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UNECE / UIC Workshop on the Security of Vulnerable Users in Railways

UNECE – UIC Joint Workshop on the Security of Vulnerable Rail Users

Submitted by the secretariat and UIC

Introduction

1. As an essential service, passenger rail is an integral part of society used by most members of the public. That said, it is important to remember that the public is not a homogenous mass and instead is made up of a diverse range of individuals that together constitute that public, or in this case, those passengers. While acknowledging that vulnerability is context dependent and therefore many people could be considered vulnerable to some degree while in the rail environment, there are groups for whom we can anticipate would benefit from specific security measures to address the unique security challenges they face.
2. An example of potentially vulnerable rail users relates to the movement of refugees across borders, such as resulting from the “Arab Spring” where increased numbers of refugees crossed the Mediterranean and then proceeded north using the rail network as well as during the influx of Ukrainian refugees into Western Europe in 2022. During this latter period, the alarm was raised that refugees were vulnerable to the crime of trafficking in human beings and the railways were called upon on as a trusted partner by authorities, law enforcement agencies and civil society organisations to disseminate anti-trafficking public awareness campaigns. Moreover, in order to ensure malicious actors weren’t present in stations, railways set up obligations to register and verify volunteers who came to railway stations to help, such as the wearing of a uniform/vests, distributing daily different colored wristbands. Further groups who are particularly vulnerable to falling into the clutches of traffickers include migrants, unaccompanied minors, those suffering from financial instability or lack of employment opportunities, among others.
3. Sexual harassment and gender-based violence occur in public spaces all over the world. Along the transport chain, abuses/attacks happen everywhere, with no real identifiable patterns. Unfortunately, this means that the railways are a place where women feel vulnerable, especially in situations where there may be crowding or, conversely, a shortage of people. Therefore, security of women is a major concern for railways who are putting in a

lot of effort to increase the feeling of security of women and attract them to travel by train. Security measures employed by the railways could include technological ones, such as smartphone apps or dedicated phone numbers to use in the case of sexual harassment, to ask for help or even report the crime; environmental design features such as ensuring adequate lighting or clear lines of sight; human factor considerations such as the presence of rail staff at stations, the provision of trauma-informed training. The railways may even consult directly with women passengers through innovate methodologies such as walkabouts to learn more about women’s feeling of security when travelling by rail to identify areas and ideas for improvement.

4. The International Union of Railways (UIC) Security Platform 2023 Jaipur Declaration calls on the railways to “especially ensure protection of vulnerable sections of the rail users such as Children, Women, the Elderly, the Sick and Ailing travelling on trains and those susceptible to exploitation by the Human Traffickers¹,” and UNECE works extensively on security in the railways as well as in ensuring the security of vulnerable users across transport modes. Therefore, this joint workshop aims to discuss the security challenges associated with vulnerable rail users, share good practices regarding measures to ensure their security and explore how the legal framework can support the railways in their efforts. It will look at vulnerability generally as well as the fight against trafficking in human beings and the security of women specifically.

¹ https://uic.org/events/IMG/pdf/uic_wsc_jaipur_final_declaration.pdf.