

THE INCONVENIENT TRUTH

The Pandemic of Violence and Harassment in Commerce



commerce

Executive Summary¹

Commerce workers have long been the victims of violence, harassment and abuse at work. Even before the emergence of Covid-19, workers experienced unacceptable levels of third-party violence from customers on a regular basis. However, this report, which gathers evidence from trade union studies in more than 20 countries worldwide, shows that the coronavirus pandemic has led to an alarming escalation of violence and harassment of commerce workers across the globe.

The studies show that retail workers are under attack. Some of the most startling findings are as follows:

The United Kingdom - Nine out of ten workers

abused: Abuse, threats and violence against retail workers doubled since the start of the coronavirus pandemic. During 2021, 89% of surveyed workers experienced verbal abuse, 64% were threatened by a customer and 11% were assaulted.

Australia - One in five workers were coughed on

or spat at: 88% of respondents to an SDA survey said they experienced verbal abuse from customers, while 8% of respondents said they had been the victim of physical violence from a customer during the pandemic.

Austria - Commerce workers at the end of their

tether: 51.2% of surveyed retail workers said "aggressive, unruly customers" was a statement that applied to them.

Hungary - Verbal violence, at least once a week:

20% of respondents said they had experienced physical violence and 87% of workers said they had been verbally abused by a customer. Six out of ten workers said they were exposed to verbal violence at least once a week.

Japan - Unreasonable complaints and harassment

soared: Workers attributed 36% of abusive customer behaviour to the impacts of the pandemic. 60% of respondents said the number of (unreasonable) complaints against retail workers had increased.

Sweden - Increase in anxiety, stress and harassment:

Workers reported having strong anxiety due to the risk of being infected with Covid-19. Among the underlying reasons, customers who do not keep distance" (83%) and "customers' ignorant attitudes" (81%) were on the top of the list.

Turkey - Half of commerce workers think customers are treating them badly or very badly:

A worker survey also revealed that many disputes (and verbal abuse by customers) were arising from the implementation of safety measures placed in the stores and shops.

Germany - Neither reported, nor recorded but a

part of workers' daily life: Aggressive behaviour from customers has got worse during the pandemic. Insults and threats have become commonplace with female workers suffering the most.

Finland - Half of workers were called names or

threatened: One in ten workers experienced physical violence or threats with sharp objects such as a knife. 56% of retail workers said they were sexually harassed.

South Africa - Precarious employment put workers

in peril: There was a spike in sexual harassment complaints and a lack of safe public transportation made commuting to work more dangerous especially for women commerce workers.

Lesotho - Harassment is the norm in the retail

sector: However, there are many obstacles to reporting violence and harassment in the commerce sector including cultural barriers, and a lack of reporting mechanisms and information.

Nigeria - 57.5% of women workers report gender-based

violence at work: More than one-third (35.9 %) of respondents said that even when violations were reported, justice was rarely upheld.

1. For more information and to contact with UNI Commerce: commerce@uniglobalunion.org

The full report is available on: <https://www.uniglobalunion.org/news/pandemic-leads-global-rise-violence-stores>

Belgium – 80% of retail workers have been victims of aggression: Three in four workers reported that they had been verbally threatened by a customer. One in three respondents indicated that they experienced verbal aggression on a weekly to daily basis.

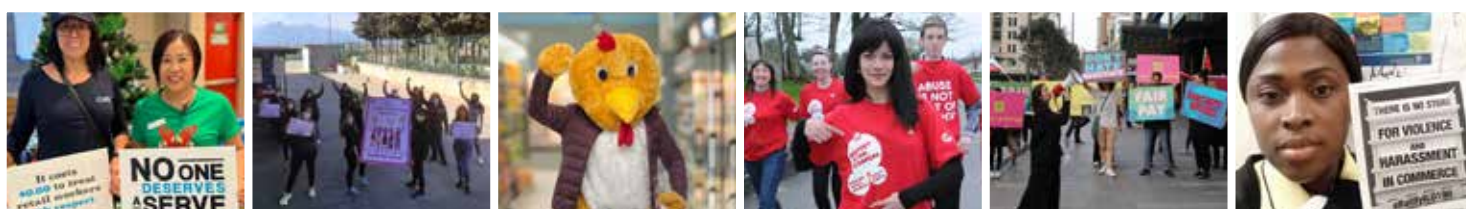
Ireland - Abuse on the frontline: Commerce workers have been hit hard by Covid-19 itself and at the same time suffered increased levels of abuse for simply doing their job.

Tunisia - Harassment and violence cause mental and physical harm: Psychological harassment, customer abuse, violence and physical aggression have been seriously harming the mental and physical health of commerce workers and their overall well-being.

The USA - Shootings at Stores: It is not only the deadly virus threatening commerce workers; abuse, harassment and violence including shootings at stores put workers at more risk. Some workers were shot to death because they asked customers to wear a mask.

New Zealand - Violence and abuse increased more than ever: Two shocking stabbing incidents in two different stores in New Zealand during the pandemic put a spotlight on the long-existing issue of violence and harassment in the sector, which reached a new high.

Chile - Better closing hours - better protection from violence: Late closing hours and lack of safe public transportation put commerce workers at greater risk of violence and sexual harassment during the pandemic.



We are fighting back and we are making a difference

Commerce unions across the globe are fighting back stronger than ever to stop the pandemic of violence and they are making a difference through their dedicated campaigns and efforts:

- ✘ A new law protecting retail workers from violence, abuse and harassment was adopted in **Scotland**.
- ✘ Amendments were progressed to a Bill to include protections for shopworkers in **the UK**.
- ✘ Better legislation, guidelines and recognition for commerce workers were achieved in **Japan**.
- ✘ Better safety measures at stores and stronger deterrents were secured in **Australia**.
- ✘ A paragraph on violence was introduced into the sector level collective agreement in **Finland**.
- ✘ New legislation for the protection of workers was adopted in **Sweden**.
- ✘ A Bill on the protection of commerce workers was approved in the Senate Committee in **Chile**.
- ✘ Better protection against sexual harassment was secured in collective agreements in **Peru** and **Korea**.

“Stop violence, respect workers”

We call on governments to:

- ✘ Ratify ILO Convention 190 on the Elimination of Violence and Harassment in the World of Work
- ✘ 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 hope this report is a useful tool for unions to learn from the experiences and campaigns of other UNI Commerce affiliates so that together we can end all forms of violence and harassment in the commerce sector.

There is No Store for Violence and Harassment in Commerce!

