Preventing violence against women in commerce

UNI Europa Commerce - Position for 25 November 2026

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

Every woman has the right to work free from violence, harassment and fear. UNI Europa Commerce stands with women experiencing violence at work, online, at home and in society. We call on employers, governments and EU institutions to turn commitments into effective prevention, protection and support across retail and wholesale.

Verbal abuse, threats, sexual harassment and intimidation must never be accepted as part of the job. Whether violence comes from customers, managers or colleagues, employers must take responsibility for preventing it and protecting workers.

Build safety into work organisation

Building on our 2025 position, the outcomes of the I'M PINC project provide a clear direction for action: women's safety must be integrated into work organisation, staffing, scheduling and employer responsibility. Violence and harassment must be addressed as organisational risks requiring prevention.

Understaffing, lone working and unsafe arrangements for evening and night shifts can leave workers exposed. Automation and self-service technologies must also be assessed for their effects on safety, including situations where workers intervene in payment disputes or are expected to take on security tasks.

Violence and harassment can also take place online. Work-related cyberviolence, including sexual harassment, threats, stalking and the sharing of intimate images without consent, must be covered by workplace prevention, reporting and support procedures. Employers must address abuse through digital channels, including from customers, and support affected workers in preserving evidence and accessing assistance.

Training must be backed by resources and changes to the conditions that expose workers to harm. UNI Europa Commerce calls for:

- **Adequate staffing and safe scheduling.** Negotiate minimum staffing standards, restrictions on lone working in high-risk situations, and safe arrangements for opening, closing, evening and night work.
- **Gender-sensitive risk assessments.** Involve workers and their representatives in assessing customer aggression, sexual harassment, psychosocial risks and the effects of new technologies. Include part-time, temporary and agency workers.
- **Effective reporting and support in person and online.** Provide accessible, confidential reporting channels, prompt and fair investigations, protection against retaliation, and practical and psychological support.
- **Action against customer violence.** Establish clear procedures for obtaining assistance and withdrawing from dangerous situations without being penalised. Workers must not be expected to put themselves at risk to protect goods or enforce store policies.
- **Paid training and joint monitoring.** Train managers, workers and representatives during paid working time and regularly review whether prevention measures are effective.

Negotiate enforceable protection

Workers and their trade unions must have a say in identifying risks, negotiating solutions and monitoring implementation. Collective agreements at sectoral and company level should cover staffing, scheduling, prevention, reporting, support and joint monitoring. Protection must reach workers in smaller workplaces and franchised outlets, as well as those in large company-owned stores.

I'M PINC also connects safety with wider gender inequalities in commerce. Insecure contracts, insufficient guaranteed hours, low earnings and unequal care responsibilities can make it harder to challenge abuse or leave an unsafe situation. Secure employment, predictable hours, equal pay and equal opportunities must form part of our wider response.

Support workers affected by domestic violence

Domestic violence can affect safety, health, attendance and financial independence. Employment can provide essential stability and access to support. Employers and unions should agree measures that enable affected workers to remain safely in employment.

We call for paid domestic violence leave, confidential support, agreed adjustments to working arrangements and individual safety plans. Measures must respect the worker's choices, protect confidentiality and safeguard employment and income. Workers should have access to specialist services and trade union assistance.

Make the 2027 transposition count

Directive (EU) 2024/1385 on combating violence against women and domestic violence must be transposed by 14 June 2027. It explicitly recognises links between violence and the workplace.

Article 36(6) requires Member States to ensure that people with supervisory functions in the workplace receive training on recognising, preventing and addressing sexual harassment at work where it constitutes a criminal offence under national law, and that supervisors and employers receive information on the effects of violence against women and domestic violence on work and on the risk of third-party violence. Article 28 requires Member States to ensure that counselling services are available to victims and employers in cases of workplace sexual harassment that constitute a criminal offence under national law.

UNI Europa Commerce calls on governments to involve trade unions in transposition and implementation ensure that these provisions deliver practical improvements in commerce workplaces. The Directive's requirements should be supported by collective bargaining and wider prevention measures. Our demands on safe staffing, scheduling and paid domestic violence leave go beyond these specific provisions and remain essential bargaining and policy priorities.

Turn commitments into lasting change

We call on governments to ratify and fully implement ILO Convention 190, supported by Recommendation 206, and strengthen enforcement and labour inspection. We call on employers and their organisations to negotiate concrete prevention measures with trade unions.

UNI Europa Commerce reaffirms its commitment to pursuing a European sectoral framework addressing violence and harassment, including gender-based violence, third-party violence and the workplace effects of domestic violence. Building on I'M PINC, we will work with affiliates to translate the recommendations into bargaining priorities, workplace action and measurable improvements.

Women's safety must be reflected in staffing decisions, working schedules, collective agreements and everyday management practice. Every worker deserves protection, support and a voice.