

# Campaign To End Violence And Abuse Against Retail Workers

Survey Results 2025



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VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINE

"Whenever a shoplifter is challenged or a customer doesn't get their way, or complains about something being out of stock, my colleagues and I are verbally abused as if it is our fault. I have been assaulted by people trying to enter the kiosk, threatened to be stabbed outside of work... and have been assaulted while handing banning notices to shoplifters."

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# Foreword

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**The scale of retail crime and abuse of retail workers continues to grow, impacting the industry, communities and our members. For years, the retail industry has been largely left to fend for itself and retail workers have borne the brunt of a retail crime epidemic. Our members have said loud and clear that enough is enough.**

Therefore, I am delighted that after many years of campaigning alongside retail employers, we are beginning to see the impact of governments who are listening and taking action to make our shops and streets safer - delivering the respect and protections that retail workers across the UK deserve.

We have been closely following the passage of the Labour Government's Crime and Policing Bill, currently at report stage in the House of Lords, and look forward to the Bill receiving Royal Assent. We will be calling for measures to be implemented as soon as possible to deliver the much-needed protection of retail workers' law; end the indefensible £200 threshold for prosecuting shoplifters, which has effectively become an open invitation to retail criminals; along with Criminal Behaviour Orders.

During the year, we welcomed further investment in neighbourhood policing to tackle retail crime. An additional 2,400 officers have been recruited into neighbourhood police roles, marking a significant step towards delivering 13,000 more uniformed officers in our communities and town centres. An increase in shoplifting convictions indicates that these reforms are already starting to make a difference.

In Northern Ireland, the Sentencing Bill will introduce a new offence for assaulting public-facing workers, including retail workers, and we will be monitoring progress closely. Together with winning the Protection of Workers Act in Scotland in August 2021 and securing the Crime and Policing Bill in England and Wales, this means retail workers across the whole of the UK will benefit from the protection of legislation. But legislation is the beginning and not the end of tackling retail crime.

Usdaw continues to call for retail home delivery drivers to be included in the scope of protections in England and Wales. This year's report includes evidence from our survey conducted during 2025 which demonstrates retail home delivery drivers are facing similar levels of abuse to staff in stores. We therefore continue to make the case that home delivery drivers, tasked with enforcing the law, must receive the protection of it.

No one should feel afraid to go to work. Over the next year, we will be working with employers to ensure that legislation is being used by retailers to protect staff on the frontline.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joanne Thomas". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Joanne Thomas  
General Secretary

# Summary

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This report sets out the results of our latest annual survey of retail workers and their experiences of violence, threats and abuse. It is largely a face-to-face survey conducted in workplaces during the whole of 2025. Responses have also been gathered from individuals completing an online version on the Usdaw website.

In 2003, Usdaw launched the 'Freedom From Fear' Campaign in response to members' concerns about increasing levels of violence and abuse. Since then, Usdaw has worked with the public, retail employers, the police and governments to protect retail workers.

Before Covid-19, levels of violence, threats and abuse were rising and through the pandemic, the situation became much worse. While levels have come down from that extraordinary peak, they remain higher than before the pandemic – and are growing.

A significant factor in the high level of abuse faced by retail workers is theft from shops. Official statistics show that shoplifting has nearly doubled since the pandemic and rose by 5% in the year to September 2025 with 519,381 recorded offences, continuing a trend of quarterly increases. It is increasingly common for retail stores to be targeted by organised crime gangs stealing to order. This is in no way a victimless crime, with weapons and violence used by criminals against shopworkers to ensure they are not stopped.

Having to deal with repeated and persistent offences can cause issues beyond the theft itself like anxiety, fear and physical harm to retail workers. 68% of respondents had suffered incidents of violence, threats and abuse that were triggered by shoplifting and armed robbery.

## **Usdaw's survey of over 8,980 shopworkers found that in 2025 (% in 2024) [% in 2019]:**

- 78% were verbally abused (77%) [68%].
- 54% were threatened (53%) [43%].
- 11% were assaulted (10%) [5%].
- The leading underlying issues that triggered these incidents were customer frustration because of staff shortages, followed closely by shoplifting and enforcing the law on the sale of age-restricted goods.

The details behind these headline statistics are set out in this report and regional results can be found on pages 10 to 12.

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## VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINE

"Basket of shopping thrown at me because they couldn't wait in the queue. Spat in my face, kicked and pushed me to the floor."

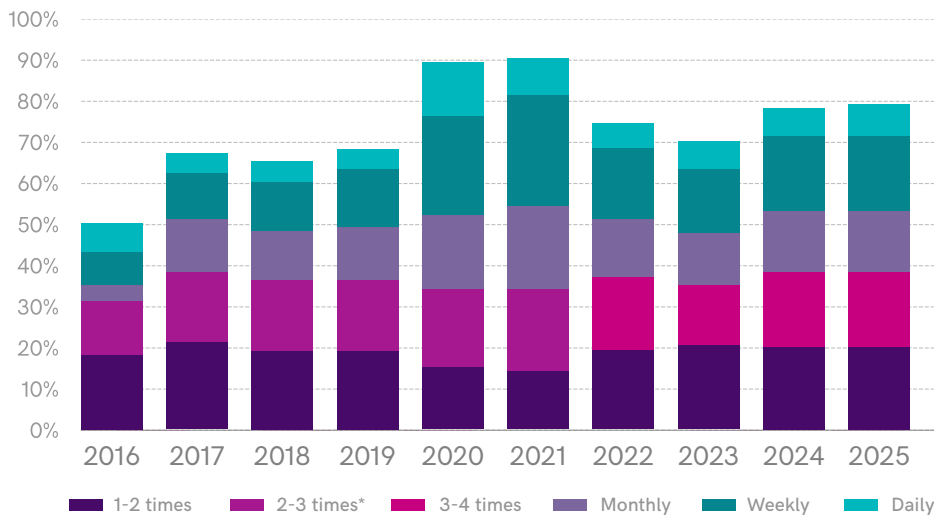
# 2025 Survey Results

Since 2007, Usdaw has surveyed between 1,500 and 10,000 shopworkers each year to gather first-hand accounts on the extent of violence, threats and abuse against shop staff. The distinctive feature of the Usdaw surveys is that the majority of responses are based on face-to-face interviews conducted by Usdaw reps with fellow colleagues in shops. Evidence is also gathered from members completing the survey online (the 2020 survey was conducted entirely online because of Covid-19).

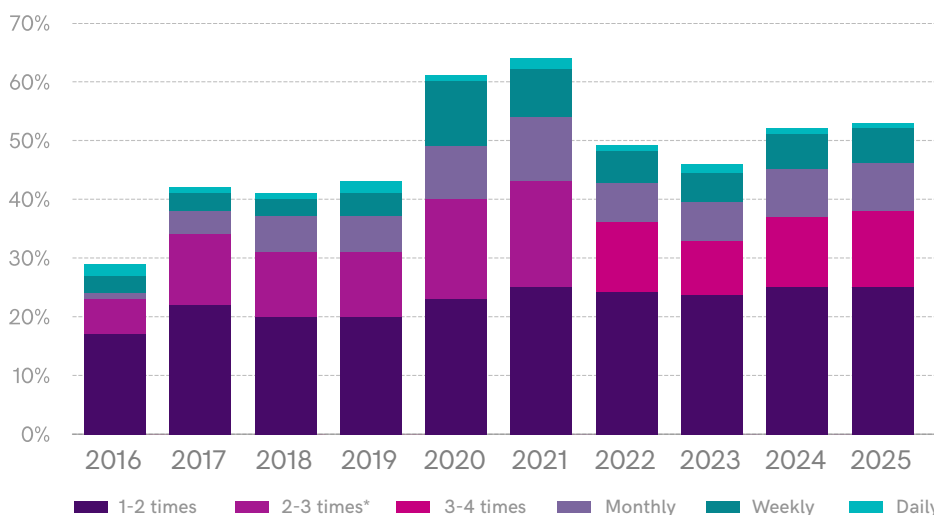
This survey captures more incidents than formal reporting systems operated by employers and the police. It gives a unique perspective into the workers' perceptions of the risks that they face and the solutions that are needed to reduce or prevent those risks, and dramatically exposes the level of under-reporting of incidents over that period.

This year's survey was the fifth consecutive year of returning to our face-to-face interviews. So these findings are best compared to the 2019 survey results, before the extreme peaks seen during the pandemic. The survey results are based on 8,980 responses received throughout 2025. They show that the growing levels of abuse and violence recorded in 2019 have continued to increase year on year since the pandemic.

## Frequency of Verbal Abuse in the Last 12 Months

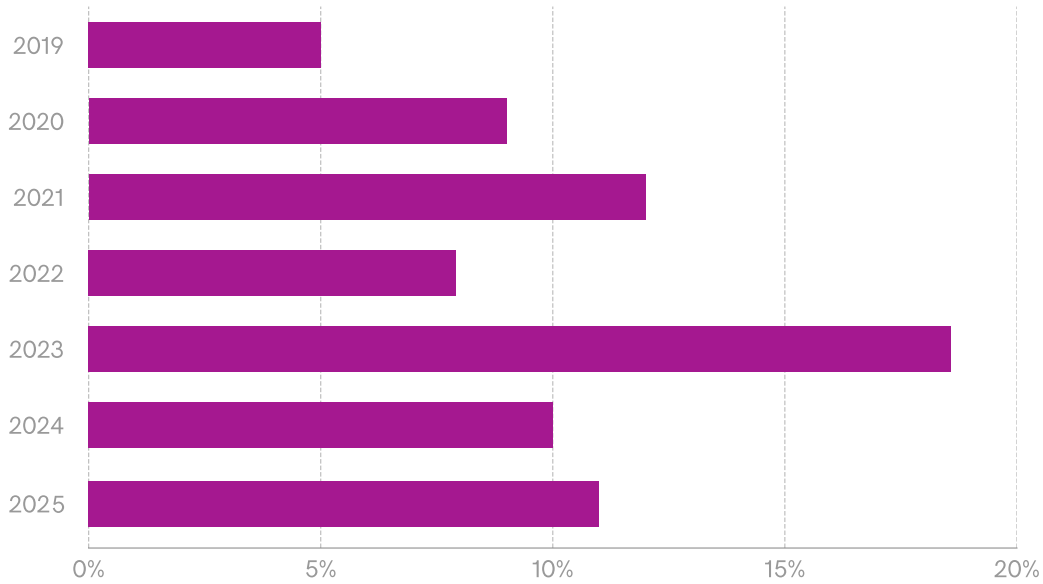


## Frequency of Threats of Violence in the Last 12 Months



\*In 2022, the answer parameters for these questions were changed from 2-3 times to 3-4 times to provide a more accurate measurement

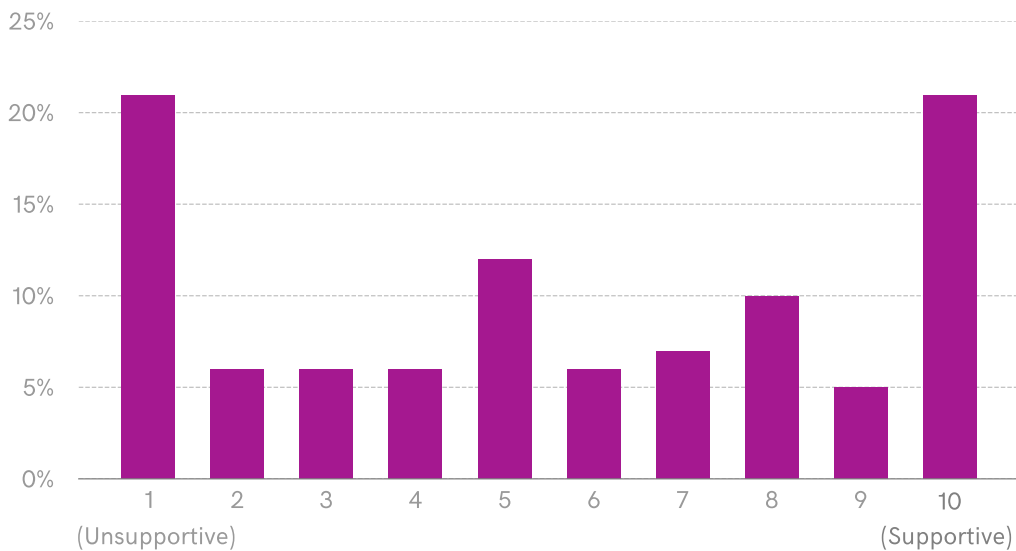
## Physical Assaults in the Last 12 Months



## Support from Employers

We asked: 'on a scale of 1 to 10, how supportive was your employer after you reported the incident?' The average score was 5.5, with 49% scoring over 5. That has remained steady over the years, and delivering improvements will be a key focus for the campaign moving forward as we look to work with employers, in the light of new legislation, to better protect employees on the frontline.

### How Supportive was the Employer?

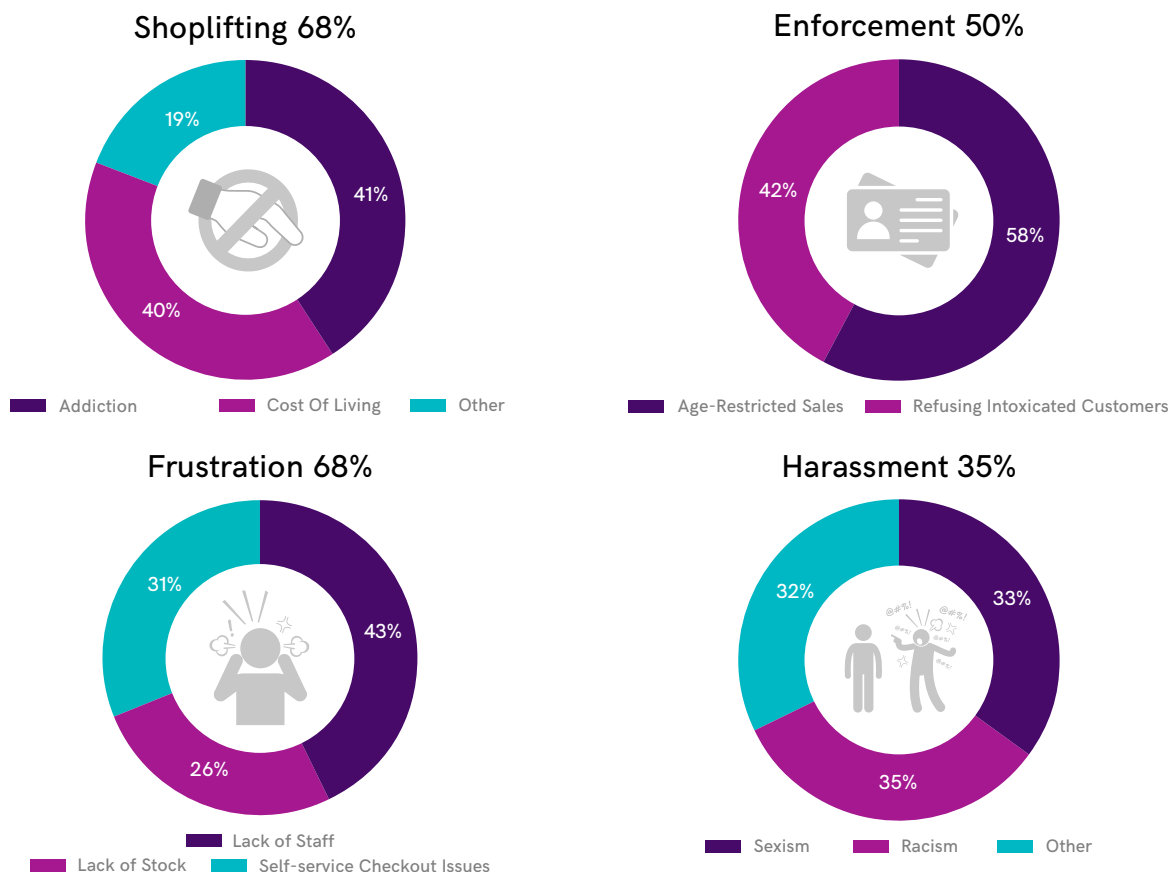


#### VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINE

"Racially abused by a customer for no reason; he wasn't happy with migrants and foreigners. Verbally abused by thieves, pushed by customers."

# Triggers for Violence and Abuse in 2025

Respondents were asked to answer this question by selecting triggers within the subheadings of shoplifting, enforcement, frustration and harassment. The chart below shows the total for each subheading and the breakdown within each individual category.



**Frustration** of customers all too often ends up with abuse and attacks on shopworkers. Short-staffing is the leading cause of customer frustration. Retail staff are on the frontline when anything goes wrong or the customer feels they've been treated unfairly, even if technology or company policy is the issue.

**Shoplifting** increased again during 2025 and remains a major flashpoint for abuse of retail staff. Abuse and intimidation often continues outside of work, and members report customers waiting outside and in car parks threatening staff who challenged them. Stealing due to addiction and the cost of living crisis are the main causes.

**Enforcement** of the law remains a key trigger for abuse among our members, particularly when challenging the sale of alcohol and other age-restricted products. This is why it's so important that the law offers protection for shopworkers who are tasked with enforcing it.

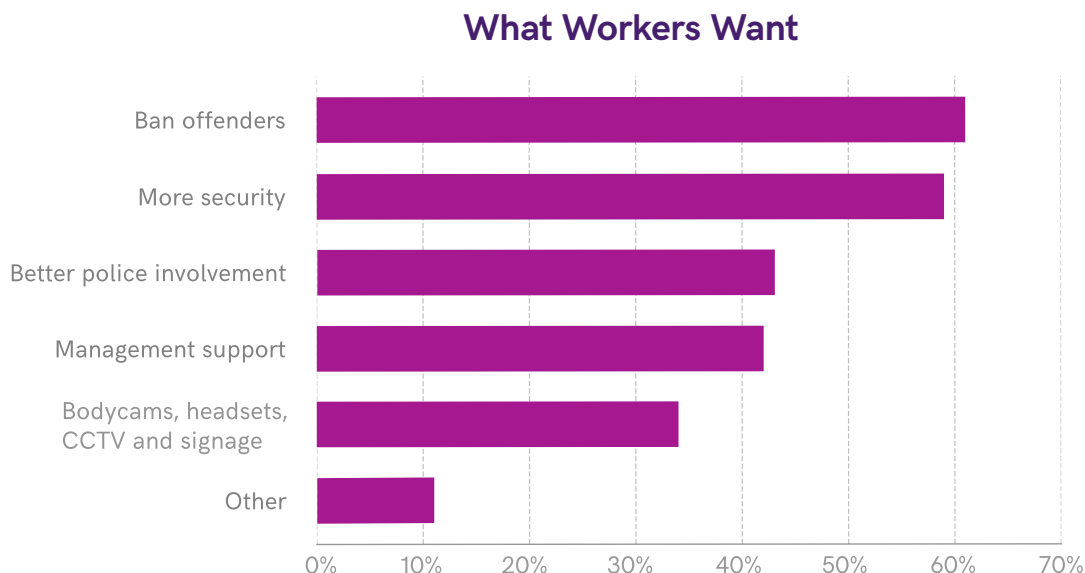
**Harassment** has risen since last year. Almost half of Black workers (47%) report racial harassment, and this increases for young Black women (55%) and young Black men (58%). A quarter of women report sexual harassment, rising to a third (35%) of women under 27. Other harassment reported included homophobia, transphobia, ableism and ageism.

35% of respondents identified other issues, including lack of respect for staff, antisocial behaviour, doing replenishment and home delivery picks while customers are in the store, crowding round reduced items, refusing banned customers, dealing with exchanges/returns and parcel drop off/ collection, technology failures and enforcing company rules and policies.

# What Workers Want

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We asked what employers could do to support their workers more. This provides Usdaw negotiators and health and safety representatives with information to support discussion with employers on improving security measures and access to support for staff:



At the top of the list is the call to ban offenders. Many workers are frustrated that theft and abuse are committed by the same people over and over again. Some retailers have introduced facial recognition technology to support identifying repeat offenders. The introduction of Respect Orders could help to ensure that persistent offenders are barred from stores and face consequences for breaching an order.

Having a physical security presence remains popular with shopworkers; security guards provide reassurance, act as a deterrent and have specialist experience to deal with incidents. Many companies now rely more on electronic measures like body-worn cameras and headsets that link individual workers to a central control for backup and support. While not as popular as a security guard presence, they are still valued by staff.

Support from both management and police is crucial to whether workers report incidents. With 4 in 10 shopworkers not reporting incidents, including 12% who were assaulted, there is significant work to be done to encourage reporting and follow-up action. The Government's neighbourhood policing guarantee delivers an increase in officers patrolling shopping areas: our hope is this will help boost confidence in the system and strengthen police connections with retail stores.

11% of all respondents suggested other improvements, including zero-tolerance notices and tannoy announcements in stores, adequate staffing levels, no lone working, better reporting procedures, follow-up support and time to recover post-incident, action to prosecute offenders and training to deal with incidents.

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## VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINE

**"I was sexually assaulted by an older man who wanted me to move out of the way; he grabbed my lower waist and then went down to squeeze other places."**

# Confidence in the System

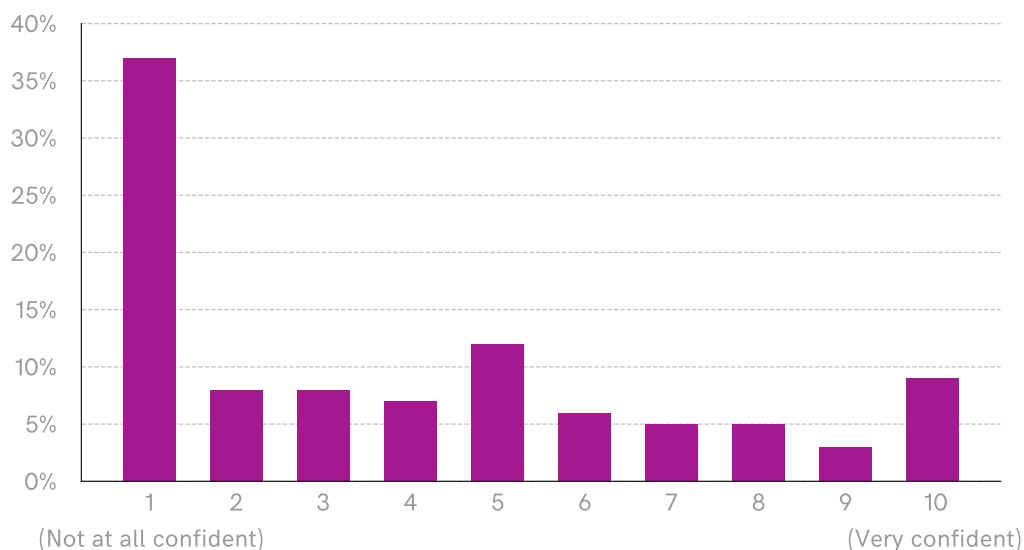
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There has been a slight increase in incident reporting levels with 61% of workers reporting incidents to their employer (compared to 52% in 2024). However, there remains more work to be done to encourage staff to tell their employers when they have been abused, threatened or assaulted. Worryingly, 12% of those who have been assaulted did not report it. So Usdaw will continue to promote the 'report it to sort it' message to our members and seek similar awareness campaigns from employers.

We asked respondents to give a score on a scale from 1 to 10 to indicate how confident they were that reporting violence and abuse would make a difference. Despite the increase in reporting levels, confidence among workers that this will make a difference has eroded slightly on the previous year.

Over one-third (37%) of all respondents reported a total lack of confidence in their employer, which is four times as many as those who have full confidence (9%). The average score is 4.0 out of 10, with 71% scoring 5 and under (compared to 4.3 and 66% in 2024).

## The Impact of Threats and Abuse



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### VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINE

“Homophobic insults, abusive language, swearing, threats of violence, followed home after shift. I was punched and spat at by a shoplifter.”

# Retail Home Delivery Drivers

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During 2025, Usdaw conducted a separate survey into the experiences of retail home delivery drivers to support calls for them to have the same protections as other retail workers, such as those who work in shops.

The Union surveyed over 400 retail home delivery drivers, working mainly in the grocery sector. The results of the survey clearly show that they face significant levels of abuse, threats and violence when undertaking their job role, comparable to their colleagues in retail stores.

- 77% of respondents had been a victim of abuse in the last 12 months. This is similar to the level of abuse reported by those who work in retail stores (78%).
- 13% had been a victim of physical violence in the last 12 months. This is slightly higher than the figure of 11% for members who work in a store.
- 26% of respondents reported that they had had to refuse a delivery due to fears for their own personal safety.

Drivers are often working alone, late at night and in areas with anti-social behaviour. They are isolated and without the relative protections and contact of working in a store. Some retailers provide drivers with remote safety tools such as body-worn cameras to alert base and record incidents, but not all drivers have access to this technology.

Udaw asked about the main triggers for abuse. Half of respondents, 48%, reported abuse was related to complaints or issues with the delivery such as late delivery or missing or replaced items, 20% reported dog attacks, 12% reported theft from delivery vans and 7% incidents with other road users.

Home delivery drivers have the same responsibility for age verification checks as store colleagues but are conducting these checks on doorsteps on their own. Refusing underage sales (33%) and refusing intoxicated customers (18%) were also identified as key triggers for violence. Provisions in the Crime and Policing Bill mean delivery drivers will have to follow stricter requirements when delivering knives, further supporting the argument that workers tasked with enforcing the law should benefit from the protection of it.

The Union successfully campaigned for protection to cover home delivery drivers in Scotland, and in Northern Ireland, the upcoming Sentencing Bill is due to include delivery drivers. We continue to make the case that the standalone provision in the Crime and Policing Bill should extend to cover home delivery drivers in England and Wales.

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## VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINE

“I tried to refuse a delivery once due to the customer’s unchecked aggression. He then ripped the shopping from my hands, hit me, chased me down the road, kept yelling and swearing while coming after me.”

# Conclusion

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Usdaw's Freedom From Fear survey continues to highlight the hugely challenging and potentially dangerous environment shopworkers continue to face when simply going about their job. Police recorded crime statistics set out the scale of the retail crime epidemic. While the rate of increase has slowed since it peaked at 37% at the end of 2023, the fact is retail crime continues to rise with ongoing personal and business costs.

Employers attempting to confront the scale of the issue are providing more body cameras, improved CCTV, facial recognition technology and panic alarms to workers in high-risk areas and roles as part of their suite of preventative risk-control measures. Some employers have introduced electronic reporting systems to make it easier to report incidents. These measures are no silver bullet, and employers must do more to support staff by ensuring they are afforded proper time to report incidents and given follow-up support post-incident. It is also important that employers provide feedback to workers on what has been done, so workers are confident their employer will act to support them.

Crucially, incidents must be reported to the police. The Government's investment in community policing means more uniformed officers patrolling high streets and shopping centres, and more ability to tackle organised shoplifting and respond to incidents. Figures from the Ministry of Justice show a 25% increase in convictions for shoplifting, demonstrating reforms are starting to make a difference.

The industry spent almost £5.5 billion on retail crime prevention measures in the last 5 years, which limits funds available to invest in the business or bring down prices. Usdaw wants to see the burden of crime on business, staff and customers reduced. As the Crime and Policing Bill nears royal assent and measures start to take effect, the focus of the Freedom From Fear Campaign will shift from political solutions to promoting the new law and health and safety measures with employers.

Legislation protecting retail workers is intended as a preventative measure, and that can only be achieved by raising awareness of the law in workplaces. We want to see employers using public-facing messaging to promote zero-tolerance and respect in stores, alongside simpler reporting systems and greater co-ordination with local police to support high-risk retail settings and ensure new provisions are used to tackle and prosecute retail crimes.

For years, retail workers have borne the brunt of a retail crime epidemic. However, we are finally seeing action from governments who are committed to legislation and investment to make shops safer places, sending a clear message that abuse, threats and violence will not be tolerated. As new legislation comes into effect, Usdaw will continue to work with employers to ensure it provides the respect retail workers deserve.

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## VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINE

**"Customer threaten[ed] to slit my throat. A man threw some money that hit me just above the eye. Another occasion, I was threatened with a baseball bat."**

# Results by Region and Nation

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## Top 5 Regions with the Highest Rate of Incidents:

Abuse	Threats	Assaults
1st Northern Ireland 87%	=1st London 62%	1st London 23%
2nd Yorks & Humber 85%	=1st North West 62%	2nd North East 13%
3rd North East 84%	3rd Yorks & Humber 61%	=3rd North West 12%
4th North West 83%	4th North East 59%	=3rd South East 12%
5th East of England 79%	5th West Midlands 56%	=5th East of England 10%
		=5th Scotland 10%
		=5th West Midlands 10%
		=5th Yorks & Humber 10%

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### VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINE

“I have been verbally abused many times by customers if they can’t get what they want, I have been spoken to loudly, shouted at, sworn at, been called a f\*\*\*ing liar, had reductions snatched out of my hands.”

# Results of all Regions and Nations



## UK-wide (sample of 8,980)

Abused 78%  
Threatened 54%  
Assaulted 11%

Comparison with national average:  
**Above** - **Below** - Equal to

## North East (295)

Abused 84%  
Threatened 59%  
Assaulted 13%

## Scotland (1062)

Abused 76%  
Threatened 50%  
Assaulted 11%





For further information or to join Usdaw,  
call our Helpline on **0800 030 8030**  
or visit **[www.usdaw.org.uk/fff](http://www.usdaw.org.uk/fff)**

FFF Survey Results March 2026  
Stock photography, posed by a model



[www.usdaw.org.uk](http://www.usdaw.org.uk)

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Ussdaw Union

