INSECURITY IN SECURITY WORK:
A GLOBAL SURVEY OF WORKING CONDITIONS IN THE SECURITY SECTOR

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UNI global union

property services

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HIGHLIGHTS

This year, UNI Global Union commissioned a first-of-its-kind global survey of workers in the security sector. Over 11,000 security workers from 35 countries responded to the survey. Taken together, their answers paint a stark, consistent picture that transcends national borders.

Underpaid and overworked:

Pay dissatisfaction in the security sector is widespread.

- In the context of a global cost of living crisis, **57% of security workers** said they are **dissatisfied with their pay**.
- Beyond slim paychecks, **workers report forced overtime, underpayment, and irregular pay**.

Unsafe and under attack:

Discrimination, harassment, and violence are endemic in security work.

- **One in five** security workers feel **"very unsafe"** in their jobs.
- **Around half** have experienced at least one **form of harassment** or discrimination on the job.
- **Women experience harassment** at even **higher rates than men**, and significantly more report feeling "very unsafe" in their jobs.
- Over **85% of workers said their employer should do more** to protect them from harassment and discrimination.

Unheard and disrespected:

Employers fail to provide security workers with the support they need to do their jobs safely.

- **Just one third of workers** said their employer or client regularly **treats them with respect.**
- One in two workers said they **do not receive appropriate training** to ensure their safety at work.

Safer, stronger, and more satisfied when organized:

Union victories drive progress in the sector, and give hope to workers seeking better conditions.

- In a highly unorganized sector, **46% of unionized workers** say union membership has had a **positive impact on their working conditions**.
- Union members say **union membership** has improved their **working conditions**, given them a **voice at work**, and won them **better pay**.
- In search of better pay and conditions, about **half of non-unionized workers** say they would **like to join a union**.



"IT'S SO MENTALLY TAXING WHEN YOU HAVE TO THINK ABOUT HOW TO SURVIVE WHEN THE COST OF LIVING RISES."

INTRODUCTION



Worldwide, more than 20 million private security workers spend their days and nights working a dangerous job to keep the public safe[1] – at airports, at music halls, in schools, on trains, and most other places we go to work, learn, or play. Despite its global importance to a lucrative industry with annual revenues of around USD$350 billion[2], security work is often thankless work. The everyday labour of security workers goes unnoticed and under-paid, while their experiences and opinions go unheard.

This year, in an effort to amplify their voices, **UNI Global Union commissioned a global survey of security workers**, managed by the research agency Jarrow Insights. Overall, **more than 11,000 security workers from 35 countries responded to the survey[3].** Their responses reveal widespread and fundamental challenges that face the global security workforce every single day in their jobs.

Well over half of security workers who responded to the survey are unsatisfied with their pay. This dissatisfaction is deeply linked to the mismatch between their wages, and the difficulty and dangers of their work. **Workers report high levels of discrimination, harassment, and violence** from the very public they are meant to protect, and little respect from their employers or clients.

1 Claire Provost. (2017). "The industry of inequality: why the world is obsessed with private security". *The Guardian.* https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2017/may/12/industry-of-inequality-why-world-is-obsessed-with-private-security. (Last accessed 05/06/24).

2 BusinessWire. (2021). "Investigation and Security Services Global Market Report 2021: Market is Expected to Grow from $288.25 Billion in 2020 to $417.16 Billion in 2025 - Long-term Forecast to 2030 - ResearchAndMarkets.com" https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20210810005901/en/Investigation-and-Security-Services-Global-Market-Report-2021-Market-is-Expected-to-Grow-from-288.25-Billion-in-2020-to-417.16-Billion-in-2025---Long-term-Forecast-to-2030---ResearchAndMarkets.com. (Last accessed 05/06/24).

3 See Appendix A for a full list of countries and response numbers

In the face of these industry-wide problems - poor pay, dangerous working conditions, and often unreceptive management - **survey responses showed that unions and collective bargaining have had a significant positive effect on working conditions.** In a sector that remains highly unorganized, over half of unionized security workers who are covered by a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) say that union membership has had a positive impact on their working conditions. Meanwhile, union membership and a strong contract remain core aspirations for many security workers - **half of non-union workers who are not covered by a CBA said they would like to join a union.**

Alarmingly, **the survey also found widespread reports of discrimination against workers for union activity.** In some countries, as many as 80% of workers reported experiencing retaliation from their employer for organizing. However, **the use of union-busting tactics by employers is counterproductive in more ways than one.** While the experience of union-busting harassment may lead some workers to feel negatively about the effects of union membership, it is related to higher positive perception of union membership among others, who see the union as giving them a voice to speak out against poor treatment.

Overall, the results of the survey show that much remains to be done in the effort to ensure that the security sector offers good and safe jobs, with pay, safety, and training standards that protect workers' lives and livelihoods. As these challenges persist, and employers fail to act, it falls to workers and their unions to continue securing better conditions in the security sector.



PAY DISCONTENT

The ongoing global cost of living crisis has not left security workers unscathed. The results of this survey show that pay dissatisfaction is a strikingly prevalent issue among security workers globally, with over **57.42%** of respondents saying they were either somewhat or very dissatisfied with their compensation, and less than 10% saying they were very satisfied (see Figure 1).

The majority of security workers are dissatisfied with their pay.



Figure 1. Comparison of percentages of worker responses to the question, "How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your pay?"

In their free response answers, security workers highlight the diversity of challenges caused by the relentless rise in inflation and rising cost of living. This economic strain has created substantial obstacles for workers who are struggling to make ends meet.

> "Wages for this trade are starvation wages." - Museum, Germany

The broader implications of this dissatisfaction extend beyond the pocketbooks of individual workers. Respondents shared how economic pressure affects their mental health, and the well-being of their families.

> "Given the high cost of living, I ask for a good salary which can allow us to take care of our families." - Industrial or manufacturing sites, Ivory Coast

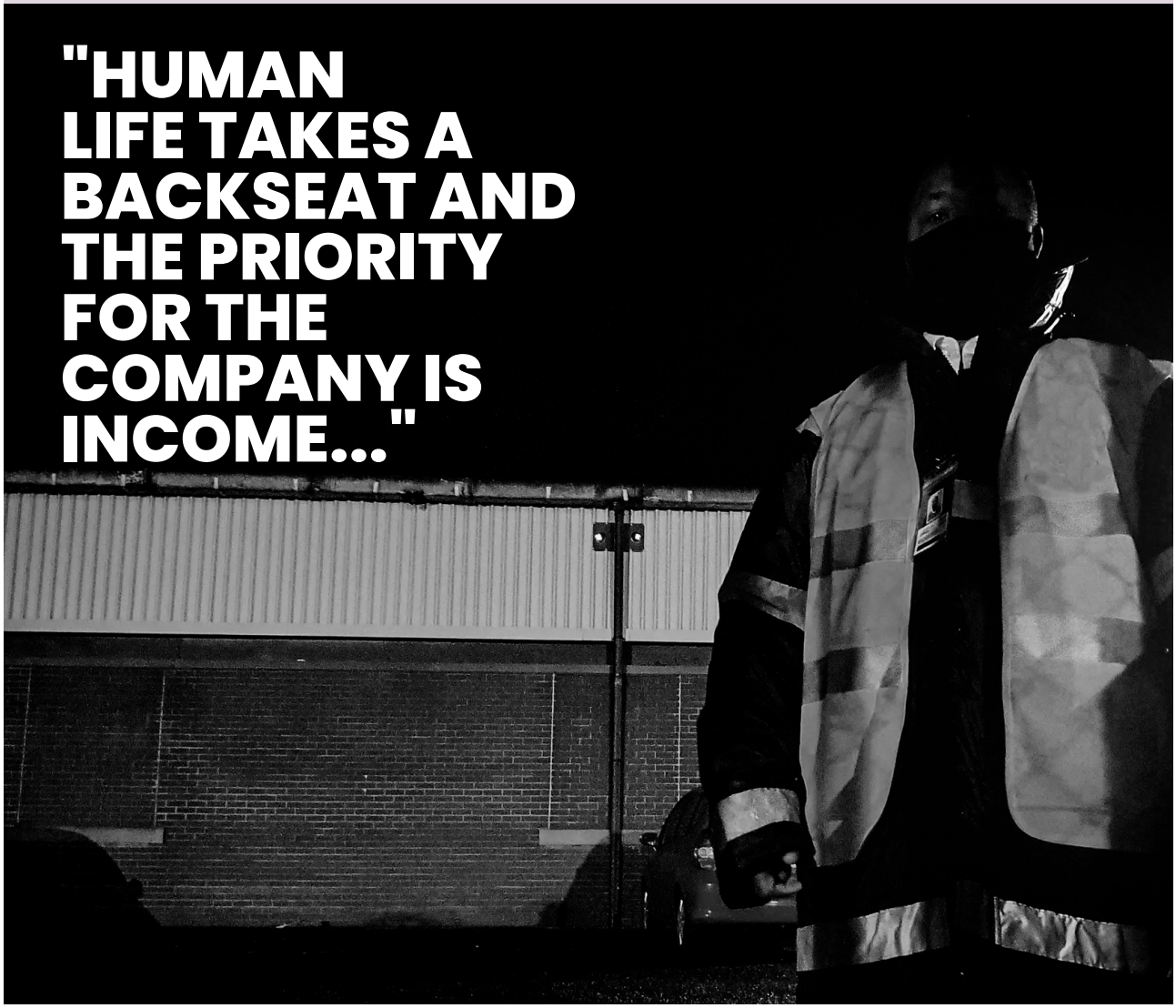
> "I am worried that it will cause psychological problems. Lack of money really affects our health. The wage we receive is not enough to pay for our food. **We cannot provide a good life for our children.**" - Industrial or manufacturing sites, Turkey

> "It's so mentally taxing when you have to think about how to survive when the cost of living rises." - Multiple job sites, Finland

Zero-Hour Contracts

As previously discussed, workers in the security sector are overwhelmingly dissatisfied with their pay. However, those with contracts that feature fixed hourly commitments – "full-time" or "part-time" security workers – report such dissatisfaction at rates lower than the overall dataset (51.72% and 46.24%, respectively). For other security workers, the situation is even more dire.

Many economic commentators have observed a dramatic rise in zero-hours contracts since the 2008 global financial crisis. These so-called "casual" contracts, which do not guarantee workers a minimum number of weekly work-hours, grew rapidly in the 2010s, with the United Kingdom alone seeing an increase of nearly 500%.[4] Understandably, pay dissatisfaction among such workers is high, given its inconsistent nature: **over 87.00% of "casual or zero-hours contract" security workers reported being dissatisfied with their pay.**



4 CIPD. (2022) Zero-hours contracts: evolution and current status. London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. https://www.cipd.org/globalassets/media/knowledge/knowledge-hub/reports/zero-hours-contracts-report-aug-2022_tcm18-110465.pdf (last accessed 05/06/24, see table on Page 4).

An Unreliable Income

Low wages alone are not the only contributor to pay dissatisfaction among security workers. In the free response data, **underpayment** also emerged as a significant issue. Security workers reported that they are paid lower wages than their contracts stipulate, an issue that arises often in the context of overtime payments.

> "No overtime being paid and you work for more than 12 hours, try to demand it and the verbal harassment you'll get will leave your mouth shut and left with nothing." - Residential buildings, Kenya

> "Companies have taken advantage of employees and their need to work in order to exploit them: **they don't pay overtime** on pay slips and even **pay less than 40%** of the agreed amount." - Hospitals and health facilities, Brazil

Additionally, workers report being pressured into **forced overtime**, or to perform tasks outside of their job description without appropriate compensation. Security guards who attempt to assert their right to be compensated for extra hours worked can face harassment and intimidation.

> "You are asked to do jobs not in your job descriptions. Failure to do so means you will be benched for weeks without jobs." - Multiple job sites, United Kingdom

> **"Insults and threats from employers are almost the order of the day** if you refuse to work overtime or something similar." - Banking and finance, Germany

> "My supervisor threatened to hit me because I asked a question about time sheets." - Residential buildings, United States

Irregular pay is another frequently cited problem, as inconsistent work hours and delayed payments contribute to financial instability and stress among workers.

> "... late payment and low salary makes me stressed every time. I can't manage my budget." - Multiple job sites, Kenya

> "... salary payments are delayed, creating family insecurity as well." - Personal escort, Colombia

> "[My primary health and safety concern is] Reasonable, regulated working hours and that ... overtime is paid reasonably without having to chase after it for months." - Mining, Germany

Yet even as many workers expressed the difficulties in being paid on time for the few hours they were assigned to work, many others reported that their primary safety concern was overwork. Long overtime hours without necessary rest contribute to chronic fatigue, stress-related illnesses and can lead to more severe health problems. This significantly undermines workers' physical and mental well-being.

> "From a health point of view, there are unstable and unpredictable schedules, breaks that start in the middle of the night do not allow us to have restful sleep." - Airports and aviation, Belgium

> "As a guard, my main health and safety concern is fatigue and changes in pace. These two factors have a direct impact on my work. Fatigue can affect my alertness and my ability to respond quickly to emergency situations. Additionally, changes in pace, such as irregular work schedules, can disrupt my sleep and daily routine, which can lead to lower work performance." - Multiple job sites, Belgium

> **"I work for 12 hours daily for only one day of weekly rest**, this greatly affects my physical health." - Mining, Ivory Coast

> "Standard working hours of over 200 hours per month is an outrage!! This makes you physically and mentally ill!" - Multiple job sites, Germany



PROTECTING US, BUT WHO KEEPS THEM SECURE?

> "Workplaces are very unsafe, **no one stands up for us, no one stands behind us.**" - Public spaces, Turkey

Every day, in countless public and private spaces, people rely on security workers to ensure their safety. Alarmingly though, as the figure below shows, **nearly one in five security workers report feeling "very unsafe" in their job,** while a full **34.86%** reported feeling some lack of safety (see Figure 2).

An alarming proportion of security workers feel unsafe at work.

Answers to *"How safe do you feel in your job?"*



Somewhat unsafe *16.35%*

Very unsafe *18.51%*

Figure 2. Comparison of percentages of worker responses to the question, "How safe do you feel in your job?"

In response to both multiple-choice and free-response questions, security workers painted a picture of workplaces rife with harassment, discrimination, and violence. Overall, **46.25% of respondents indicated that they have experienced at least some form of harassment or discrimination on the job.** In their free response testimony, workers indicated that this feeling of vulnerability primarily stems from the frequent harassment, discrimination, and violence they encounter.

> "I'm spit on and discriminated against." - Multiple job sites, Germany

> "I have been called all the names under the sun by members of the public and have recently been assaulted." - Corporate and government buildings, United Kingdom

> "[I witnessed] sexual and workplace harassment, but the complaint was not documented." - Multiple job sites, Colombia

> **"Harassment is ubiquitous** and is turned a blind eye if not encouraged by the employer/customer." - Multiple job sites, Belgium

> "It is impossible not to feel your health affected, since, in the position in which I work, tension and stress are my daily bread." - Multiple job sites, Costa Rica

Beyond the ever-present challenges of dealing with unruly and disrespectful customers and members of the public, the forms of both discrimination and harassment that security workers suffer varies widely (see Figure 3). Of security workers reporting experiencing or witnessing harassment, discrimination, or violence on the job, 17.61% reported racial discrimination, while 16.48% reported gender-based discrimination, and 14.71% discrimination based on tribal affiliation. Rates of harassment, discrimination, and/or violence based on sexual orientation, religious affiliation, or political beliefs were lower – between 10-13% – but not absent.

Workers reported experiencing or witnessing many kinds of violence, harassment, and discrimination.

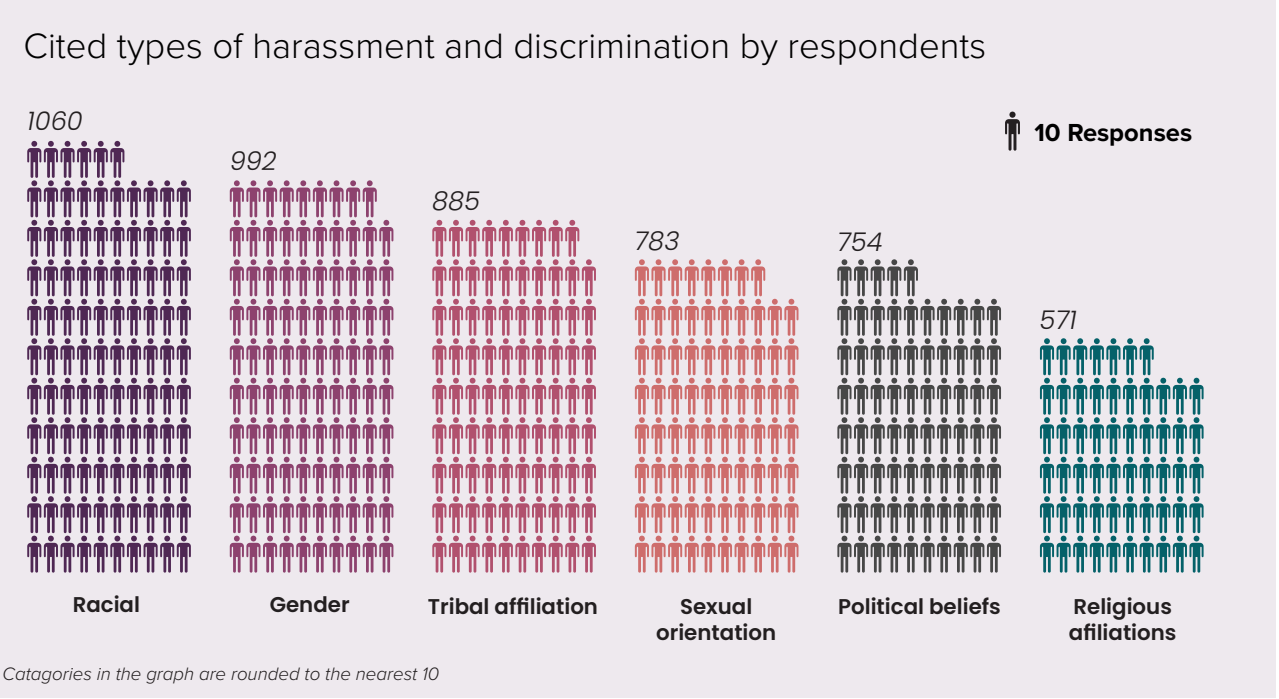


Figure 3. Comparison of the percentages of workers who selected various kinds of discrimination, harassment and/or violence in answer to the questions, "What was the nature of the discrimination you experienced?" and "What was the nature of the violence, harassment, and/or discrimination you witnessed?"

This prevalence of discrimination based on racial and tribal affiliation was also reflected in perception of safety among workers who are employed in countries in which they were not born. These foreign-born workers express a perceived lack of safety at far higher rates than the data set as a whole – 55.52% said they felt either somewhat unsafe or very unsafe (see Figure 4). Furthermore, these foreign-born workers also reported experiencing significantly more discrimination than native-born workers (60.50% vs 45.09%).

Foreign-born workers were far more likely to report experiencing discrimination.

Answers from foreign/native-born workers to *"Have you experienced discrimination at work?"*



Foreign-born workers were far more likely to report feeling unsafe at work.

Answers from foreign/native-born workers on *"How safe do you feel in your job?"*



Figure 4.

In their free response answers, security workers reported experiencing other kinds of discrimination by employers and clients, including ageism, ableism, and class/caste-based discrimination.

> "They no longer call you by your name but old man." - Industrial or manufacturing sites, Peru

> "Gender and age. Those two things are the biggest causes of discrimination." - Multiple job sites, Finland

> "Unfortunately, I was faced with several forms of discrimination, particularly because of my origins, my religious affiliation and my age." - Multiple job sites, Belgium

Harassment by workplace

Working in a busy, public-facing environment increased the likelihood of experiencing harassment.

Percentage of affirmative answers to *"Have you experienced verbal or physical harassment in your workplace?"* by workplace

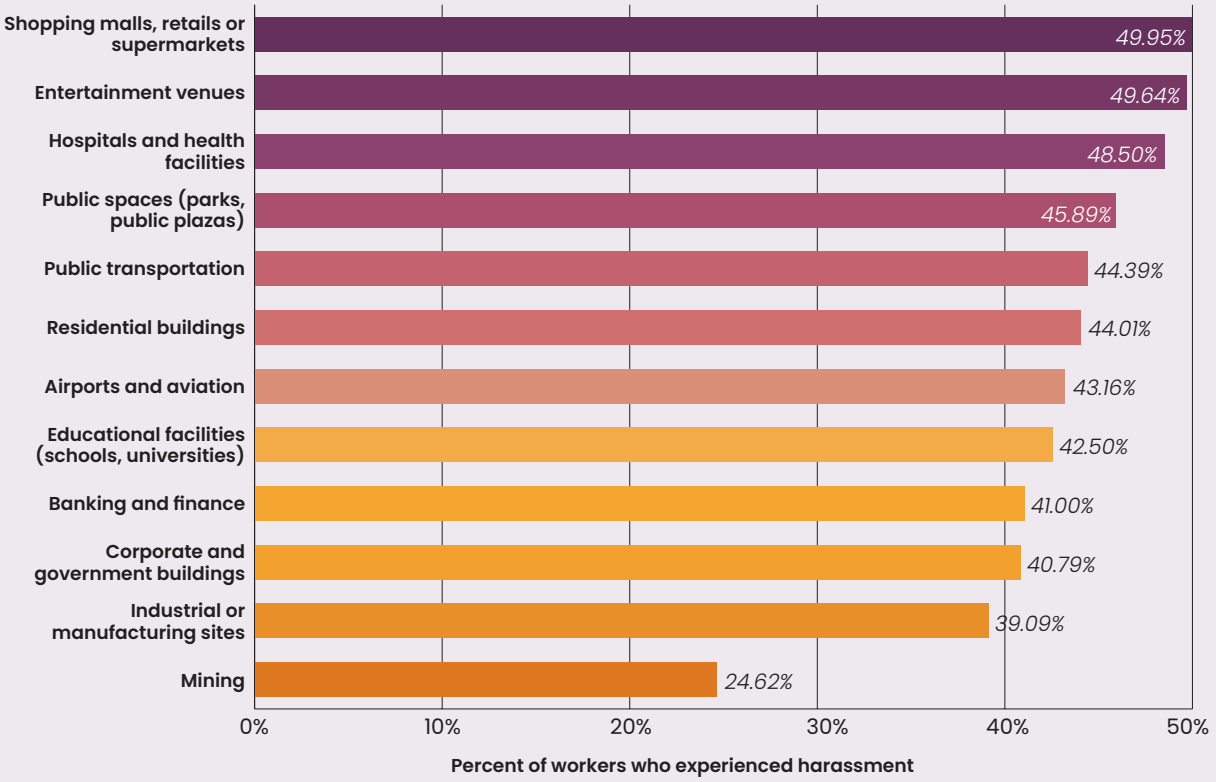


Figure 5. Comparison of the percentage of workers who answered "Yes" to "Have you experienced verbal or physical harassment in your workplace?" grouped by answer to the question, "What type of workplace environment are you mainly employed in?"

Perhaps unsurprisingly, workers who work in busy, public-facing places tend to experience the highest proportion of harassment. For instance, **nearly 50% of security workers who work at shopping malls, retail stores, or entertainment venues reported having experienced harassment.** Similarly, hospitals and health facilities and public spaces (parks, public plazas) – highly trafficked spaces open to the public – also saw significant levels of reported harassment.

> "Intimidation by local youths, sometimes for hours on end, **with no meaningful support**. Daily threats and cursing from both thieves and angry customers." - Shopping malls, retail, or supermarkets, United Kingdom

> "We experience a lot of harassment from the clients. Some clients insult and threaten us." - Shopping malls, retail, or supermarkets, United Kingdom

> "In my tenure as a parking attendant, I have been verbally abused." - Public spaces, Belgium

> "Mental torture." - Hospitals and health facilities, Kenya

> "We're being harassed by clients because of a low salary." - Shopping malls, retail, or supermarkets, Kenya

Harassment and gender

> **"Misogyny affects 90% of women in this sector."** - Multiple job sites, Belgium *(Female)*

19.74% of security guards who responded to the survey were women - a reflection of a somewhat male-dominated sector. **Female respondents reported feeling "very unsafe" at work at nearly twice the rate of male respondents (28.6% vs. 16.1%).** They also reported experiencing verbal and physical harassment at a rate 35% higher than men (52.27% vs. 38.66%, see Figure 6).

Female security workers experience more harassment and feel less safe than men.

Comparison of answers from men and women to questions on harassment and safety in their workplace

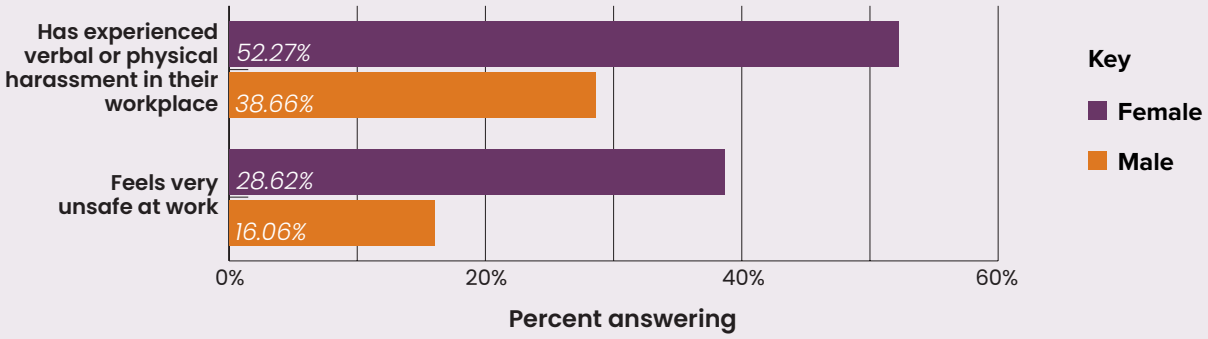


Figure 6. Two comparisons of the percentage of women and men who answered "Yes" to "Have you experienced verbal or physical harassment in your workplace?" and "Very unsafe" to "How safe do you feel in your job?"

> "Sexually tinged things from customers and being forcibly hugged, etc. Fortunately, I have a hard face." - Shopping malls, retail, or supermarkets, Finland *(Female)*

> "I was harassed by men and not only colleagues but also passengers." - Multiple job sites, Belgium *(Female)*

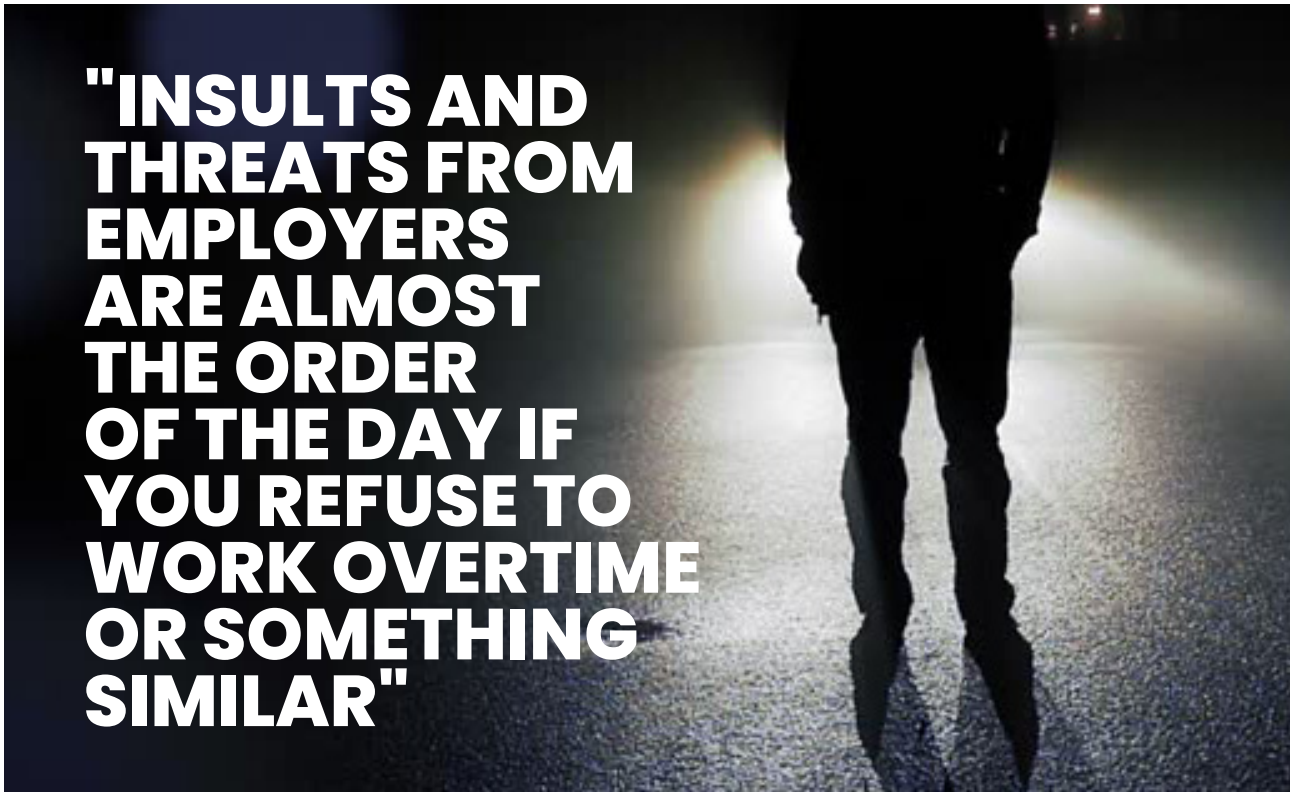
Gender-based discrimination and harassment does not only originate from customers, however. Free response testimony reveals the ways in which male colleagues, and supervisors in particular, exploit their power and position to harass the women who work with or under them. This is reported both in first hand accounts from the women themselves, as well as in observations from male colleagues.

> "Senior guards / supervisors taking advantage of lady officers. Like sexual harassment before you are deployed." - Shopping malls, retail, or supermarkets, Kenya *(Female)*

> "When females were allowed into the Security field, the male supervisor would sometimes give them assignment requirements that males never given in an attempt to make the females fail. Other times, the male supervisor would give the female an easy position in order to *"make time"* with them." - Multiple job sites, Denmark *(Male)*

> "Security Assurance Management people that's in charge sexually harass employees if you don't do what they want then they start playing with your hours if you don't take u off the schedule." - Multiple job sites, United States *(Female)*

> "Supervisor wanted sex favours, when the lady refused, she was always punished for no good reason, being late for 2 minutes given hard jobs from maternity, less minutes for lunch, denied protective clothes and even given less overtime than others." - Corporate and government buildings, Kenya *(Male)*



DENIED RESPECT, DESERVING SUPPORT

The statistics and testimonies presented in the previous section paint a grim picture of the day-to-day working life of many security workers. In response to these conditions, **86.19% of workers surveyed said their employer should do more to prevent harassment, violence, and/or discrimination.** This number alone indicates a significant dereliction of responsibility on the part of security companies and their clients.

The perceived inaction from employers on the basic duty of protecting those who work for them is connected to a broader sense of disrespect that security workers endure. **Just 32.56% of respondents said they are always or often respected by their employer and clients**, with an equal number saying they are "sometimes" respected, and another third saying they are rarely or never respected.

In their free response answers, many respondents shared strong words regarding the way the company they work for sees and treats them.

> "The company doesn't give a shit about the health and safety situation and is only concerned about billing customers." - Shopping malls, retail, or supermarkets, Spain

> "**Human life takes a backseat** and the priority for the company is income... it literally comes before human life." - Banking and finance, Colombia

> "The employer does not take any measures to ensure that the employee is safe or feels safe at work. Unless something is required by law, you won't get it." - Multiple job sites, Norway

> "We are unsafe and our employer doesn't want to listen about my safety." - Industrial or manufacturing sites, South Africa

> "As long as we are physically healthy we are needed but **when we are physically weak we will be thrown away like rubbish** by the company." - Industrial or manufacturing sites, Indonesia

One concrete way that employers can provide support for security workers is by providing training. However, when asked, "Do you feel you are given adequate training by your employer in order to keep yourself safe and carry out responsibilities?" 45.17% of survey respondents reported that they did not.

> "Absent management, zero training or care of employees, culture of fear." - Hospitals and health facilities, Norway

> "There is no adequate training, and there is no inspection of the area in which they work." - Banking and finance, Colombia

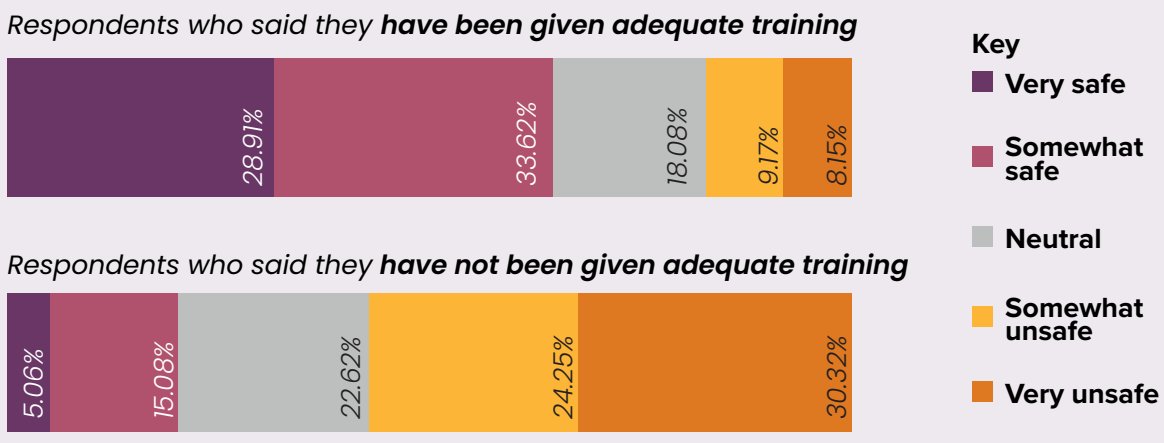
> "No job training is provided to operational staff, there are no opportunities for growth in the company or support from bosses." - Unspecified jobsite, El Salvador

Not only is this lack of sufficient training a safety issue for the security workers, who have not been prepared to deal with the array of challenges that might face them, it is also a safety risk for those who depend on them. **35.26% of airport security staff, 45.33% of security workers in schools, 46.27% of guards in corporate and government buildings all report not having received proper training. Even higher rates of inadequate training were reported by respondents who work in public transportation (57.54%), shopping malls (64.52%), and entertainment venues (53.82%),** despite these kinds of spaces having been the target of high-profile attacks over the last few years.

Adequate training is crucial for equipping security personnel with the necessary skills and knowledge to perform their duties effectively and safely. This lack of proper training not only leaves workers ill-prepared to handle the demands and challenges of their roles but also exacerbates their feelings of insecurity, as the figure below shows. **Among workers who say they have not received adequate training, over half report feeling somewhat or very unsafe at work.** Less than 20% of workers who say they have received adequate training said the same (see Figure 7).

Perceived adequacy of training has a strong influence on perceived safety on the job.

Comparison of answers to *"How safe do you feel in your job?"* grouped by perception of training adequacy

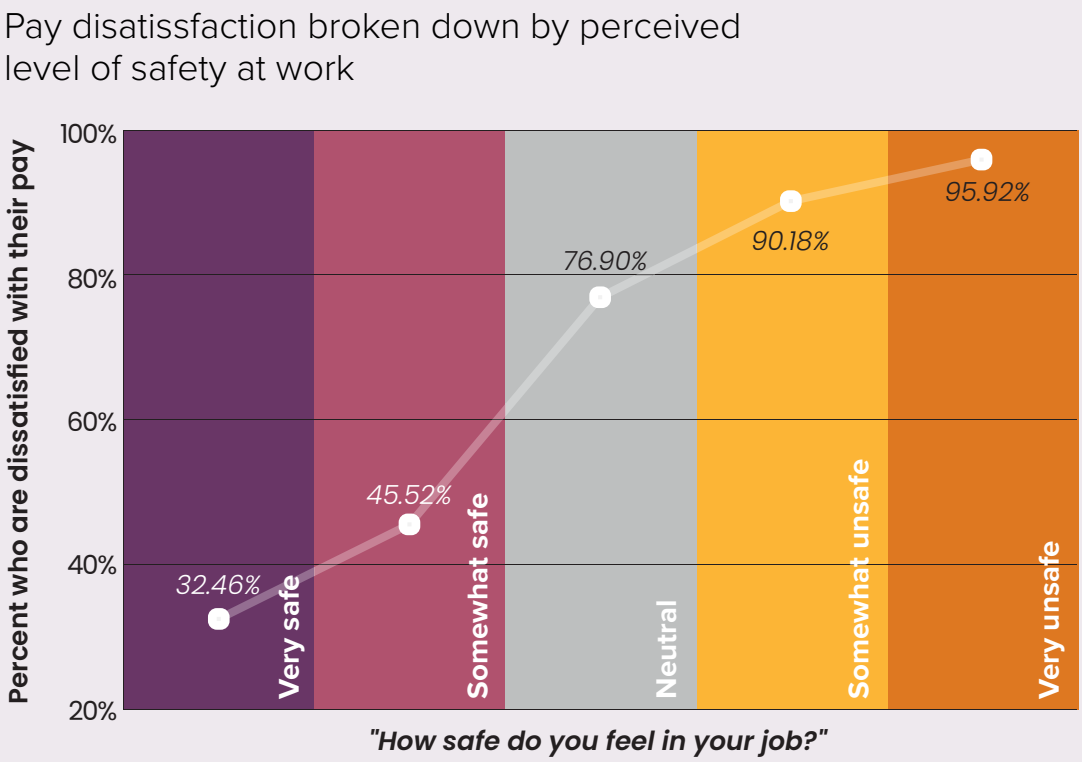


"Neutral" refers to the original response option "Neither safe, nor unsafe"

Figure 7. Comparison of answers to "How safe do you feel in your job?" grouped by answer to "Do you feel you are given adequate training by your employer in order to keep yourself safe and carry out responsibilities?"

The effects of these unsafe working conditions on security worker morale are readily apparent, as evidenced by their correlation with pay dissatisfaction: **among workers who 'rarely' or 'never' felt respected, only 10% reported being satisfied with their pay**. In keeping with this trend, **93.31%** of security workers who reported feeling unsafe at work also said they were dissatisfied with their pay, as compared to just **40.63%** of security workers who reported feeling safe at work (see Figure 8).

Workers who feel unsafe are more dissatisfied with their pay.



"Neutral" refers to the original response option "Neither safe, nor unsafe"

Figure 8. Percentage of respondents who said they were dissatisfied with their pay broken down by answers to "How safe do you feel in your job?"

This relationship between pay dissatisfaction and negative opinion of working conditions continues in other areas. Security guards who reported harassment at work were only half as likely to be satisfied with their pay as those who did not (see Figure 9). Meanwhile, of workers who felt 'always' respected by employers and clients, **67.45%** reported being satisfied with their pay (see Figure 10).

Workers who experience harassment are more likely to be dissatisfied with their pay.

Comparing sentiment on pay between responses to "*Have you experienced verbal or physical harassment in your workplace?*"

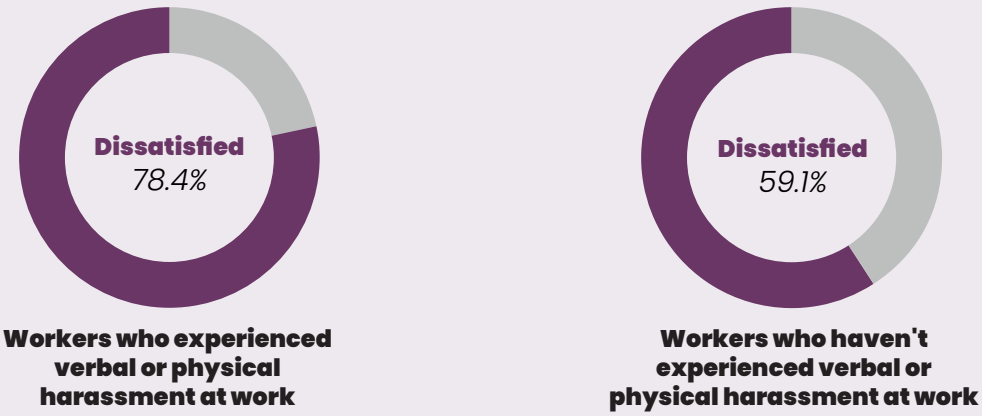


Figure 9. Comparison of answers to "Have you experienced verbal or physical harassment in your workplace?" grouped by answers to "How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your pay?"

Workers who do not feel respected by their employer or client are most likely to be dissatisfied with their pay.

Pay disatissfaction broken down by perceived level of respect from the employer or client

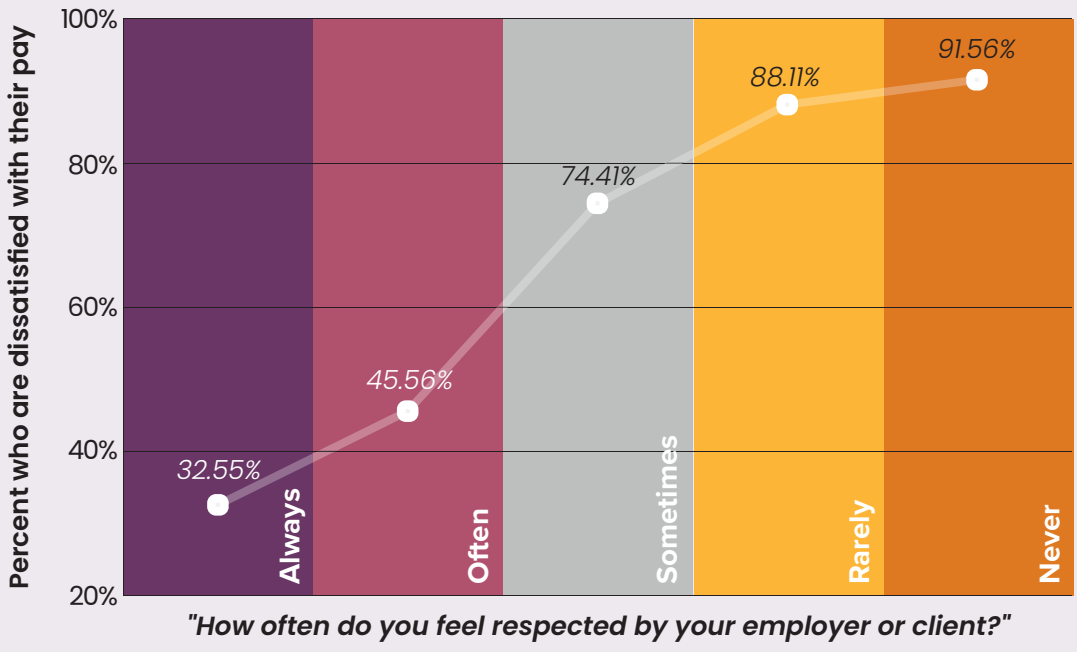


Figure 10. Percentage of responses with negative sentiment to "How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your pay?" grouped by answers to "Do you feel respected by your employer or client?"

Fighting for Recognition and Respect

> "Supervisors should be more aware of workers and respect their opinions" - Banking and finance, Peru

Many security guards point out the issue of **lacking a professional recognition** within the industry. This lack of acknowledgment creates **uncertainty about appropriate pay levels** and standards, leaving many workers unsure of their worth and compensation expectations. The role of a security guard involves significant risks and responsibilities, including ensuring the safety and security of people and property.

> "We are poorly paid and poorly seen." - Corporate and government buildings, Spain

Additionally, the lack of professional acknowledgment raises growing concerns among workers about retirement pay—a crucial safeguard for older security workers. Many do not receive any retirement benefits at all.

> "Low salary, bad hours and no early retirements." - Industrial or manufacturing sites, Spain

Despite their critical duties, the industry often fails to recognize the contributions of security workers adequately. **This job unquestionably deserves greater recognition** and understanding, as well as more standardised pay scales that reflect the true value of the work they perform. A serious professional recognition would not only help in determining fair compensation but also improve job satisfaction and morale among security guards.

> "Security guard work must be a recognised profession and paid accordingly." - Public transportation, Austria

> "To be valued for the fact that with a high degree of responsibility you sometimes risk your own safety." - Emergency Call Center, Germany

> "A wage should finally be negotiated that makes it possible to have a working day of 8 hours in 20 working days and at the same time be able to live adequately. So a minimum wage of €18 per hour." - Multiple job sites, Germany

In their answers detailed throughout this report, security workers have stressed that they lack significant institutional support from their employers to deal with these problems. They lack adequate training. They feel unsafe. They feel disrespected. They are harassed, discriminated against, and are both subject and witness to violence, from which they overwhelmingly think that employers could and should do more to protect them.

With this state of the industry in mind, we now turn to the positive effects that unions have in mitigating some of these problems, and how employers have acted decisively against such efforts.

THE EFFECT OF UNIONS

As we have seen, security work is difficult work. Responses to this survey have shown that these workers experience high rates of discrimination, harassment, and violence - all in exchange for unsatisfactory pay and a lack of respect. The last section explored workers' sense that their employers and clients are not doing enough to protect them and improve their conditions on the job. Despite facing these challenges, responses showed that when workers rely on each other, forming unions and winning contracts, their working conditions improve without employer support – and despite employer antagonism.

Respondents to the survey were asked both whether they were members of a union, and whether their wages and conditions at their job were regulated by a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) negotiated by a union. The combined answers to these two questions sort the respondents into four distinct categories. Broadly, union membership gives a worker **representation**, while coverage under a collective bargaining agreement gives them **contractual benefits** (whether in terms of pay or conditions).

Employment categories

Non-union members who do not have a CBA are most often subject to levels of pay and working conditions that their employers decide for them. They lack both representation and the contractual benefits of a CBA.

Non-union members who have a CBA are those who benefit from a union's collective bargaining efforts, or a sectoral agreement, but who do not participate in or contribute to the union - and thus lack direct representation. Their contracts are in whole or in part influenced by collective bargaining.

Union members who do not have a CBA are often members of unions that are actively fighting for recognition from their employer. These workers have come together to make demands of their employer, and to support each other. Thus, workers in this category benefit from representation. They may have won some of their demands, but they have not achieved formal recognition from the employer in the form of a collectively negotiated contract.

Union members with a CBA are those whose unions have achieved formal, contractual recognition from their employer or from the state. These workers have both representation, and contractual benefits.

More than 50% of union security workers who are covered by a collective bargaining agreement say that being in a union has positively impacted their working conditions.

When asked how union membership makes their lives better, these workers most commonly cited "improved working conditions" (47.58% of workers), "better pay" (41.96%), "a voice at work" (36.53%), and "a safer working environment" (30.29%), emphasising that unions benefit workers not just by winning better safety and conditions, but also by giving them a say.

The results also highlight the importance of winning a contract for realising improvements in pay and conditions. As Figure 11 shows, when compared to union members without a collective bargaining agreement, union members with a CBA were twice as likely to say that union membership had improved their working conditions and pay, and nearly 3 times as likely to say that union membership has made their working environment safer. Among union members without a CBA, the most-cited benefit of union membership was gaining "a voice at work".

Winning a strong contract is key to winning better conditions.

Answers to *"How does being a member of a union make your life better?"* among workers with and without a CBA

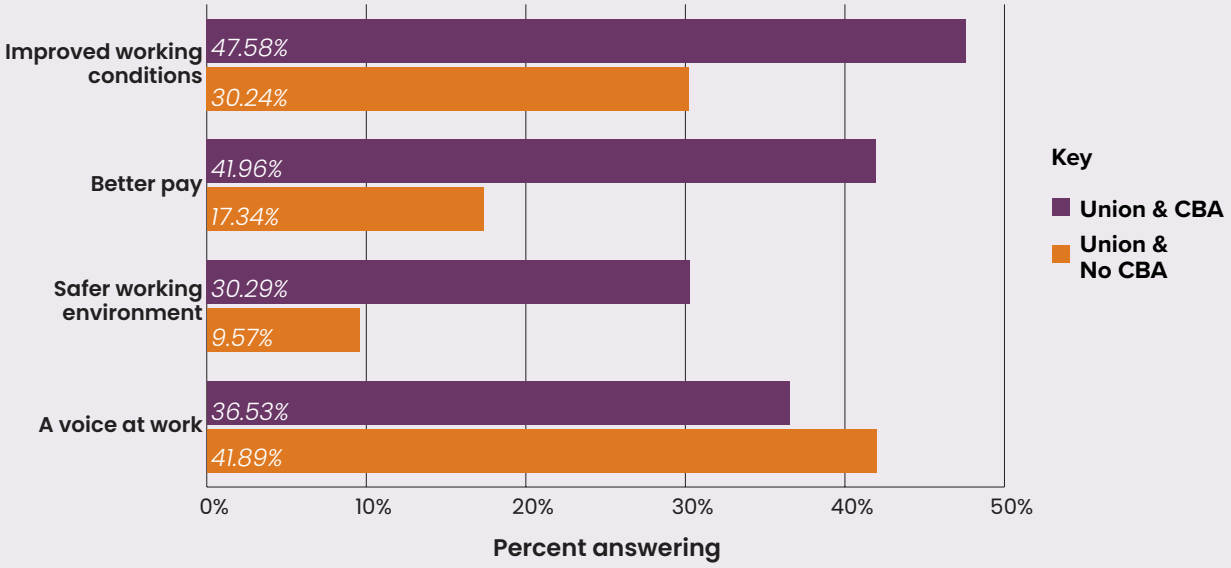


Figure 11. Comparison of answers to "How does being a member of a union make your life better?" by unionized workers with and without a collective bargaining agreement

'Better pay' was the number one perceived benefit of unionization among non-unionized workers, even higher than improved working conditions. Indeed, **50% of non-unionized security workers who are not covered by a CBA said that they would like to become members of a union**. This number falls to 29% among non-union members who already have the pay-related benefits of a union-negotiated CBA.

The notable emphasis on achieving better pay (at the expense of more intangible outcomes like having a voice at work) may be explained by several factors. Firstly, and most simply, in the context of the global cost of living crisis, and considering the high number of security workers who are dissatisfied with their pay, it could simply be that better pay is many workers' most urgent demand. However, it is also worth considering the possibility that unions' function as democratic organizations that serve to amplify the voices of their members is most easily perceived and appreciated from the inside.

Union discrimination

In previous sections, we have seen how security workers experience widespread and varying forms of harassment and discrimination at work. Among union members, the most commonly cited form of discrimination overall was discrimination for union activity.

> "**Employers bully union members** and those involved in strikes. Various verbal inappropriate comments, theft, etc." - Airports and aviation, Germany

> "[I have been harassed] many times because I belong to the union and am a regular member of the OSH committee of my company." - Multiple job sites, Peru

> "We were subjected to degrading speeches by superiors and pressure because we were unionists." - Multiple job sites, Turkey

Testimony from some workers reflected the common union-busting tactic of singling out and punishing rank-and-file union leaders[5].

> "Supervisors threaten me for being secretary of a rank-and-file union. I am often threatened with dismissal." - Multiple job sites, Ivory Coast

> "Because I am a union director, [my employer] acts in an arbitrary and very persecutory way towards directors and members, and I have seen it sack only members of our union in a certain period, bringing discontent to the employees and a great deal of emotional turmoil in our midst." - Multiple job sites, Brazil

> "**Since I joined the union and they elected me part of the leadership, they began to attack me**, going to the client to ask them to remove me from said unit and only because they indicate that I complain a lot for presenting the complaints of my members. basis or for any claim that I present due to non-compliance on the part of the company." - Industrial and manufacturing, Peru

5 Lafer & Loustaunau. (2020). "An inside account of how employers threaten, intimidate, and harass workers to stop them from exercising their right to collective bargaining". Economic Policy Institute. https://www.epi.org/publication/fear-at-work-how-employers-scare-workers-out-of-unionizing/(last accessed 05/06/24).

Sites of Labour Repression

Figure 12 shows the percent of respondents from each country who reported experiencing discrimination for union-related activities (limited to countries that received more than 100 responses, of which 5% or more experienced anti-union discrimination).

Union-busting was prevalent worldwide, but extremely common in three particular countries.

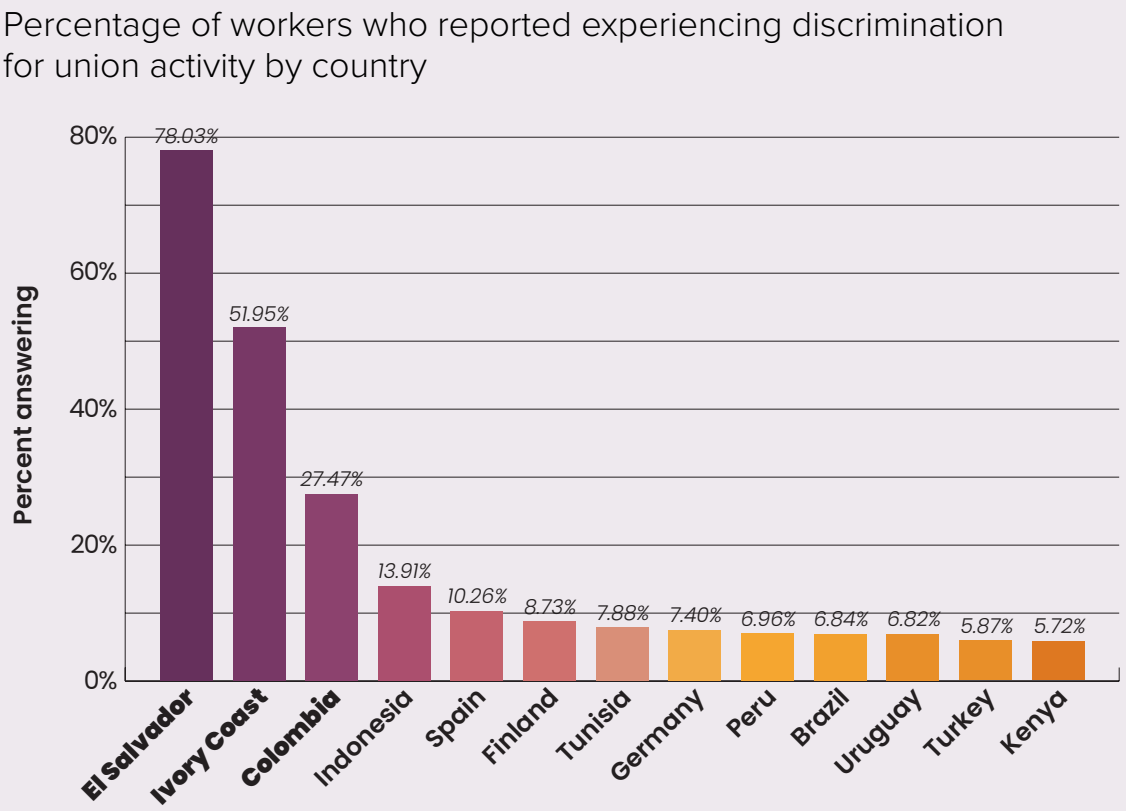


Figure 12. Percentage of respondents who experienced discrimination for union activity by country, in countries with more than 100 respondents where the percentage was higher than 5%

While the frequency of discrimination for union-related activity was greater than 5% – a not insignificant number – in many countries, three stand out as uniquely aggressive in their attacks on organized labour: El Salvador (78.03%), Ivory Coast (51.95%), and Columbia (27.47%).

By employing union-busting tactics, and more generally by discriminating against workers for union activity, employers are actively interfering with workers' right to organize. The aim is to discourage the formation of or participation in unions. Interestingly, however, the results of the survey suggest that this may not always be effective.

Overall, as Figure 13 below shows, union security workers who say they have experienced discrimination based on their union activity are more polarised in their assessment of how union membership has impacted their working conditions.

The experience of discrimination for union activity polarises workers' perception of unions.

Answers to *"How has union membership impacted your working conditions?"* grouped by experience of anti-union discrimination



Figure 13. Comparison of percentage answers to "How has union membership impacted your working conditions?", between workers who have and workers who have not experienced anti-union discrimination

The proportion of workers who say union membership has had a negative impact on their working conditions rises sharply among those who have experienced discrimination for union activity (22.94% vs. 8.49%). Surprisingly, however, a higher proportion of these workers say that union membership has had a positive impact on their working conditions (55.27% vs. 44.88%) - an indication, perhaps, that conflict with the employer can strengthen workers' appreciation for their unions.

CONCLUSION

Considering the results presented in this report, gathered from over 12,000 security workers in 35 countries, it is evident that **security work, while vital for ensuring safety and security, is greatly underappreciated**. Security guards continue to face an alarming level of discrimination and harassment globally. Despite the financial and societal importance of the sector, pay discontent among security workers is prevalent. **Almost two-thirds of survey respondents are unsatisfied with their wages.** This dissatisfaction is amplified by poor working conditions and a lack of professional recognition. Additionally, **over 45% of workers reported a lack of adequate training needed to correctly carry out their duties**, often placing them in environments they are ill-prepared for.

> "Long hours on your feet, many hours of work per day, very low salaries and **security companies look at you as a mere creature just to make money** and the rest don't care about your health, your well-being and even working conditions." - Shopping malls, retail, or supermarkets, United Kingdom

Working long hours without proper compensation causes stress, which takes a severe toll on their health. Inadequate pay creates economic difficulties, further diminishing their overall well-being and extending the negative impact to their families.

> "It's poor pay when they have us on shift all night, and they want one of us to be there early the next day." - Banking and finance, Nicaragua

Among the many dissatisfied with their wages and working conditions, the results of the survey identified a troubling amount of evidence pointing to daily discrimination and harassment faced by security workers. **Over 43% of respondents reported experiencing discrimination, and more than 41% have been harassed at work**. An overwhelming majority – **eight out of ten people – feel that employers should do more to protect them.**

> "**There is a lack of resources to protect ourselves** in cases of aggression and danger." - Diplomatic protection, Belgium

Over one in ten security guards never feel respected by their employers or clients, and an additional one in five rarely experience any acknowledgement or approval.

> "They say our activity is useless, and in some cases they mock and disrespect the authority assigned to the position." - Corporate and government buildings, Brazil

This highlights the urgent need to demand better treatment and foster an environment where workers' well-being is prioritised over employers' profits, ensuring that they are treated with the respect they deserve.

Trade unions are an important force which empowers security workers to combat these challenges. **A large proportion of reported discrimination and harassment experienced by security workers is in retaliation for union activity**, highlighting how their collective demands for better working conditions are met by employers not with improvements, but intimidation. Whether it is to negotiate a collective bargaining agreement, fight for recognition, or just simply voice their needs, unions provide a key venue for worker demands.

> "Supervisor threatened to send me to insurance and accused me of consuming substances, the **union helped me**, and the company protected him." - Multiple job sites, Uruguay

Ultimately, the findings from the survey outline a critical need for substantial reform in the security sector. **The goal of making security work decent work can only be achieved by prioritising the well-being of security workers through fair compensation, adequate training, and robust protections against discrimination and harassment.** Empowering workers through unionization and collective bargaining is essential for ensuring they are treated with the respect and dignity they deserve.

APPENDIX A.

Responses by country

Country	Responses
Australia	3
Austria	125
Belgium	578
Brazil	189
Chile	102
Colombia	181
Costa Rica	37
Denmark	1
El Salvador	132
Finland	126
Germany	959
India	412
Indonesia	115
Ireland	6
Ivory Coast	1323
Kenya	1355
Malawi	41
Nepal	219
New Zealand	2
Nicaragua	105
Norway	245
Panama	28
Peru	571
Philippines	28
Portugal	1
Qatar	14
South Africa	111
Spain	494
Tunisia	241
Turkey	1754

Country	Responses
Uganda	21
United Kingdom	516
United States	424
Uruguay	132
Zambia	237
Not specified	535
Total	11363



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Jarrow Insights is a Companies House registered workers' co-operative, a member of the Co-Tech digital co-ops federation and of Co-operatives UK.



