“COVID-19 and Gender Based Violence in the Retail Sector”*¹⁶ that highlighted how precarious forms of employment can put women retail workers at more risk of harassment during a global pandemic.

“We have been seeing a spike in sexual harassment complaints” said Brenita Cloete, Provincial Treasurer of South African commerce workers’ union SACCWU. *“But some of the female workers do not want to go to the full extent of the (reporting) procedure, because they fear that they would not get more hours of work, or they would get a cut in working hours. It is very seldom that it actually goes the full course.”*

The pandemic made the right to a safe commute to and from work even more important due to changes in store opening times and a lack of safe public transportation. *“Workers, especially women workers are vulnerable to gender-based violence and sexual harassment, and as such employers are contributing to the ever increasing levels of gender-based violence,”*¹⁷ said SACCWU.

Patricia Nyman, National Gender Coordinator of SACCWU, points out how dangerous it can get:

*“There was a case... where the manager didn’t provide the required transport as per the collective bargaining agreement and the woman had to organise her own transport home late at night. When she was waiting for the taxi to take her home, she was brutally raped.”*¹⁸

16. Full episode is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FvWtoRi-Kb4&t=103s>

17. <https://saccawu.org.za/supermarket-workers-a-new-frontline/>

18. https://en.breakingthecircle.org/descargas/en/activityworkbook/Facilitator-guide_en_web.pdf (p.24)



Voices from the frontline:

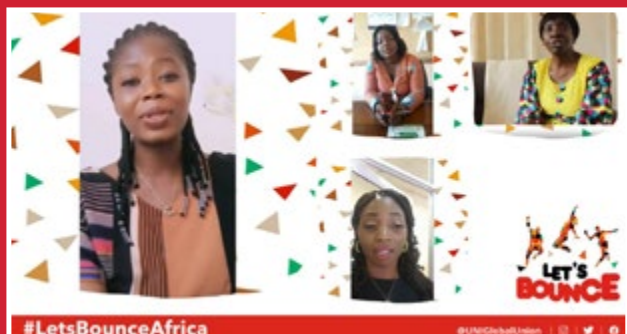
“I was harassed and the management almost blamed me”

“I did not see him; he came from behind and touched me. I actually got upset; very, very upset. Everybody in the shop knew it... I took it to the management. There were a lot of people on his side and a lot of things were said about me... They almost blamed me.” (A woman retail worker, COVID-19 and Gender Based Violence in the Retail Sector, Workers World Labour Show).

“In many cases it is hidden because, from the point of view of the victim, saving her job and her income is much better than having to speak out about the violence and risk losing her job. Violence gets driven underground.” (Patricia Nyman, National Gender Coordinator of SACCWU, Facilitator Guide, p.13).

Lesotho

Harassment is a norm for the retail sector



At the 5th UNI Africa Women's Conference held in December 2021, women trade union leaders and activists committed to fighting against violence and harassment at work.

According to the information note provided by the National Union of Commerce, Catering and Allied Workers (NUCCAW) of Lesotho for this report:

- ✖ There are many obstacles to reporting violence and harassment in the commerce sector including cultural barriers, lack of reporting mechanisms and information.
- ✖ On the other hand, some workers end up thinking that harassment is a norm for the sector so they do not report violence and harassment cases as they are considered to be a part of the job.
- ✖ When customers insult or harass workers, company management intervenes to deescalate the situation, but they do not take further action against the harassing customers.
- ✖ In some cases, managers harass workers and workers do not speak in case they put their jobs at risk. In some cases, they report harassment after leaving the job, but it becomes extremely difficult for the union to trace back their claims.
- ✖ Another challenge is employers' reluctance to take necessary action on the reported cases of violence and harassment and their established practice of intimidating or punishing workers instead of remediating the situation.
- ✖ In three different incidents reported by NUCCAW union, the workers filing a grievance of violence and harassment were either forced to resign or dismissed by the management.

Nigeria

57.5% of women workers report gender-based violence at work

According to a survey¹⁹ conducted by the Nigeria Labour Congress and Solidarity Centre in 2020:

- ✖ 57.5% of interviewed women workers stated that they experienced gender-based violence and harassment at work.
- ✖ More than half (52.2%) of respondents reported that they had been threatened whilst at work or on their way to and from work.
- ✖ More than one-third (35.9%) of respondents said that even when violations were reported, justice was rarely upheld.

The pandemic made Nigerian women workers more vulnerable to gender-based violence at work as described below by female market porter²⁰ from Lagos:

Voices from the frontline:

"There are days I just do not want to go to work"

"My husband got laid off, and I could not watch my children starve. In the market, I experience sexual harassment from male shop owners. Some approach me and encourage me to meet them in a hotel, saying they will help me find a better job. There are days I just do not want to go to work but I must feed my family. I do not report these men because I do not want to lose their patronage. I have experienced a lot of sexual harassment while trying to get home on the public bus. Strange men touch my breast or buttocks. I feel dirty by the time I get off... These incidents are almost a normal part of my daily commute."

19. <https://www.solidaritycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Nigeria.GBVH-in-the-World-of-Work-Nigeria.10.2021.pdf>

20. <https://www.solidaritycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Gender.Publications.Made-for-this-Moment.12.20.pdf> (p.7)



Belgium

80% of retail workers have been victims of aggression

ACV Puls union organized online workshops for its members on how to combat violence and harassment at work during the pandemic

According to a survey conducted by ACV Puls Union of Belgium, which covers more than 21,000 retail workers:

- ✱ No less than 80% of workers have experienced verbal or even physical aggression in stores since the start of the pandemic.²¹
- ✱ 70% of respondents said customers are noticeably more irritated since the Covid-19 outbreak.
- ✱ 3 in 4 workers reported that they were verbally threatened by a customer.
- ✱ 1 in 3 respondents indicated that they had to deal with verbal aggression on a weekly to daily basis.
- ✱ More than 70% of workers said they expect the government to play a more active role in the prevention of violence and harassment.²²

²¹. <https://trends.knack.be/economie/bedrijven/acv-puls-vreest-voor-agressie-door-klanten-na-herinvoering-mondmaskers-in-winkels/article-belga-1794329.html?>

²². <https://www.hetacv.be/nieuws-algemene-pagina/2020/09/30/acv-puls-biedt-workshops-aan-tegen-agressie!>

²³. https://www.rtbf.be/info/societe/detail_une-partie-du-personnel-de-l-hypermarche-carrefour-de-berchem-en-greve-suite-a-plusieurs-agressions?id=10747405

Manuel Gonzalez, a representative for CNE union in Belgium at several stores, describes a chain of incidents at a single store in Berchem²³:

Voices from the frontline:

“Workers are beaten, bitten and attacked”

“First, a security guard arrested someone for theft. The guard was bitten and hit.”

“Two days later, a guard had to intervene after a customer behaved inappropriately. He asked the customer to leave the store. The guard and a member of staff accompanied the customer outside, where the customer let go of his dog and let it attack the staff.”

“Two customers beat a part-time student worker. A checkout staff supervisor had asked these customers to wear a mask and the customers insulted her violently. The student asked them to be polite. So, they literally beat him up.”

“Covid has not helped matters, but we cannot blame everything on Covid”, said Manuel Gonzalez of CNE Union. “I have been denouncing this aggressive behaviour in stores for more than ten years. It is not normal for employees to come to work and not be safe there.”

Ireland

Abuse on the frontline

The survey conducted by Mandate Trade Union in Ireland revealed abuse was already alarmingly prevalent in the commerce sector before the pandemic. Since Covid-19 violence and harassment against commerce workers has escalated further.

Mandate Trade Union has a campaign called "Respect Retail Workers"



According to the survey²⁴ covering around 1,000 workers:

- ✖ 74% of shop workers suffered verbal abuse from a customer in the previous year; 10% every day, 30% every week and 41% every month.
- ✖ A further 30% received threats from a customer in the previous year.
- ✖ Almost 10% were assaulted by a customer during the course of their employment.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the situation has deteriorated:

- ✖ Data from the Central Statistics Office of Ireland showed that "retail assistants, cashiers and check-out operators were the workers most likely to contract the virus in the second and third waves of the pandemic."²⁵
- ✖ Mandate has repeatedly received worrying reports of increased abuse towards shop workers. "Shop workers have been on the frontline," said Mandate General Secretary Gerry Light and added "Abuse is not part of the job and it costs nothing to show respect and support to the workers who have kept our shelves full throughout the pandemic."²⁶
- ✖ "These 'essential' workers – who have kept us fed and clothed throughout the Covid-19 emergency – don't deserve the indecent conditions many are forced to work under," noted Mandate Union in a statement. "And they certainly don't deserve the level of abuse heaped on many of them in recent months for simply doing their job."²⁷
- ✖ The worrying increase in abuse and harassment of commerce workers were so apparent that Simon Harris (the former Minister of Health) condemned abuse of workers by customers after personally witnessing how customers were "reacting" when politely asked to wear a mask: "Don't be a jerk, wear a mask."²⁸

24. <https://www.respectretailworkers.ie/respectretailworkers.pdf>

25. <https://www.independent.ie/world-news/coronavirus/retail-workers-were-hardest-hit-by-second-and-third-waves-of-covid-pandemic-40909489.html>

26. <https://mandate.ie/2021/12/retail-union-asks-public-to-show-renewed-respect-and-support-to-shop-workers-in-run-up-to-christmas/>

27. <https://mandate.ie/2020/11/retailers-and-government-must-lead-by-example-and-show-respect-to-retail-workers/>

28. <https://www.irishpost.com/news/dont-be-a-jerk-wear-the-mask-simon-harris-condemns-abuse-of-retail-workers-by-customers-190681>

Voices from the frontline:

"It gets very depressing at times"

"I have been spat at by a customer and I was told by a customer to watch my back when I left the store."

"I have first-hand experience of customers launching verbal attacks because of company policies that I'm obliged to follow. It gets very depressing at times."

"I have been cursed at, roared at and had items of stock thrown at me. We need better workplace protection in our shop before someone gets seriously injured."

Tunisia

Harassment and violence cause more mental and physical harm



Tunisian unions are campaigning for the ratification of ILO Convention 190

“Even before the Covid-19 became a part of vocabulary; violence, harassment, stress and anxiety at work were already significant issues in the commerce sector,” notes FGTA-UGTT union of Tunisia. “With the pandemic, they have reached a serious level that harms workers’ mental and physical well-being.”

According to a report provided by FGTA-UGTT union in Tunisia, which represents retail workers among others:

- ✖ Many workers felt helpless due to the profound changes they had to face. Those who are on the frontline serving customers and those who ensure the safety and security of customers, especially at the entrances and exists in the stores, have been suffering from stressful situations due to the pandemic.
- ✖ Increase in workload and working hours, inadequate breaks, the constant fear of being infected at work and passing the virus to their families, lack of care services, massive lay-offs, and fear of losing their jobs made commerce workers’ life much more difficult.
- ✖ Workplace violence and harassment has drastically increased during the crisis. Frontline workers, such as supermarket workers, have faced violence and harassment due to food shortages. Many security guards have been attacked while trying to enforce safety measures, including mask-wearing.
- ✖ Psychological harassment, abuse of workers by customers, violence and physical aggression have been seriously harming the mental health and overall well-being of workers.
- ✖ Violence and harassment at work particularly affects women retail workers who also suffer from discrimination at work and unequal distribution of care responsibilities at home.

Voices from the frontline:

“Uncertainty even leads to suicidal thoughts among workers”

“Faced with this unimaginable level of uncertainty, workers experience mood swings, low motivation, exhaustion, anxiety, depression, burnout and even suicidal thoughts. According to the occupational physicians, the reactions are sometimes physical, such as digestive problems, fluctuations in appetite and weight, skin reactions, fatigue, cardiovascular diseases, musculoskeletal disorders, headaches or other unexplained aches and pains. This can also result, in response, in an increase in the consumption of tobacco, alcohol and narcotics. If not assessed and addressed appropriately, these psychological risks can trigger even more serious mental health issues.” (FGTA-UGTT Union).

The USA

Shootings at stores and dealing with worst of the worst

Findings from the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW) reveal that at least 50,600 retail and grocery workers have been infected or exposed to Covid-19; and at least 213 retail and grocery workers have lost their lives due to the pandemic²⁹. It was not only the deadly virus threatening commerce workers; abuse, harassment and violence in different forms including shootings at stores put frontline workers in danger.



"The customer is always right is nonsense," said Stuart Appelbaum, President of RWDSU/UFCW and UNI Commerce

- ✱ According to data from the FBI, 78 people including many retail workers were killed in 28 shootings at grocery stores in between 2000 and 2020³⁰.
- ✱ Restrictions, stock shortages and safety measures added more fuel to the fire.
- ✱ Calvin Munerlyn, a security guard was shot to death for enforcing the store's mask policy and refusing a entry to a customer because she was not wearing a face covering³¹.
- ✱ Laquitta Willis, a cashier at a supermarket, was shot and killed by a customer whom she asked to wear a mask³².
- ✱ After another shooting at a grocery store in Boulder, Colorado, that left ten people - including a young

grocery store manager - dead, the New York Times reported that grocery store workers were dealing with the 'worst of the worst'. Kim Cordovo, the President of UFCW Local 7 said: *"They've seen horrible behavior by customers – spitting on them, slapping them, refusing to wear masks – but they were the first to be heroes."*³³

- ✱ In a mass shooting at a Kroger store in Memphis, ten grocery workers - represented by the UFCW - were wounded. *"No one in any part of Memphis or America should have to face violence at work or in their community"* said UFCW International President Marc Perrone, *"And we, as a nation, must do more to prevent these acts of violence from ever occurring."*³⁴

29. <https://www.ufcw.org/press-releases/americas-largest-retail-union-calls-on-ceos-for-action-on-omicron-and-winter-covid-surge-to-protect-essential-workers-and-customers/>

30. <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/active-shooter-incidents-in-the-us-2020-070121.pdf/view>

31. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52540266>

32. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/14/us/georgia-shooting-grocery-store-mask.html>

33. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/23/us/grocery-store-workers-boulder.html>

34. <https://www.ufcw.org/press-releases/ufcw-condemns-shooting-at-kroger-store-in-memphis/>

35. https://www.local338.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=294

36. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/09/25/us-grocery-store-shootings/>



Voices from the frontline:

"Gun violence must be recognized as a workplace safety issue"

A store manager was killed, and two other workers were injured by a co-worker who opened fire in a Stop & Shop store in West Hempstead. *"We as a society must recognize that gun violence is a workplace safety issue,"* said John Durso, President of Local 338 RWDSU/UFCW that represents many of the workers in the store. *"As part of this healing, we must make changes to ensure that this doesn't happen again. We owe it to our essential workers."*³⁵

"We're putting our lives on the line all the time with coronavirus and now with all these mass shootings," said Chavez, a grocery worker. *"Like me, they're thinking, 'Hey, are we next?'"*³⁶



First Union fights for better conditions, pay and safety at work

New Zealand

Violence and abuse increased more than ever

Two shocking stabbing incidents in two different stores in New Zealand during the pandemic put the spotlight on the long-existing issue of violence and harassment in the sector.

- ✖ In May 2021, a customer who couldn't afford to buy beer at a supermarket stabbed and seriously injured two retail workers and two other shoppers. He slashed a female worker's face from earlobe to chin, pushed her to the ground, said, "I am going to kill you" and kept stabbing her. She was saved by the intervention of the store manager and other customers.³⁷
- ✖ Four months later, in Auckland, a violent extremist stabbed and wounded seven people including workers in a supermarket before being shot and killed by police.³⁸
- ✖ "We have been concerned about the escalating violence towards our team," said the managing director of the supermarket chain where four people were stabbed.³⁹ The general safety manager of the company confirmed the severity of the problem: "We're concerned about both the frequency and the severity of assaults in our stores."⁴⁰
- ✖ The chief executive of the retailers' organization, Retail NZ, agreed that aggression had escalated with the pandemic: "There is a pattern of violent and anti-social behaviour we are seeing nationwide. It's a massive issue throughout the country."⁴¹

37. <https://www.odt.co.nz/star-news/star-national/countdown-stabbings-man-pleads-guilty-attempted-murder>

38. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58405213>

39. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/crime/125116566/stabbing-in-dunedin-shock-devastation-as-carnage-unfolded-at-a-countdown-supermarket>

40. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/125089098/countdown-rep-overwhelmed-with-emotion-when-speaking-about-traumatic-dunedin-stabbing?rm=a>

41. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/12508074/stabbing-in-dunedin-supermarkets-look-at-safety-measures-amid-rise-in-aggressive-incidents>

42. <https://www.1news.co.nz/one-news/new-zealand/after-tough-year-supermarket-workers-frontlines-again-following-countdown-stabbings/>

43. <https://www.1news.co.nz/2021/09/04/supermarket-worker-questions-if-her-job-is-still-worth-the-risk/>

44. <https://www.1news.co.nz/2022/01/10/many-workers-struggling-with-pay-conditions-amid-pandemic/>

45. <https://www.1news.co.nz/2021/09/04/supermarket-worker-questions-if-her-job-is-still-worth-the-risk/>



Voices from the frontline:

"You have to be on guard, 24/7"

"The rise in customer aggression started during lockdown last year and just seems to have continued," said First Union Retail Secretary Tali Williams and added: "People should be able to come to work knowing that they'll go home safe to their families."⁴² Williams also highlighted the pandemic of violence: "Across the country, staff are nervous about the exposure they have as frontline supermarket workers, not only to the virus, but to this kind of violence."⁴³

"I feel like you have to be on guard, 24/7," said Dunedin supermarket worker Pepi Campbell referring to the abuse and confrontation she faces. "The pay doesn't even cover for what we have to do."⁴⁴

An experienced retail worker Kalein Howard reported that the last couple of years is among the worst in her career: "We've experienced physical abuse, we've had things thrown at us. Workers have said they have been spat at... I was too traumatized to work."⁴⁵

Chile

Better closing hours, better protection from violence!

Female workers make up 70 per cent of the workforce in the commerce sector in Chile.

Late closing hours and lack of safe public transportation put them at more risk of violence and sexual harassment during the pandemic and the Chilean retail unions joined forces to secure earlier closing hours and better protection for commerce workers.



The Chilean retail unions are campaigning for better protection from violence

- ✖ The Confederation of Commerce Workers of Chile (CONATRACOPS) and other organizations of commerce workers have established “the Alliance of Commerce Workers of Chile” (ATCOMER) and launched a campaign entitled “Close at 19:00” in August 2021.⁴⁶
- ✖ ATCOMER Alliance highlights that many female retail workers have been victims of violent crimes when commuting from work to home after late shifts during the pandemic.
- ✖ With the slogan “Our family and our security are also essential”, the campaign aims to secure earlier closing hours and better protection against violence and harassment for retail workers.

⁴⁶. <https://www.uniglobalunion.org/es/news/nace-atcomer-la-alianza-de-trabajadores-de-comercio-en-chile>

⁴⁷. <https://twitter.com/uniglobalunion/status/1460991601061371904?s=20>



Voices from the frontline:

“This is a historic push for justice for women”

“This is a historic push for justice for women who have been violated, harassed and assaulted. We cannot allow them to continue putting their lives at risk simply for doing their jobs.” (Claudio Sagardías, President, CONATRACOPS).

“Women in commerce are being harassed and sexually assaulted on their way home after working late into the evening. That’s why we’re demanding an end to retail hours at 19:00.” (Mauricio Acevedo Sandoval, ATCOMER).⁴⁷

We are fighting back and we are making a difference!

While violence, abuse and harassment of retail workers have soared during the pandemic, commerce unions across the globe are fighting stronger than ever to ensure retail workers have a workplace free from violence and harassment. The list below shows how union power and collective bargaining can make a difference. This is not an exhaustive list, and we will issue another report on best practices in late 2022.

The United Kingdom: Thanks to the dedicated “Freedom from Fear Campaign”⁴⁸ run by USDAW for several years, considerable progress has already been achieved and more is on the way:

- ✖ A new law protecting Scottish retail workers from violence, abuse and harassment was adopted in the Scottish Parliament in January 2021⁴⁹. The Bill increases protections for retail workers by:
 - a. Creating a new statutory offence of assaulting, threatening, abusing, obstructing, or hindering a retail worker,
 - b. Creating a statutory aggravation to that offence where the retail worker is enforcing a statutory age restriction.
- ✖ USDAW collected more than 100,000 signatures to trigger a debate in the UK parliament on violence against retail workers, which took place on 7 June 2021.⁵⁰
- ✖ The UK government committed to ratify ILO Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment.
- ✖ USDAW continues to push for the introduction of a better legislation and has been successful in progressing amendments to the Police, Crime Sentencing and Courts Bill to include protections for shopworkers.

Japan: UA Zensen’s campaign against unreasonable complaints and harassment in the commerce sector not only raises public awareness but also helps to secure better legislation, guidelines and recognition for the commerce workers.

- ✖ On 3rd December 2020, UA ZENSEN held a landmark event on violence and harassment with 200 participants including over 80 Diet (Japanese parliament) members. In the meeting, the Japanese government committed to allocate a budget of 17 million Japa-

nese Yen (approx. US\$160,000) to develop specific guidelines and measures to prevent harassment by customers and to raise awareness.⁵¹

- ✖ In the Japanese parliament, the Prime Minister at the time acknowledged the harassment retail workers face and committed to work on the issue.
- ✖ The Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare is working on a guideline that will focus on customer harassment.
- ✖ An ordinance on elimination of discrimination which includes measures against customer harassment is expected to be introduced in 2022 in Akita Prefecture of Japan. It will be the first ordinance that addresses customer harassment.

Australia: Launched in December 2017, SDA’s “No One Deserves a Serve” campaign has led to the abuse of retail and fast-food workers being recognized as a serious problem that requires greater action and better measures and legislation for the protection of workers. Key achievements include:⁵²

- ✖ Hosting two national roundtables bringing industry groups and employers together to work towards industry wide solutions.
- ✖ Nationwide advertising campaign calling out abusive and violent customers including two retail and one fast food TV ads and advertising on radio and billboards.
- ✖ SDA briefing federal and state members of parliament and senators about the issue.
- ✖ Working with individual employers on their specific policies and training.
- ✖ All Major employers signing on to SDA Industry Statement calling for zero tolerance to abuse and violence.
- ✖ Coughing and spitting fines in New South Wales, Queensland, and the Northern Territory. Fines and/or prison terms (up to 12 months) for abusing/ assaulting commerce workers or Pharmacy shop assistants in Western Australia and South Australia.
- ✖ Campaign endorsed by MPs and senators across Australia.
- ✖ Research and a world first trial of preventative measures using retail and fast-food stores in partnership with a government safety agency and Griffith University.

Finland: PAM Union and the Finish Commerce Federation launched a campaign titled “Let’s Behave” in 2017 to promote appropriate customer behaviour.

- ✖ The campaign videos have been viewed hundreds of thousands times on social media⁵³, become viral and played a key role in awareness raising.
- ✖ PAM negotiated a specific paragraph into the sector level collective agreement which obliges retail employers to assess risks related to abuse and harassment and take necessary actions to protect workers.
- ✖ PAM and the Finish Commerce Federation issued a guideline on tackling harassment in the commerce sector which entitles workers with right to refuse service to the customers who insist on acting inappropriately.

Sweden: Swedish unions, Unionen and Handels, have been effectively using collective bargaining to prevent violence and harassment at work with a specific focus on sexual harassment.

- ✖ A working group (composed of union and employer representatives) focusing on prevention of sexual harassment by the third parties has been established.
- ✖ Risk assessment and prevention of harassment have been mainstreamed into occupational health and safety.
- ✖ New legislation was introduced in March 2021 which regulates that a person over the age of 15 can be banned from accessing a store if there is a risk they will commit a crime or harass someone in the store. The access ban applies for a maximum one year but can be extended.

Chile: Thanks to the “Close at 19:00” campaign launched by the Alliance of Commerce Workers of Chile (ATCOMER), the Chilean Senate Labour Committee approved a bill that aims to promote decent work and worker safety in the commerce sector by closing stores at 7 pm. The legislation is still in progress.⁵⁴

Peru: Following months of negotiations, many collective actions and strikes, Sinathit union in Peru concluded a ground-breaking collective agreement at Tottus, a major retailer in the country. In addition to a good pay rise and better financial benefits, Sinathit won better



Sinathit Union of Peru established a committee for the prevention of harassment.

health and safety conditions for workers and got a committee established for the protection of workers against sexual harassment.⁵⁵

Korea: After many actions and a strike, the Chanel Korea Workers Union concluded a new collective agreement and won improvements in rights and pay for workers, including better preventive measures against sexual harassment in stores.⁵⁶ The union is also pushing for remediation for the workers who were sexually harassed by a manager.⁵⁷



The Chanel Korea Workers Union fought hard to secure better protection against sexual harassment.

48. More information on the campaign is available here: <http://www.usdaw.org.uk/Campaigns/Freedom-From-Fear>

49. <https://www.uniglobalunion.org/news/usdaw-wins-new-scottish-law-protecting-retail-workers-abuse>

50. <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/328621>

51. <https://www.uniglobalunion.org/news/japan-ua-zensen-advances-eliminate-harassment-customers>

52. <https://national.sda.com.au/no-one-deserves-a-serve/>

53. The campaign videos are available here: <https://www.facebook.com/ollaanihmisiksikaupassa/>

54. <https://www.uniglobalunion.org/news/chilean-senate-labour-committee-approves-cierre-alas7-close-7pm>

55. <https://www.uniglobalunion.org/es/news/conquista-de-pandemia-el-sinathit-logra-nueva-firma-de-convenio>

56. <https://www.uniglobalunion.org/news/chanel-korea-workers-union-wins-wage-increase-and-collective-agreement-pressing-secure-justice>

57. <https://www.uniglobalunion.org/news/kfsu-chanel-korea-workers-union-fights-against-endemic-sexual-harassment>

Conclusion

This report concludes with our declaration on violence and harassment in commerce sector which was unanimously adopted at UNI Commerce webinar held with the participation of 110 trade union leaders, activists and members from 30 countries on a global action day on 17 November 2021.⁵⁸

UNI COMMERCE DECLARATION ON VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT IN COMMERCE SECTOR:

WE CALL ON GOVERNMENTS AND RETAILERS TO ACT TO PROTECT RETAIL WORKERS:

“STOP VIOLENCE, RESPECT WORKERS”

For years violence, abuse and harassment has plagued the commerce sector. Third party violence from customers is commonplace—ranging from rude comments and disrespectful gestures to verbal assault, violent threats, physical attacks, and sexual harassment.

However, since the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation has become even worse. While commerce workers around the globe continue to keep people supplied with their vital needs, even during the strictest of lockdowns, they have been deliberately coughed on, spat at, verbally attacked, emotionally harmed, racially abused, threatened, struck by goods, physically attacked, stabbed, and even shot to death by customers. Often because they simply asked customers to comply with security measures or they are bearing the blame if the store has run out of items.

Gender-based violence targeting female retail workers has also increased during the pandemic. Lack of proper and safe transportation deprived many women commerce workers of the right to a safe commute to and from work, leading to women being attacked. Some managers even took advantage of precarious employment and fewer available working hours to offer women more shifts in exchange for sexual relations.

Today, as affiliates of UNI Global Union representing millions of retail workers around the world, we demand an end to violence and harassment in the commerce sector.

We join UNI Global Union in its call to the International Labour Organization (ILO) to designate health and safety as a fundamental right. Violence and harassment is a health and safety issue and all workers deserve to be protected.



We call on our governments to:

- ✗ Ratify ILO Convention 190 and Recommendation 206 on violence and harassment.
- ✗ Consult with trade unions to introduce and implement effective legislation, penalties and sanctions (including creating a new criminal offence if necessary) to stop commerce workers being harassed, attacked, or abused.
- ✗ Recognize the impact of domestic violence on all workers -including those in commerce- in their jobs and take necessary actions to eliminate all forms of violence and harassment.

And we call on all retailers, wholesalers, and e-commerce companies to take immediate action to address increasing violence and harassment during the pandemic by:

- ✗ Consulting and negotiating with UNI Commerce and its affiliates across the globe on the policies and measures to protect commerce workers; and putting them into practice.

⁵⁸ More information on the webinar is available here: <http://www.uniglobalunion.org/news/unions-demand-action-end-customer-violence-stores>

- ✘ Incorporating the prevention of violence and harassment into their vigilance plans and taking measures to combat violence and harassment throughout their whole operations.
- ✘ Replacing the “customer is always right” policy - that encourages customers to engage in abusive and violent behaviour and discourages workers from reporting it - with a “zero-tolerance” policy against violence and harassment making it clear that this kind of behaviour will not be tolerated and will be sanctioned.
- ✘ Ensuring a safe commute for workers to and from work.
- ✘ Providing specific training for workers on handling abusive customer situations and equip them with the necessary tools, procedures, and supportive measures so they can put their training into practice.
- ✘ Addressing gender-based violence with specific safety measures for female commerce workers.
- ✘ Taking all necessary precautions to avoid different forms of violence which can manifest itself through discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, colour, age, sexual orientation and gender identity, among others.

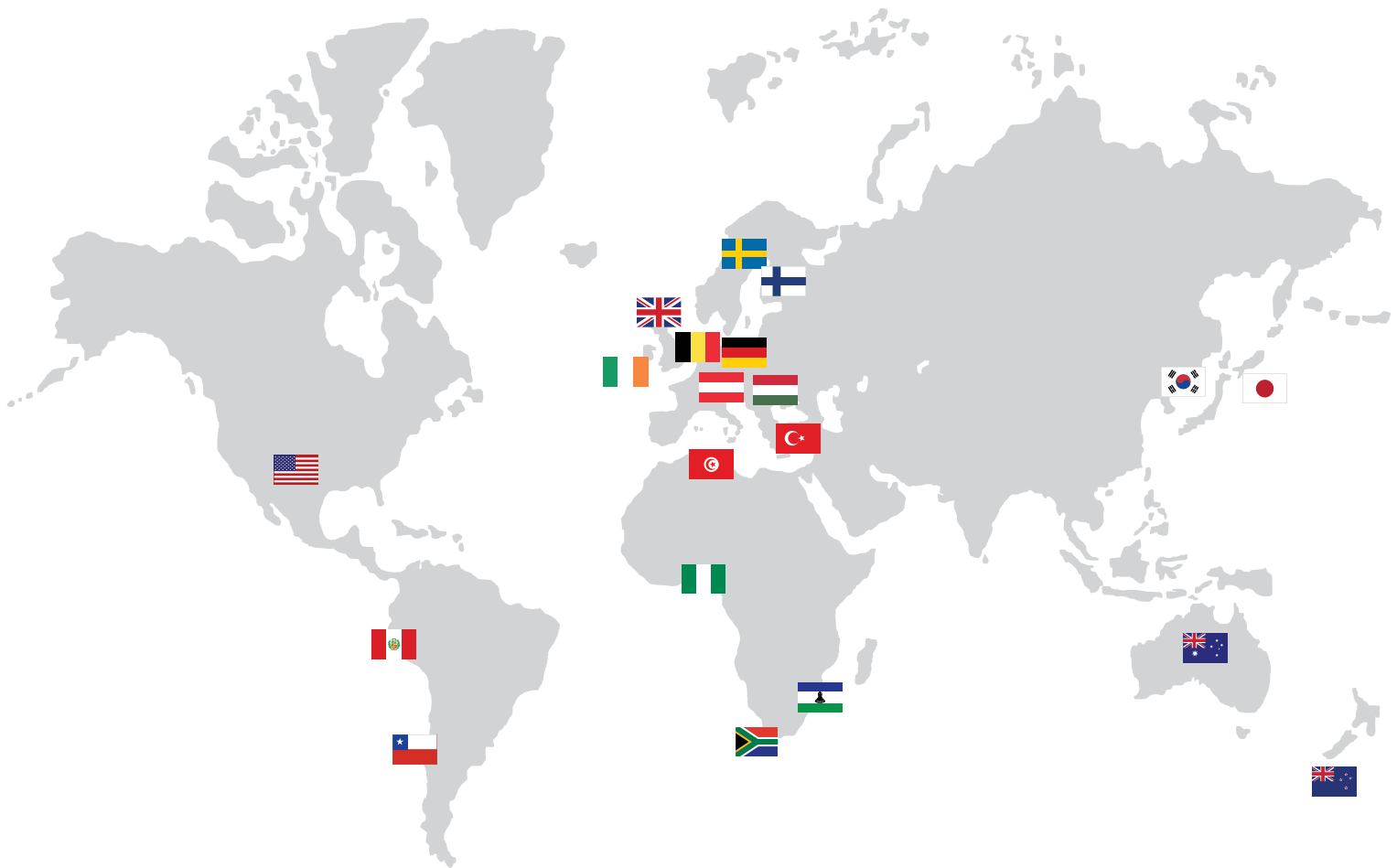


With this declaration we highlight our commitment to stand united against all forms of violence and harassment in the commerce sector and to fight together until we eliminate all forms of violence and harassment.

There is No Store for Violence and Harassment in Commerce!

THE INCONVENIENT TRUTH

The Pandemic of Violence and Harassment in Commerce



As the evidence from more than 20 countries across all continents covered in this report shows, while commerce workers around the globe continue to keep people supplied with their vital needs, even during the strictest of lockdowns, they have been deliberately coughed on, spat at, verbally attacked, emotionally harmed, racially abused, threatened, struck by goods, physically attacked, stabbed, and even shot to death by customers.

