

AIRPORT WORKERS AGAINST ABUSE



Earlier this year, GMB conducted a survey of our members who work in airports across the UK. We wanted to know what issues they have experienced in the workplace, about any physical or verbal abuse they have suffered at work, and the impact it had on their mental health and wellbeing.

This is what our members told us.

13% said they had been physically abused at work in the past 12 months.

- **Unsafe & Understaffed:** No clear standards, broken equipment, and too few people.
- **Daily Abuse:** Staff hit, spat on, shouted at, and threatened by passengers.
- **Zero Backup:** Little police or management response – staff left to cope alone.
- **Exhaustion:** Long shifts, missed breaks, constant pressure.
- **Emotional Strain:** Anxiety, fear, and burnout are now routine.

59% told us they had been verbally abused at work in the past 12 months.

- **Daily abuse:** swearing, shouting, threats – from passengers and staff.
- **Blame & intimidation:** staff punished for rules they don't control.
- **Toxic culture:** bullying from management, reports ignored.
- **Emotional toll:** fear, stress, burnout, discrimination.
- **No clear reporting system:** staff feel unsafe, unheard, and unsupported.

50% said that their mental health had been negatively impacted by the abuse they had suffered, with 38% telling us that as a result they were now considering leaving the industry.

- **High stress & burnout** from toxic culture and understaffing
- **Poor support & communication:** staff feel unheard and unsafe
- **Unfair workloads & rotas:** exhaustion, missed rest, family strain
- **Low morale & fear:** punished for speaking up, no trust in leaders
- **Poor mental health support:** staff left to cope alone

95% had seen staff shortages at their airport/station, 78% saw shortages on a daily basis

70% told us they expected delays to get worse over the summer.

- **Abuse Rising, Protection Failing** – Verbal, physical, and alcohol-related assaults are up; responses are slow or absent.
- **Zero Tolerance in Name Only** – Management often minimises incidents; staff feel unprotected.
- **Unsafe & Understaffed** – Too few people, too much pressure, and unsafe conditions on the ground.
- **Toxic Culture, Low Trust** – Bullying, favouritism, and weak accountability breed resentment.
- **Mental Health on the Line** – Stress, fear, and burnout are taking a toll.



AIRPORT WORKERS' EXPERIENCES

Physical Abuse

"Passenger headbutted me push me on the stairs, spat on your face"

"Being pulled and dragged by team leader"

"Had leaflets & newspapers thrown at me because we were full so couldn't let any more passengers in."

"I have been hit a number of times by special needs children age ranging between 2 and 15"

Verbal Abuse

"When explaining policies to customers and they aren't happy or compliant with them. They become often very verbally abusive"

"Customers cursing or calling names when I'm just trying to do my job."

"Internally, verbal abuse from management is just as concerning. Shouting, intimidation, and belittling are commonplace, with some managers resorting to threats when mistakes occur creating a hostile, fear-driven atmosphere. Staff are spoken to in an unprofessional and degrading manner, often in front of colleagues, which destroys morale and contributes to the toxic work culture."

Mental Health

"My anxiety has got worse due to the lack of support from my management."

"I have never been an irritable person, but recently, due to sleep deprivation, psychological pressure from management over low pay for heavy and excessive work, and the lack of accountability regarding our concerns, I have become somewhat irritable and short-tempered."

"The lack of support, recognition, and the constant fear of being disciplined for speaking up or making a genuine mistake created a mentally exhausting atmosphere. Instead of feeling like a valued member of the team, I felt like I was just surviving shift to shift. No one should be pushed to the point of burnout or feel anxious coming into work, yet that became my daily reality."

"I am not longer enjoying the job, I have to drag myself to work. When at work, it's difficult to smile for passengers who treat us like dirt."

Other Issues

"Management of airport should be trained to a higher level to ensure their staff have support"

"The work conditions on central search is way too hot, definitely above what we should be working in. Staff clothing are wet and sweat dripping from them. All we get told is it's fine"

"We need help better help we are looked at the bottom of the food chain all the time we under staffed and underpaid for what we have to carry out on a daily basis it's not fair."

"The employer nor the airport does not take it seriously enough, if they did they would be looking at ways to help. Like body cams for protection and to deter abusive passengers. Many parts of the airport have no working cameras. The camera are not 24/7 monitored you have to call a control centre to ask them to be put on, this takes you away from an already volatile situation sometimes leaving one staff member alone to deal with the abusive passenger/s. When you call the control centre you have an interrogation by them why you need the cameras on, this should not be the case. Even panic alarms at gates may help."

"More needs to be done. Clearer signage on zero tolerance and we need to be given training on how to respond or deal with these types of passengers. We need to have a clear policy on how this type of being should be dealt with."

