

# UNSEEN AND UNREPORTED: SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN URBAN MOBILITY

JUNE | 2025

## FOREWORD

*Gender-based violence or violence against women and girls (VAWG), is a global pandemic that affects one in three women in their lifetime. This is a worldwide issue that many agencies, cities and transport providers view as a priority. To reduce this negative reality, which is not limited by social or economic boundaries, a multi-pronged approach is essential. This requires sustained engagement and information sharing with stakeholders, addressing risk factors and challenging the social norms around gender roles and varying levels of acceptability of violence as well as tolerance regarding unwanted sexual behaviour.*

*To shed light on the details of the phenomenon in the public transport sector, a survey was commissioned by UITP and completed in March 2024. More than 50 organisations were surveyed in order to understand and share expertise in terms of reporting procedures and 21 transport companies from 18 cities, in 10 separate countries, provided information.*



▶ Waiting in a metro station in Budapest, Hungary

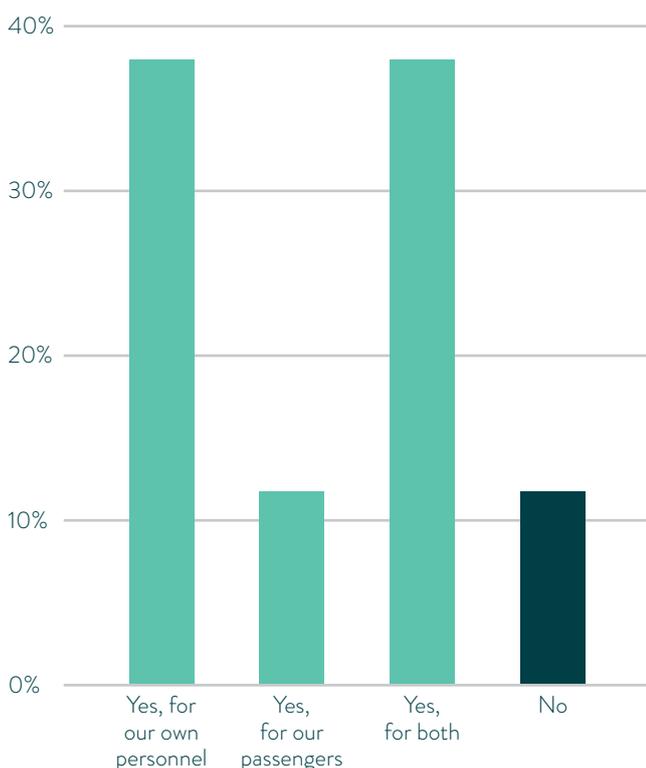
## GENERAL OUTLOOK

The survey highlighted a number of different ways the issue of gender-based violence is defined, recorded and managed in different organisations. This heterogeneity in recorded data makes direct comparison between networks both challenging and unhelpful. However, what can be drawn from our insight is a **clear way forward which prioritises collaboration, information sharing and lessons learned in this area.**

With only half of survey respondents able to provide data on incidents, the dataset is insufficient for us to draw data-driven conclusion. **Arguably, it should be seen in a positive light if high numbers of reports are recorded, because this shows both confidence of victims to report issues and monitored enforcement activity.** Cities with high numbers of reports are known to have established VWAG programmes.

Despite inconsistencies, reporting procedures were in place for both staff and customers (90%). Where a dedicated procedure does not exist, it was still possible for incidents to be reported through other channels. However, despite this, over 85% of respondents believed that incidents relating to gender-based violence and sexual harassment go under-reported on their network for a number of reasons, the main issue being a public lack of confidence regarding a positive outcome.

Do you have a dedicated procedure to report sexual assault or harassment in your organisation?



Education of staff and customers, infrastructure design (including CCTV and lighting), as well as enforcement activity were the three most highlighted interventions that are deemed the most effective by respondents.

UITP also understands that whilst data collection will need to comply with national law and best practice, one possibility to explore would be to better understand thematic-based victimology and offender profiles from data collected by policing services:

- A general overview of locations would enable security audits of these locations for environmental improvements.
- Large scale numerical representations of offenders and victims would enable a better understanding of patterns concerning victims and offenders as well as targeted communication and education, and a tailored approach to addressing the issue.

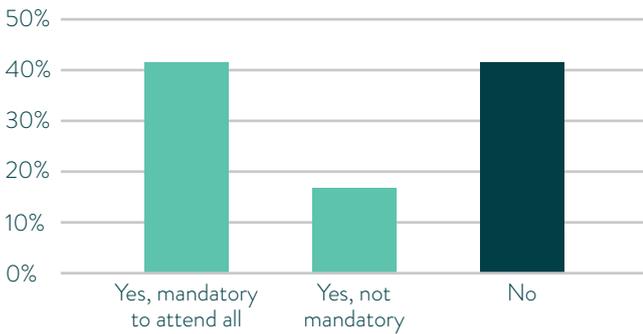
In addition, cultural background, laws and regulations vary greatly throughout the world, and definitions change accordingly. Having a list of definitions for offences that relate to sexual harassment and gender-based violence is of paramount importance to establish a common vocabulary to report the incidents.

## INTERNAL PROCESSES VS. EXTERNAL FACTORS

When looking at incident reporting and the handling of gender-based violence inside public transport organisations and on their networks, a clear difference emerges.

Implementing training and reporting procedures related to gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual harassment within the company is generally more straightforward, mostly because HR departments have both the authority and the legal framework to enforce such policies. In addition, the workplace is a 'controlled environment' where information about employees is available to the employer, making it easier to monitor, manage, and respond to instances of GBV. An employee who is the victim of sexual harassment can turn to HR or another designated unit, which is responsible for addressing the issue and providing a follow-up. This is not to say that things could not be ameliorated. In fact, a staggering 41% of respondents have not had any internal training on inappropriate sexual behaviour in their company. Training of staff should also ensure that the right response is in place to support a victim, which is a key element in increasing reports.

### Do you have internal training on inappropriate sexual behaviour in your company?



In contrast, reporting GBV on public transport networks is more complicated. The intrinsic nature of the service means that passengers use public transport to travel from point A to point B and are often unwilling to engage in a perceived time-consuming reporting process. The environment often reinforces societal norms that tolerate such behaviour and many women may be unaware of the perpetrator’s identity or precise location, which complicates the reporting process. Take, for instance, catcalling — while it is a common issue, it is often left unreported, as victims are unable to identify the harasser or doubt that any action will be taken.

Unlike what happens within the organisation, where the company offers support and follow-up, there is no similar structure on the public transport network, often leaving passengers without a clear point of contact. As a result, survey respondents agree that most GBV on public transport remains largely unreported, creating a significant gap in both data and anti-violence measures.

In view of the common agreement among the survey respondents on these two different realities when it comes to gender-based violence, this paper will focus on the harassment of women and girls on public transport networks.

### MODUS OPERANDI

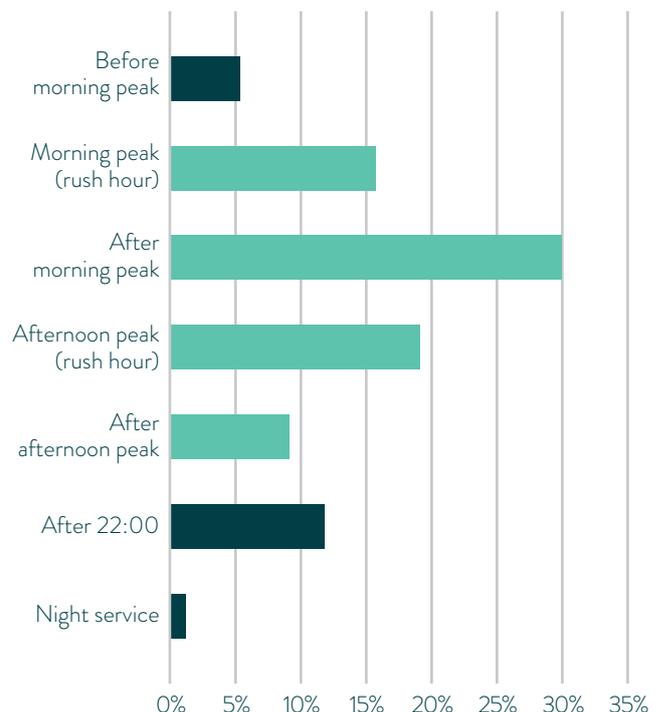
It is hard to identify consistent trends when looking at offences due to the limited data available and the lack of consistency in reporting and definitions among the respondents. Despite conducting additional interviews with respondents to gather a richer source of information, the amount of data captured is still very limited and inconsistent which is due to systems already in place by operators. To truly understand the issue there would need to be more consistency in terms of what is captured by transport authorities. This includes a consistent definition of what is meant by sexual harassment and an agreed minimum threshold of what should be reported. To establish a sound framework for reporting incidents with clear procedures and specific indicators, the following aspects should be taken into consideration:

- To truly understand the rate of offending and impact of interventions, a baseline of reports against a total number of ridership per year is needed. Reports should not be intended as only referring to the collection of data directly by the operator, but also those based on the use of existing data on VAWG, for instance, from crime statistics, public transport operations and market research / opinion polls.
- Evaluation using established data and customer/staff perceptions is a key element to understanding the impact on reducing issues of unwanted sexual behaviour and the perception of safety for women and girls.
- More information should be shared between transport operators to better understand interventions and best practice.
- Transport operators should not be afraid of increased numbers of reports if this leads to a greater understanding of the scale of the issue more in line with expected figures. It will also allow for a more targeted enforcement activity.

However, even with the limitations mentioned, an overview of the reality captured by this survey can be shared.

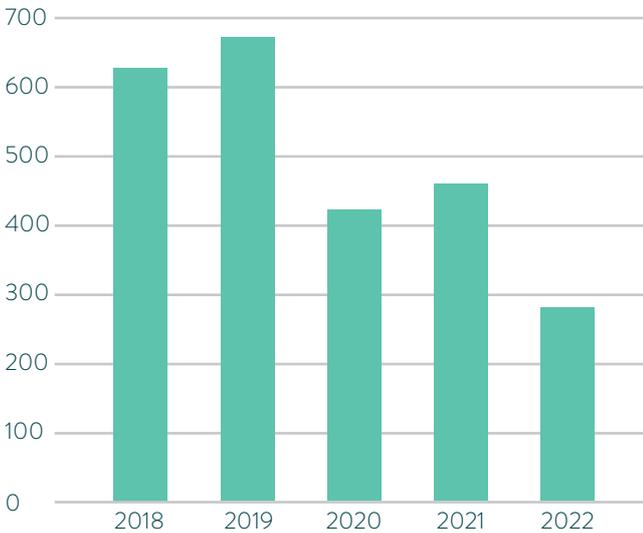
Only one third of companies reported on the distribution of offences over time. Most companies reported the peak number of offences to be after the morning rush hour and during the afternoon rush hour, but unfortunately a further breakdown of the type of offences at these times is not available.

### Detailed distribution by time of day (average numbers)



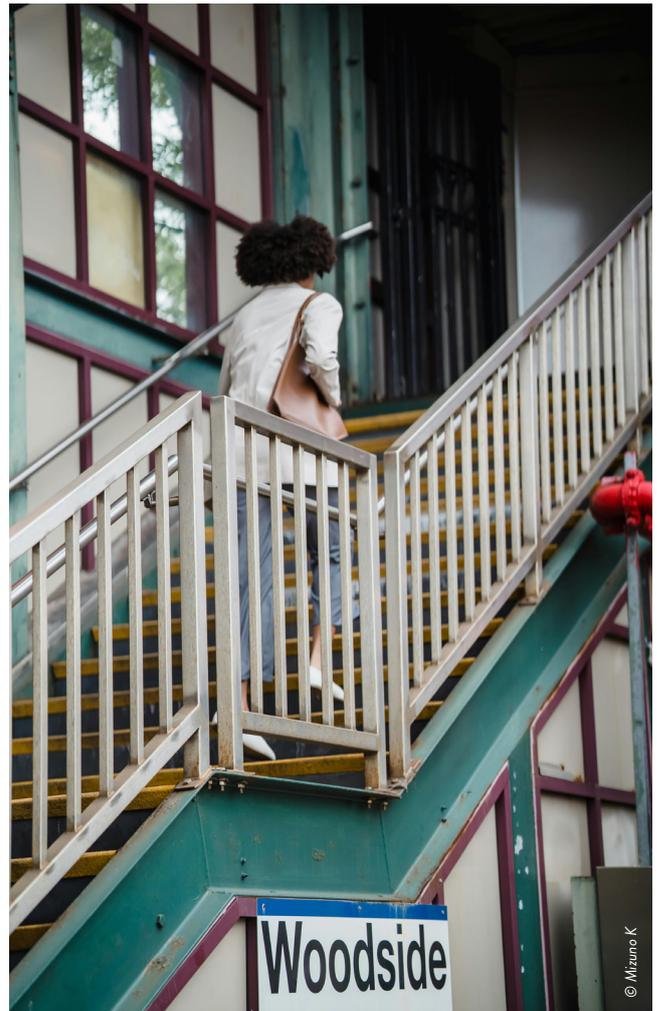
Roughly 50% provided an insight into the number of sexual assaults and harassment on their network and different modes.

How many situations of sexual assault and harrasment are reported **on your network** from passengers/client in total



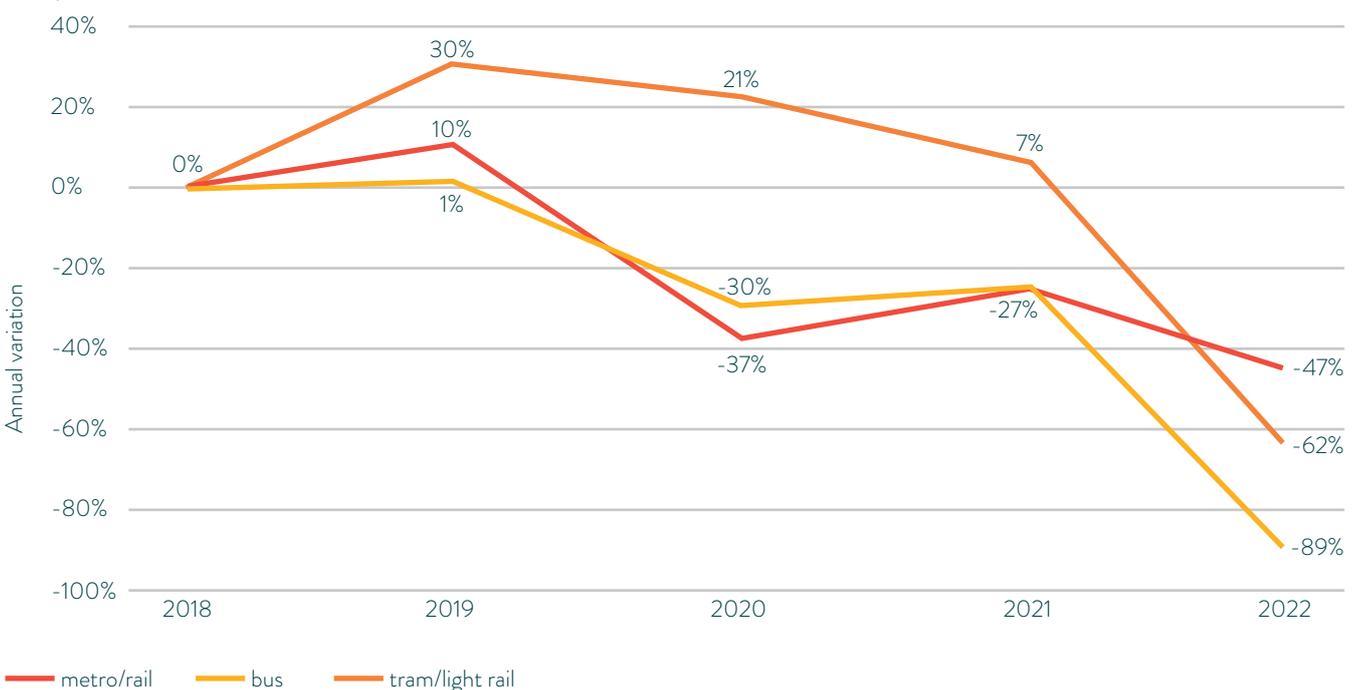
It is interesting to note that despite an overall ~60% drop in ridership during COVID-19 in 2020<sup>1</sup>, the incidence of sexual harassment did not go down accordingly, diminishing only by -30% when compared to the same period in 2019.

When it comes to modal distribution, the data gathered shows similar trends on all modes. Only few differences can be seen on the different modes:



▶ Leaving a quiet platform in New York City, United States

Variation of situations of sexual assault and harrasment are reported **on your network** from passengers/client compared to 2018, 2018-2022



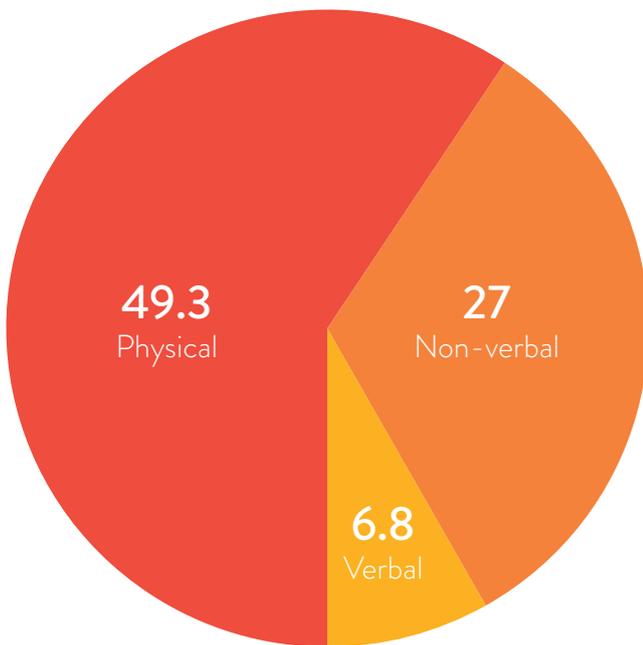
<sup>1</sup> UITP ridership data (<https://www UITP.org/topics/covid-19/>)

Although the absolute numbers vary greatly, in part due to the restricted sample of answers, the trends are similar, with a slightly higher impact on light rails in 2020, showing a similar pattern across modes.

What is very clear for all the people surveyed is that most recorded offences occurred within the vehicle (average 74%) with an average of 25% occurring at the station/stop.

Whilst it is not possible to draw sound conclusions on the seasonal trends of sexual harassment due to a lack and heterogeneity of data, it is worth reporting that the kind of abuse reported most is overwhelmingly physical violence, followed by non-verbal (gestures, whistles, etc.) and verbal (catcalling, unwanted conversation, etc.) It is worth clarifying that this is not due to physical sexual aggression being prevalent, but rather to the fact that lighter acts of aggressions such as verbal and non-verbal go highly under-reported. In many incidents authorities appear to be prioritising the recording of physical incidents over verbal. The graph shows average numbers.

Distribution by type of situation



Surprisingly, the role of innovation (new technology for the purpose of analysis and operational response) was not widely mentioned in the responses received as part of the survey. This highlights that the survey has been answered in a narrow sense of operational activity, whilst the exploration of the role of technology and seeking new possibilities should be considered in this area.

## VIDEO SURVEILLANCE

When it comes to CCTV deployment, 55% of respondents stated they have 100% CCTV coverage within their vehicles, with a further 15% having CCTV in most of their vehicles (~80%). Comparatively, 80% of companies have between 90-100% CCTV coverage of their stations.

Whilst the coverage of CCTV can be deemed satisfactory, especially in stations, it does not mean that it comes without its challenges. In particular, the following can be noted:

- The poor quality of some CCTV can hinder security applications as the quality of the footage is key to a successful prosecution.
- In the European Union, GDPR legislation can be a hurdle, as it dictates strict limits for sharing, storing and retaining footage. In some states, if no crime is reported in a time frame of 72 hours, CCTV footage is erased.
- Due to a lack of data, it cannot be determined how CCTV is used as part of the action taken to fight gender-based violence and support prosecution.

It is expected that with the deployment of new rolling stock with better cameras and the development of AI applications for CCTV, these challenges should be tackled differently and with better results. In fact, organisations should aim to deploy the best possible quality of CCTV hardware, and consider new smart technologies in the field of security that can tackle unwanted behaviour in a more systematic and sustainable manner.

Sharing best practices in this area would be welcomed, especially when it comes to sharing footage with policing partners to support enforcement activity. Poor quality and deletion of footage can have a detrimental impact on passenger confidence to report an issue or obtain a successful outcome. To support this, passenger and policing partners must be educated about the retention times of CCTV footage.



▶ Leaving a crowded metro in Paris, France

## STAKEHOLDERS

The responses show that the relationship with the police as a primary stakeholder is key for an effective response to gender-based violence; all responses bar one underlined the need for a cooperation with policing partners. In particular, partnerships with enforcement agencies for sharing offences, incidents and action were highlighted. The need for an established way of working with the police to share information that complies with data regulation and a clear enforcement presence were also deemed to be an impactful way to reduce incidents. Information needs to be shared with partners such as the police, and consistently reported on.

As a result of this reporting activity, public transport providers should deploy targeted enforcement measures as a visible deterrent and have follow-up meetings with victims to ensure they are aware of all the steps that are taken to prosecute the perpetrator. Even when prosecution is not possible, follow-up activities should be established as the norm to foster a sense of security and accountability.

Of course, partnerships with policing partners are only sufficient where society is educated on the issues and has a good understanding of what is unacceptable behaviour in this context.

One aspect that also emerged about the inclusion of relevant stakeholders is that organisations should listen to women who have experienced unwanted sexual behaviour and ask them to contribute to the design of campaigns and solutions based on the barriers they face.

## DEDICATED RESOURCES

### EDUCATION

Education can take many forms, and it can address single people, specific groups or a general audience.

When it comes to **training**, nearly 59% of respondents deploy internal training. What is unclear from the answers collected is whether this is for staff-on-staff issues or whether this is to equip staff to provide the best assistance to the travelling public. UITP recognises that training is the most common referenced way in which transport organisations can effectively reduce VWAG.

On the other hand, **Public Campaigns** to raise awareness about sexual harassment have been implemented by only 9 of the 22 companies (40%) within the PTO network, with these campaigns looking to promote how best to report instances. Many of these campaigns are based on academic research, although the extent of which they have been evaluated in terms of success is not clear. Examples have been enclosed.

Education in customer campaigns is key, understanding the behaviour is a factor to ensure that incidents are reported. Clearly, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done, especially removing any element of shame and victim blaming. This was raised consistently as a barrier to reporting.

Customer communications have a role to play in both education, but also on how to report and what will happen as a result. It should draw upon allyship, to prevent the acceptance of such behaviour and to ensure that this behaviour is challenged. **Greater visibility of this kind of messaging will show that it is taken seriously.**

Transport organisations should commit to implementing dedicated mandatory training for employees, including the importance of responding appropriately when receiving a report from victims, as well as outlining the steps to provide ongoing support to the individual beyond the initial report, including guidance on what they should do next.

Public campaigns to raise awareness and educate public transport users on the topic of gender-based violence are also a priority, and can be conceived and deployed in cooperation with other authorities such as cities, governments and other institutions. Higher attention should be paid to legislation-mandated deadlines (for example, CCTV footage erased after 72h if nothing is reported), and the inclusion of guidelines on how best to react in different situations and to report incidents appropriately.

### BUDGET

A budget was earmarked by many organisations, either in the form of a programme budget, or as part of a business-as-usual process. An allocated budget to expedite changes should be viewed very positively and is deemed to be reflective of the commitment towards change, improvement and the evaluation around their chosen messaging. This includes the evaluation impact which should be shared wherever possible with other stakeholders.

### DESIGN

Good environmental design should explicitly consider the needs of women and vulnerable groups, especially when they travel at different times of the day. One way of obtaining the view of women is to engage them more in the design process.

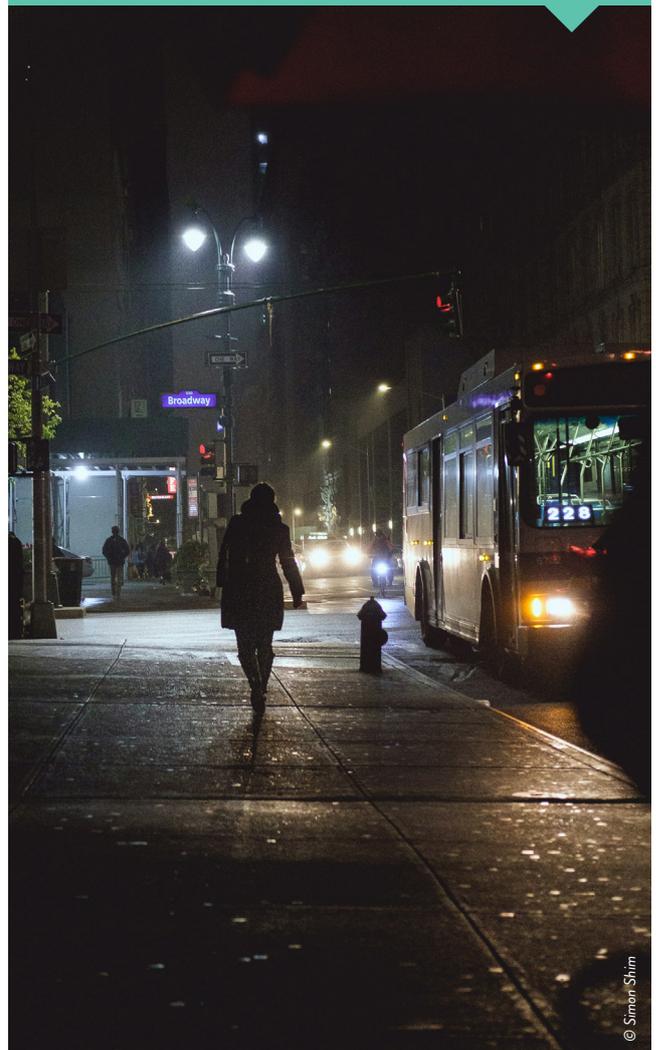
Good lighting and CCTV should be considered fundamental to maintaining a safe and secure operational environment. Beyond these measures, ensuring clear sight-lines, visibility of help points, and the presence of other passengers can serve as additional strategies for driving change in this area.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It should be noted that a multi-faceted approach is required, implementing a single recommendation from below will not be as effective. The list below is in no particular order of importance. Further collaboration, information sharing, and lessons learned in this area should continue to be explored and initiatives shared.

- ▶ **A glossary for gender-based violence should be established** to provide our sector with a common vocabulary to help address the right incidents amidst great cultural, legal and regulatory differences.
- ▶ **Data capture, reporting and exchange should be strengthened at all levels** to have a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon of gender-based violence and sexual harassment on public transport networks.
- ▶ **Education and training on the topic should be improved for both personnel and passengers.** There should be minimum mandatory requirements for training and a dedicated budget for education and awareness campaigns.
- ▶ **Organisations should invest in high-quality CCTV hardware and explore emerging technologies to improve security and address unwanted behaviour more effectively.** Additionally, educating passengers and other stakeholders about CCTV retention times, will help maintain confidence and support successful enforcement outcomes.
- ▶ **Environmental design should consider the needs of women, particularly by involving them in the design process through audits and consultations.** Additionally, ensuring good lighting, CCTV, clear sightlines, and visible help points should be considered fundamental elements to improve the safety and accessibility for all passengers.
- ▶ **Enforcement and follow-up should be enabled,** even when prosecution is not possible, to establish a sense of trust, security and accountability with passengers.

Ultimately, operators aim at fostering respectful conduct among both passengers and staff. By prioritising the reduction of gender-based violence and implementing measures such as improved lighting, design, CCTV, and enhanced staff presence, they contribute to a safer and more welcoming environment. These efforts not only support the safety of women and girls, but also benefit all passengers, including other vulnerable users such as those with disabilities, LGBTQ+ individuals, minorities, and others. This comprehensive approach helps create a culture of respect and safety for everyone. As a result, more passengers will feel confident in using public transport, leading to an increase in ridership and, in turn, a rise in all the associated benefits of PT, including reduced traffic congestion, lower emissions, and improved sustainability in urban contexts.



▶ Walking late at night in New York City, United States

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This is an official Action Point of UITP, the International Association of Public Transport. UITP has more than 1,900 member companies in 100 countries throughout the world and represents the interests of key players in this sector. Its membership includes transport authorities, operators, both private and public, in all modes of collective passenger transport, and the industry. UITP addresses the economic, technical, organisation and management aspects of passenger transport, as well as the development of policy for mobility and public transport worldwide.

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