



Tackling Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) in Public Transport

A Policy Brief for Makueni County



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Flone Initiative

Flone Initiative is a mission driven organization reimagining what public transport can be; safe, inclusive and accessible for everyone.

We train operators. We shift mindsets. We advocate for systems that serve people first. We do this by uniting communities, policymakers and stakeholders in a shared mission to build equitable public transport systems.

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Flone Initiative, and Makueni County 2026. Tackling Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) in public transport: A Policy Brief for Makueni County.

With Support of:



Policy Message

The findings from the baseline survey¹ are not just statistics but reflections of the lived experiences and aspirations of the people of Makueni County. They call for concerted action by policymakers, stakeholders, and communities to address sexual and gender-based violence in ways that are practical, context-specific, and responsive to the realities of everyday mobility. The key policy messages emerging from the study are summarized below:

- 1. Sexual and gender-based (SGBV) violence persists in Makueni County's public transport system**, affecting both commuters and workers, particularly women and other vulnerable groups, and undermining safety, dignity, and equitable access to mobility and livelihoods.
- 2. Evidence from the baseline survey shows that SGBV incidents occur in specific locations and times, and are often underreported** due to fear of retaliation, stigma, normalization of harassment, and weak reporting and response systems.
- 3. Existing county gender and SGBV frameworks signal commitment, but they do not adequately address informal public transport spaces**, where commuters and transport workers interact daily and where most incidents occur.
- 4. Makueni County, transport SACCOs, and enforcement agencies could act immediately** by strengthening reporting and documentation systems, enforcing codes of conduct, targeting identified hotspots, and integrating SGBV prevention and response measures into public transport policy and oversight.

¹ https://floneinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Baseline-Report-FINAL_20241118_02-1-1.pdf.

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List Of Abbreviations & Acronyms

SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SACCO	Savings and Credit Co-operative Society
TWG	Technical Working Group
FIA	Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile
KDHS	Kenya Demographic and Health Survey.
Ksh	Kenyan Shilling.



Introduction

Public transport² in Makueni County is broadly organized into rail, air and road modes of transport that facilitate the movement of people, providing links to important socio-economic services, including markets, healthcare, education, community gatherings, and tourist attractions. According to the Makueni County Government sheet for 2018, the share of public transportation modes in Makueni County is dominated by road transport (98%), rail (1%), and air (0.8%). Additionally, the share of means of transport in Makueni is dominated by walking at 60%, boda bodas at 29%, public service vehicles at 8%, personal cars at 1.2%, aeroplanes at 0.8% and trains at 1%. Significantly, an important aspect of public transport in Makueni is intermodality, where commuters often take multiple transfers to

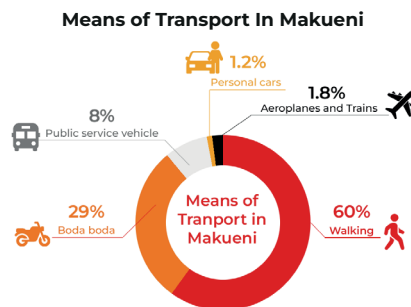


Figure 1: Means of Transport

² Public Transport means a group transport system that facilitates the movement of people and goods from one point to another. The system must be designated and utilized by members of the general public as a transit service.

complete their journeys. This pattern is particularly common among vulnerable commuters, who often face longer travel times and difficulty accessing suitable modes of transport.

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in public transport is therefore an important policy issue in Makueni County because it undermines safety, dignity, and equitable access to mobility for both commuters and public transport workers. Commuter travel time in Makueni County is concentrated during morning and evening hours. The commuter travel patterns in Makueni further align with the FIA Foundation (2017) report and also supported report by Duchene (2011). This heavy reliance on public transport exposes women to incidents of gender based violence, particularly Sexual Gender Based Violence (SGBV)³. In the Makueni context, this dependence heightens women's exposure to incidents of SGBV within the transport system.

- ▶ The FIA Foundation (2017) report, shows that women are the majority of public transport users, both regionally and globally.
- ▶ The Duchene (2011), found that fewer women than men own cars, leading to a heavy reliance on public transport.

SGBV in Makueni County public transport is a development constraint emanating from a community-level context, which represents the dynamics between and among people that are influenced by socialization⁴ within public transport, largely among commuters and service providers. Importantly, SGBV among public transport workers, mainly perpetrated by individuals in positions of power and male peers, is a key impediment to the inclusion of women in the sector. Most of these SGBV incidents are prevalent in public service vehicles, bus parks, informal and formal bus stops, along pedestrian routes, and in parking lots.

- ▶ Oxfam (2019) reports that younger women experience sexual harassment⁵, often on a daily basis, when using public transport, ranging from conductors, drivers, touts / loaders (kamageras) and from fellow passengers.

³ Refers to all forms of violence that happens to women, girls, men and boys because of the unequal power relations between them and the perpetrators of such violence

⁴ The process of learning one's culture and how to live within it

⁵ Sexual harassment is understood as verbal, non-verbal, or physical actions which are imposed on an individual as an unwanted and unwelcome sexual behaviour that interferes with someone's life, including sexual comments, jokes, gestures, unwanted kissing, touching, flirting, stalking, explicit or implicit sexual advances, whistling, and offensive stares.

Reported cases of SGBV in Makueni public transport only represent a part of the larger picture. Even in normal situations, SGBV cases will go unreported due to fear, shame, powerlessness, lack of support and limited trust in available public services. The consequences of SGBV to survivors in Makueni transport system result in overall strain on the health system, emotional and psychological consequences, lack of survivor participation in economic development initiatives, legal consequences, including reluctance to report due to long and winding legal process and social consequences, including social acceptance of SGBV as a norm. Specifically, data reported by KU Wee Hub GBV Team⁶ indicate that the direct economic costs⁷ per survivor is approximately Ksh. 71,865.00 .

⁶ Estimating the economic impact of gender-based violence on women survivors: A comparative study of support program interventions

⁷ Refer to actual cash-paid expenses calculated in monetary terms such as medical costs, transport costs, legal services, counselling, accommodation costs etc



Methodology

This policy brief draws on findings from the 2024 baseline survey on the status of vulnerable groups in Makueni County public transport system. The survey adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection to capture both the scale of the issues and the lived experiences of affected groups. Quantitative data were obtained from surveys of women public transport users and service providers, while qualitative insights were generated through key informant interviews, focus group discussions with persons with disabilities and older persons, empathy mapping sessions with school-going children, and field observations. The brief also draws on a review of relevant policy and legal frameworks, as well as validation by the County Technical Working Group (TWG), to ensure that the findings and recommendations are context-specific, practical, and responsive to the realities of public transport in Makueni County.



Research Findings

Statistics from the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey Fact Sheet (2022) indicate that Gender-Based Violence in Makueni is relatively lower than the national average. However, evidence from the baseline survey shows SGBV in the public transport system remains prevalent and persistent, affecting both commuters and workers in ways that undermine safety, dignity, and inclusion.

1. Rampant Cases of SGBV within Makueni Public Transport system

Evidence from the baseline survey on the status of vulnerable groups in Makueni County's public transport system points to the continued presence of sexual and gender-based violence across different transport spaces. Although some of the survey responses may appear to suggest low prevalence, this should not be interpreted to mean the problem is absent. Rather, it reflects the extent to which many forms of harassment have been normalized, misunderstood, or left unreported.

a. Commuters Experiences of SGBV

From Figure 2, it may appear that there is no prevalence of SGBV within the public transport system. However, low reporting does not necessarily mean low occurrence. It may also point to limited awareness of what constitutes SGBV and how it manifests in everyday travel. Behaviours such as groping, invasion of personal space, obscene jokes, sexually explicit graffiti or images, sexual propositions, verbal sexual harassment, and other unwelcome conduct are often normalized and therefore not always reported as violence or harassment. Overall, the 70% of the respondents who said 'No' may include people who did not recognize behaviour as SGBV, felt it was normal and so did not warrant reporting or feared speaking up due to stigma or facing the consequences.

Commuters experiencing/witnessing SGBV in Makeni County.

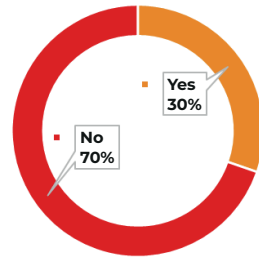


Figure 2: Commuters Experiences of SGBV (Source: Baseline Survey Report on the status of vulnerable groups in Makeni County Public Transport)

Frequency of Commuters Harassment Cases

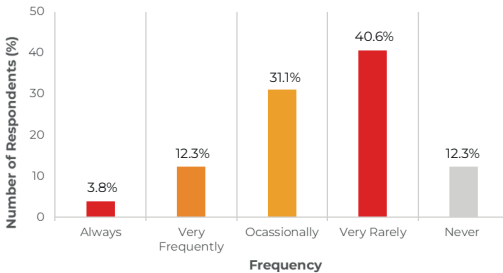


Figure 3: Frequency of Commuter Harassment Cases (Source: Baseline Survey Report on the status of vulnerable groups in Makeni County Public Transport)

Similarly, Figure 3 indicates data on the frequency of harassment cases. This finding still matters as it indicates it is present in the system. Commuters who responded “sometimes” demonstrate that the issue is already too frequent to be ignored. Similarly, responses categorized as “rare” should not be interpreted as “never.”

Even occasional incidents matter because they point to an environment in which abuse can occur and be tolerated. As awareness improves, reports of SGBV may initially rise in the short term, reflecting increased recognition, stronger reporting, and greater accountability, before declining over time as prevention and response systems become more effective.

b. Beyond Commuters: SGBV among public transport workers

While much discourse focuses on commuters' experiences of SGBV, the issue remains persistent among public transport workers. Operators, particularly women, face various forms of harassment preventing them from thriving in the sector. This contributes to the imbalanced representation in Makueni County public transport system, which currently stands at 4% (Flone, 2024).

As shown in Figure 4, insults, inappropriate comments, and other forms of harassment contribute to the most prevalent form of workplace harassment. This presents a barrier where women are not only excluded as users of safe and accessible transport systems but also as participants in the transport economy.

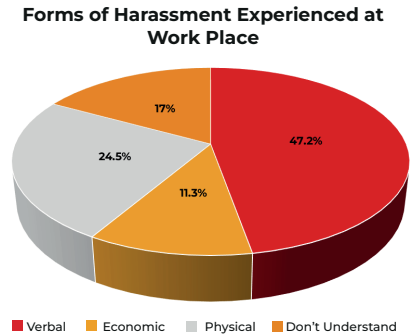


Figure 4: Forms of Harassment Experienced within Makueni Public Transport Workplace (Source: Baseline Survey Report on the status of vulnerable groups in Makueni County Public Transport)

2. Location & Time of SGBV incidents

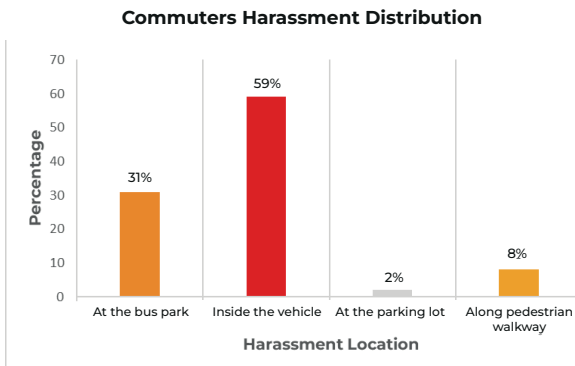


Figure 5: Location & Time of SGBV in s incident (Source: Baseline Survey Report on the status of vulnerable groups in Makueni County Public Transport)

Figure 5 indicates that SGBV occurs in specific locations, such as inside the vehicle, at the bus park, at the parking lot, and along the pedestrian walkway.

In Figure 6, timings are often concentrated in the morning and evening. These findings move the issue from being general to more specific and trackable.

Lived experiences from commuters reinforce this pattern. One respondent recounted: ***“I witnessed sexual harassment in a vehicle while travelling to school, it happened in a matatu while we were travelling using Mutongoi matatu. The conductor of a matatu sat on a woman’s thighs without her consent. The lady started crying out and was forced to alight on the way before we reached the destination.”*** This account illustrates how SGBV can occur in the course of ordinary travel and how survivors may be left without immediate protection or effective

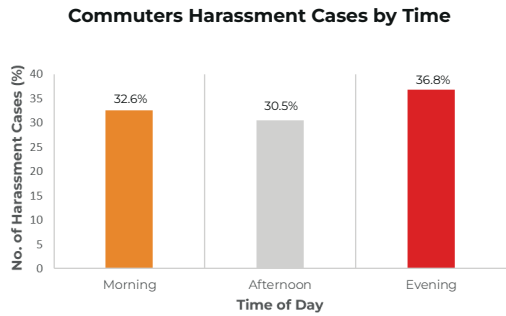


Figure 6: Commuters Harassment Cases by time (Source: Baseline Survey Report on the status of vulnerable groups in Makenuei County Public Transport)

3. Reporting of SGBV incidents is constrained by fear, stigma, and weak response systems

Harassment Perpetrators Distribution

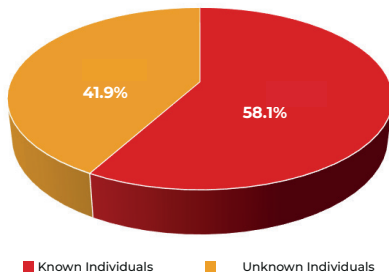


Figure 7: Harassment Perpetrator Distribution (Source: Baseline Survey Report on the status of vulnerable groups in Makenuei County Public Transport)

Data from the baseline survey indicate that most perpetrators of these incidents are known individuals, with some even mentioned by name. Survivors of SGBV do not report most of these incidents because they fear retaliation and stigma, while some lack awareness of this socially accepted behaviour. The consequences, as indicated earlier, include both direct, indirect, and intangible costs, including pain and suffering. The available reporting channels

shown in Figure 8 below, including SACCOs, have no formal, comprehensive SACCO incident-occurrence book for documenting cases; instead, incidents are verbally reported and never actioned. Normalization of SGBV prevents action by the police. Alternative

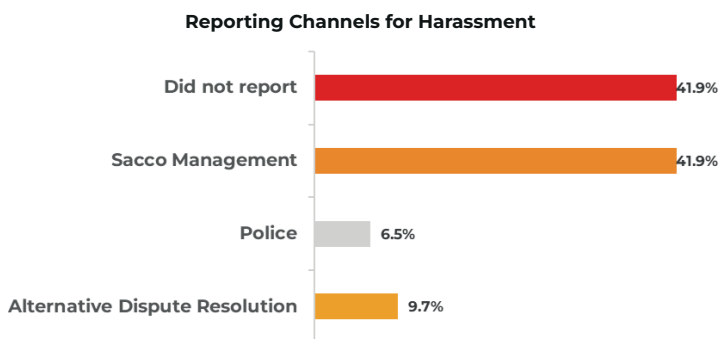


Figure 8: Location & Time of SGBV in s cident (Source: Baseline Survey Report on the status of vulnerable groups in Makueni County Public Transport)

Dispute Resolution involves conflicting parties resorting to phrases that undermine justice and reinforce impunity. The result is a system in which both direct and indirect costs of SGBV including pain, trauma, lost opportunities, and reduced trust in institutions, continue to be borne by survivors.

► Phrases such as “*tutamaliza kiwanaume*” (loosely translated as “*we will sort it out like men*”) undermine justice and reinforce impunity

4. Existing county frameworks provide a basis for action, but their application to public transport is still limited

The already developed frameworks, such as the Makueni Gender Policy and the Makueni SGBV Policy, indicate the county's commitment to social inclusion and gender equality. Review of these policies indicates gaps in their application, with them oriented to formal employment, that is, county staff and their workplace environment. This inward focus does not adequately address the informal working environment, including public transport, where most commuters interact daily. This gap is significant because public transport is one of the most common public-facing spaces in which vulnerable groups experience exclusion, harassment, and insecurity.

The existing frameworks do not adequately address the specific risks faced in vehicles, bus parks, bus stops, pedestrian walkways, and other transit spaces. In this regard, the draft Public Transport Policy presents a timely opportunity to bridge this gap. Guided by principles of inclusivity and equity, the policy can provide a practical framework for integrating targeted measures on SGBV prevention,

reporting, response, and accountability within the public transport system. Extending protection beyond formal workplaces is therefore essential to building a safer and more inclusive transport system in Makueni County.



Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The findings show that sexual and gender-based violence in Makueni County’s public transport system is not an isolated concern, but a persistent challenge that affects both commuters and workers, particularly women and other vulnerable groups. It is reinforced by the normalization of harassment, concentration of incidents in specific spaces and times, weak reporting and response systems, and limited application of existing policy frameworks to informal public transport settings. Addressing this challenge, therefore, requires practical and coordinated action by the County Government, transport SACCOs, enforcement agencies, civil society, and communities.

1. Addressing the prevalence and normalization of SGBV in public transport

The continued occurrence of SGBV in public transport underscores the need for stronger preventive measures. A practical policy option is to institutionalize awareness creation and prevention measures across the transport system. This should include enforceable codes of conduct for drivers, conductors, and other operators; regular across the transport system. This should include enforceable codes

of conduct for drivers, conductors, and other operators; regular sensitization on SGBV and social inclusion; and use of information, education, and communication materials in vehicles, bus parks, and bus stops. These actions can help shift harmful norms, improve recognition of SGBV, and reinforce zero tolerance across the sector.



Addressing the prevalence and normalization of SGBV in public transport (Source: Flone Initiative)

2. Responding to hotspots through targeted interventions

The concentration of incidents in specific locations and during peak travel hours presents an opportunity for focused action. Makueni County Government could use available data to identify SGBV hotspots and guide interventions in high-risk spaces such as vehicles, bus parks, parking areas, and pedestrian walkways. This can be supported through targeted enforcement, visibility materials, and public awareness campaigns during morning and evening peak periods. A more targeted approach would make prevention and response efforts more efficient and visible.



Bus station (Source: Flone Initiative)

3. Strengthening reporting, documentation, and accountability

Weak reporting systems and fear of retaliation continue to discourage survivors from seeking redress. A key policy option is to



Acknowledgement

This policy brief is based on a collaborative Baseline Survey Report on the Status of Vulnerable Groups in Makueni County public transport system, prepared by the Makueni County Technical Working Group members on Safe and Inclusive Mobility.



Makueni Technical Working Group (Source: Flone Initiative)

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SHE CAN Tool



Get more information on how
to tackle sexual harassment in
public transport.

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