



OUR  
PUBLIC  
TRANSPORT

PEOPLE'S PUBLIC  
TRANSPORT POLICY



# WOMEN IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT



## **ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>ASLEF</b>	Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen
<b>ATGWU</b>	Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union
<b>ATM</b>	Alianza de Tranviarios de México
<b>ATU</b>	Amalgamated Transit Union
<b>BRT</b>	Bus Rapid Transit
<b>C190</b>	ILO Violence and Harassment Convention 190
<b>ETF</b>	European Transport Workers' Federation
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FTTUB</b>	Federation of Transport Trade Unions in Bulgaria
<b>GTPCWU</b>	General Transport, Petroleum and Chemical Workers' Union
<b>IFC</b>	International Finance Corporation
<b>IFI</b>	International financial institution
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>ITF</b>	International Transport Workers' Federation
<b>ITUC</b>	International Trade Union Confederation
<b>ITWAN</b>	Independent Transport Workers' Association of Nepal
<b>LGBTI+</b>	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex+
<b>MSTKS</b>	Maharashtra State Transport Kamgar Sanghatana
<b>MWU</b>	Matatu Workers' Union
<b>NCTU</b>	National Confederation of Transport Workers' Union
<b>NETWON</b>	Nepal Yatayat Mazdoor Sangh
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>NSFE</b>	Non-standard forms of employment
<b>OSH</b>	Occupational safety and health
<b>PPE</b>	Personal protective equipment
<b>PUTON</b>	Public Transport Operators Union
<b>R204</b>	ILO Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation 204
<b>R206</b>	ILO Violence and Harassment Recommendation 206
<b>ROSPROFZHEL</b>	Russian Trade Union of Railwaymen and Transport Construction Workers
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>SNTT</b>	Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores del Transporte
<b>TAWU</b>	Transport Workers Union of Kenya
<b>UITP</b>	International Association of Public Transport
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UN</b>	United Nations



This chapter was written for the ITF by Georgia Montague-Nelson from the Global Labour Institute (GLI) ([gli-manchester.net](http://gli-manchester.net)) to inform policy proposals on gender equality for the federation's People's Public Transport Policy ([OPTpolicy.org](http://OPTpolicy.org)). The ITF would like to thank Georgia for her contribution, as well as those who helped in the preparation.

Each chapter in the People's Public Transport Policy focuses on a different policy issue related to public transport. The chapters include case studies, campaign materials and educational resources.

The ITF's Our Public Transport (OPT) programme promotes a social model of public transport. A social model includes organisational and employment rights for workers and requires that any expansion of public transport guarantees decent jobs.

**OPT:**

- works in target cities to strengthen the voices of workers in the development of new urban transport modes, including bus rapid transit (BRT), and in negotiating the transition from informal to formal work
- campaigns to improve working conditions for all public transport workers – informal transport workers in particular – through increasing their industrial power. This includes building union networks in public transport multinational corporations, developing alliances with passengers, communities and other organisations and promoting women's employment in public transport
- works to develop an alternative public transport policy – one that is built on public ownership, public financing, decent jobs and union rights for workers

The ITF women transport workers' committee has decided to make this campaign a core pillar of the ITF women's programme. Gender-related issues and women's participation and leadership are integrated in every aspect of the OPT programme.

[www.OurPublicTransport.org](http://www.OurPublicTransport.org)



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1.

## WHY GENDER EQUALITY IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT IS IMPORTANT

Public transport plays an important role in the lives of women. But it remains male-dominated, both in its design and in its employment.

The expansion of public transport is vital to provide women with equal access to mobility. This will enable women to engage a wide range of their social and economic rights, including access to opportunities for work and for the use of public services.

But public transport can only be gender-responsive if there are women employed in the industry and if women are involved in decision-making and policy about public transport.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the vision that we want for women in public transport. It looks at ways to build public transport systems that work for women as both workers and passengers, and to strengthen the role of women in public transport policy decision making and planning.

The chapter puts forward policy demands developed by the ITF women transport workers' committee. These demands are:

- 1. Strengthen women's employment and promote decent work in public transport #ThisIsOurWorldToo**
- 2. End violence against women transport workers**
- 3. Introduce technological change in a way that advances gender equality**
- 4. Involve women workers in public transport decision-making**

The chapter looks at each policy demand in detail, highlighting the problems facing

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women in public transport and suggesting practical strategies to address them.

The chapter draws together work developed by ITF Women. It also includes case studies which demonstrate strong examples of union organising, supporting materials and ITF resources, and reference to international law and standards, where relevant.

Each section also has a **quick reference guide** which sets out the key points and useful documents.

**Please note: all quotes in this chapter are from women workers, unless otherwise specified.**

### 1.1 WOMEN IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Women are an important part of the public transport workforce, globally working in a wide range of roles – as ticket sellers, cleaners, customer service agents and catering staff. In some countries, women are increasingly in operational roles as drivers, conductors and engineers. Women also work in the wider transport economy.

As passengers, women also rely on public transport to fulfil their mobility needs – to visit family, take children to school and access public services and employment opportunities.

But public transport is highly gendered. There are differences in the mobility needs and use of public transport between women and men. Inequality exists in access to transport jobs. And the needs and concerns of women are often not properly considered in decision-making.



## **WOMEN AS PUBLIC TRANSPORT PASSENGERS**

Women and men have different mobility needs and travel patterns, related to their often different economic and social roles.<sup>1</sup>

Women tend to rely on public transport more than men. In Latin America and the Caribbean, over 50 percent of passengers are women<sup>2</sup>; in France, it is two-thirds<sup>3</sup>.

Women's use of public transport is also characterised by trip chaining (making stops on origin and destination journeys). This is because women tend to make more journeys for family and household related reasons, as they undertake a disproportionate share of caring responsibilities. For example, in Santiago, Chile, over half of women's trips are for caring purposes, and in London, UK, women are three times more likely to take children to school and 80 percent more likely to trip chain.<sup>4</sup> This means that women tend to travel shorter distances in a smaller area, make more trips and face higher mobility costs.

But public transport is male dominated and geared towards the needs of men. This is evident in the values that are embedded in its structure and provision, including pricing, route planning, design of services and safety and security. Policies and services that are not gender responsive result in gender differences in access to mobility and create limitations for women passengers. This is a barrier to women's access to opportunities and participation in public life.

Key issues facing women passengers include:

- Lack of access to public transport and inadequate service frequency because of different needs
- Inadequate facilities on vehicles and in stations, including problems of overcrowding and inadequate lighting, pedestrian crossings, CCTV and sanitation facilities

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- High transport fares, disproportionately affecting women because of their lower socio-economic status
- Limited provisions for pregnant women, women with children, women carers and disabled women (spaces for goods, strollers and wheelchairs, baby-changing facilities)
- Greater exposure to sexual harassment and violence

## **WOMEN AS PUBLIC TRANSPORT WORKERS**

Women workers are underrepresented in the industry and face unequal employment opportunities. This gender-based occupational segregation is underpinned by negative myths about women's suitability to work in certain jobs, such as their ability to drive.

Women working in public transport are few in number, globally representing less than 15 percent of the workforce.<sup>5</sup> Although women work within most public transport organisations, the types of jobs they have are often highly gendered. Men traditionally hold the better paid jobs and positions of power, while women are overrepresented in the lowest paid and most precarious forms of work – for example, men are often the drivers, women are ticket-sellers.

Key issues facing women workers include:

- Occupational segregation concentrating women's employment in less senior, lower paid and more precarious jobs
- Inadequate working environments, conditions and arrangements
- Inadequate/lack of facilities, including sanitation, and security measures
- Poor work-life balance, including long working hours and inflexible shift patterns
- Lack of maternity rights



- Wage inequality
- Occupational safety and health (OSH) concerns, including vehicle design, uniform and personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Violence and harassment from colleagues and passengers

These issues can be a barrier for women wanting to join and stay working in the sector.

In some cities, more women are entering the public transport workforce and are also gaining greater opportunities to move into typically male-dominated areas, including driving in new forms of transport systems, such as Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), and expanding metro systems.

### **WOMEN AS PUBLIC TRANSPORT WORKERS AND PASSENGERS**

The needs of women workers and passengers in public transport are overlapping and interconnected. Any measures to address gender equality in public transport must include efforts to better engage and represent women workers in decision-making.

This must also involve improving access to employment for women workers, through the creation of decent and secure work opportunities that attract and retain women and challenge occupational segregation. This should be accompanied by better representation and participation of women public transport workers in unions.

Together, these will positively affect all who work in and use the public transport sector. Men will benefit from these changes too.

## **WOMEN IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

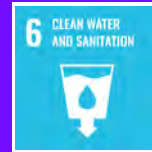
### **UNITED NATIONS (UN) SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

The adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) seeks to address key challenges, with targets for governments to meet by 2030. Women's empowerment and equality are an important part of the solution and several of the goals also relate to transport, cities, and inclusive development.



#### **SDG 5**

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls



#### **SDG 6**

Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all



#### **SDG 8**

Promote sustained inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all



#### **SDG 9**

Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation



#### **SDG 11**

Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (Access to safe, affordable, accessible, and sustainable urban transport is a key part – SDG 11.2)



#### **SDG 12**

Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns (incl. transport and commuting)



**1.2 EXPANSION OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN WORKERS**

Urban public transport plays a critical role in the economic and social life of cities, particularly in a world characterised by rapid urbanisation. Mass public transport also brings huge environmental benefits, including reductions in CO2 emissions.

Globally, an ambitious expansion of public transport is necessary to respond to the urgent need to take action on climate change. This is an opportunity to ensure public transport effectively meets social and economic priorities. It can also positively impact on gender equality by providing women with safe, affordable public services that they can access equally to cater to their mobility needs, and by strengthening green and decent work opportunities for women in public transport.<sup>6</sup>

Women public transport workers can potentially benefit hugely from the development of new transport systems or changes to existing systems because of investment from public authorities, international financial institutions (IFIs) like the World Bank, or private investors; and from transformative technological change and innovation in the sector. But women need to be represented in these developments to ensure that they benefit from them.

This means that gender equality needs to be a key goal of any new public transport infrastructure. This requires women to be represented in public transport decision-making and planning. It also means securing decent work opportunities for women to enable them to move out of informal and precarious work into good quality formal and secure work, removing barriers and challenging gender-based occupational segregation.

Strengthening women's employment will have a positive impact on the whole public transport sector, addressing labour shortages and bringing innovation and skills, better working conditions and improved safety.

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It will also mean better planning and design of transport systems and services.

**1.3 BUILDING A #GenderEqualNewNormal IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

Global crises – whether economic, social, health or climate – exacerbate inequality. The rise in insecurity displaces populations, devastates livelihoods and increases violence and harassment. Women are always disproportionately affected.

Public transport workers are currently confronting the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, an economic and health crisis that is posing unprecedented challenges. The pandemic has brought into focus the critical role of public transport in cities. Women working as drivers, ticket sellers, conductors, cleaners and office workers have been keeping cities moving.

COVID-19 has exposed and compounded existing harmful gender inequalities.

The overrepresentation of women on the frontlines of the pandemic – in customer-facing roles, for example – combined with inadequate and inappropriate PPE, means that women are at greater risk of contracting the virus. Women facing other forms of discrimination have been affected disproportionately – in the UK, for example, a black female ticket seller working without PPE died after she was spat and coughed on by a man who claimed to have the virus.<sup>7</sup>

**“Women in informal transport are vital in the fight against COVID-19. They adhere to laws, mobilise others to use PPEs and follow government guidelines.”**  
Minibus conductor, Kenya<sup>8</sup>

**“My work is essential to the community during COVID-19 because people need to move from one place to another, especially health workers.”**  
Online digital driver, Kenya<sup>9</sup>





In some countries governments have been able to support public transport systems during periods of COVID-suppressed demand, while in others the industry faces financial ruin. With workers pushed into poverty, the livelihoods of women have been hit hardest by wage cuts, unpaid salaries and job losses. It is estimated that in all sectors of the global economy, the equivalent to 255 million full-time jobs were lost in 2020 because of the pandemic, with women's employment at more risk than men's.<sup>10</sup>

Informal workers are the most vulnerable. In the first month of the crisis, informal workers in all sectors faced an estimated 60 percent decline in earnings.<sup>11</sup> As with all crises, the livelihoods of women workers – overrepresented in the most precarious work – are being hit hardest. In Nairobi, for example, there were reports from taxi and matatu (informal minibus) workers that men have been getting preferential treatment for the few jobs that remain, with women workers told to stay home. This is forcing women into even more precarious work with longer working hours, increased pressure and without provisions for support or leave.

“

***Informal workers are more scared of dying of hunger than they are of catching the disease. Women have the additional job of bringing food to the table and they eat last, after their husband and children. When food is scarce, maybe they don't eat at all.***

NETWON, women's advocate, Nepal<sup>12</sup>

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“

***Some employers sold off their vehicles which led to loss of employment for some of us. We are forced to depend on colleagues who are still in employment, by working short shifts as relievers. I am one of the victims because my employer sold the vehicle. So, I work once or twice a week...Since employers are negligent and mostly care about daily revenue targets, we must buy masks and sanitisers from the little we make...Already the women in urban transport are losing jobs and it is unlikely there will be new opportunities for them...***

Minibus conductor, Kenya<sup>13</sup>

Women in public transport are facing higher levels of physical and verbal abuse, including sexual coercion, from the public, police and colleagues. Isolation and lockdowns are increasing women's exposure to domestic violence. Reports of domestic violence have skyrocketed and femicide is on the rise, too. The economic strain of the pandemic has the potential to undermine support services for domestic violence survivors. Women are also having to undertake a disproportionate share of increased caring responsibilities.

“

***We are lacking PPE kits and fear carrying the virus home, so we try to keep our children away from us. Even with these challenges, we feel proud to play an important role maintaining cleanliness for everyone.***

Railway hospital cleaner, India<sup>14</sup>

In the aftermath of COVID-19, public transport services will be vital to rebuild the life of cities. The pandemic provides an opportunity to adopt a gender-responsive approach to recovery to ensure that inequalities are not reproduced, perpetuated or intensified.



## WOMEN TRANSPORT WORKERS' RIGHTS AND COVID-19

The ITF has identified key demands for employers, governments and investors to adopt for women transport workers in COVID-19 response and recovery. These priority areas should be negotiated with unions, with women's participation and with all actors using their leverage to ensure the same high standards of protection throughout supply chains.

“

*After COVID-19, we cannot go back to a 'normal' which for many women transport workers means being overrepresented in precarious employment without social protections, underrepresented in leadership and decision-making, facing violence at work and home, and sanitation indignity. This is not normal. Instead, we have an opportunity to ensure that as we emerge from this crisis, that there is a 'gender equal new normal' that guarantees good jobs for all workers.*"<sup>15</sup>



**1. WOMEN ON ALL DECISION-MAKING BODIES**



**2. INCOME AND SOCIAL PROTECTION**



**3. ACCESS TO SANITATION AND APPROPRIATE PPE**



**4. SECURE WORK**



**5. CARE BEFORE PROFIT**



**6. END VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT AGAINST WOMEN**



**7. NEW TECHNOLOGY TO BENEFIT WOMEN WORKERS**



**8. GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENTS**



**9. GENDER-RESPONSIVE ECONOMIC STIMULUS**



To build safe, accessible, and equitable public transport systems, gender equality needs to be integrated throughout the public transport agenda. Women’s voices need to be present and heard during policymaking, planning, research and development, operation and monitoring of systems to ensure that public transport services are gender responsive. This means involving women as decision-makers in policy discussions and consultations about public transport developments, and action to increase women’s participation and leadership at all levels throughout public transport development and implementation.

Trade unions provide a powerful vehicle for women workers to speak with a collective voice and to make demands around strengthening women’s employment and promoting decent work. This also means that gender equality needs to be strengthened in trade unions.

**2.**

**STRENGTHENING WOMEN’S EMPLOYMENT AND PROMOTING DECENT WORK**

*Women need better work opportunities to reduce the gender gap in public transport. This section introduces strategies to strengthen women’s employment in the sector. These include addressing workplace issues, ensuring that recruitment and training promote gender equality and making sure that a gender-responsive approach is taken to the expansion of public transport.*

**2.1 WOMEN’S EMPLOYMENT IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

Jobs in the transport industry are highly gendered and unequal. This means that there are ‘jobs for women’ and ‘jobs for men’, often related to gender-biased attitudes and barriers. Inequality also exists in the wages of men and women, contributing to a significant gender pay gap. The same segregation exists in public transport, where women have historically been underrepresented.



We need to ensure that public transport services are gender responsive at every stage



## OCCUPATIONAL SEGREGATION IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT

### Horizontal gender-based occupational segregation

*(underrepresentation of women in certain industries/occupations)* exists in the sector. Globally, average female participation in the transport sector is 17 percent.<sup>16</sup> In public transport, women make up less than 15 percent of the workforce.<sup>17</sup>

**Vertical gender-based occupational segregation** *(overrepresentation of men in highest status roles)* also exists in the sector. Women typically work in low paid, low quality, low status and more precarious jobs. In the EU for example, women make up on average 17.5 percent of urban public transport workers, but less than 10 percent of drivers.<sup>18</sup>

An ITF study of five major world cities found that women are underrepresented in the public transport workforce and are concentrated in lower paying, precarious and informal jobs, such as cashiering, cleaning, administration, and catering. The jobs typically occupied by men are better paid and have better working conditions, such as drivers, managers and engineers.<sup>19</sup>

Women frequently face barriers to employment in public transport. The reasons have the same root cause – the persistent inequality between women and men.

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### GENDER STEREOTYPING AND SEX DISCRIMINATION

“

*The problem is wider than the industry – it is deeply embedded in the power structures of our society. The solution is political as well as industrial. The perception my industry (the railway) has of women is by and large typical of wider society: the same tropes and stereotypes are perpetuated, as they are everywhere, with the added pressure and fatigue involved in doing shift work, along with the likelihood that women have primary caring roles when they are not at work.”*

Railway worker<sup>20</sup>

Work is generally divided between men and women according to gender stereotypes (*generalised views about roles and characteristics of men and women*). Shaped by cultural and economic factors, including sex discrimination and inequality, gender stereotypes establish expectations about the kind of jobs that women and men should work. These stereotypes create negative attitudes about women’s abilities and capability to work in public transport. It also means that transport is often considered as ‘no place for women’.<sup>21</sup>

“

*Women do not want to stay long in the transport sector. The passengers also think that these women are in the wrong place. It's like finding a man in the kitchen.”*

Male union representative, Kenya<sup>22</sup>

Sex discrimination also mean that the jobs women typically work are seen as less skilled and are undervalued. Women are typically favoured for jobs that tend to be lower paid and passenger facing (customer service, sales and ticketing), with men favoured for operational roles in driving.



Bus driver in Bogota, Colombia

Women's capabilities of working in traditional male jobs in public transport are frequently called into question by passengers and colleagues, with women often facing abuse at work.

“

***I am the only woman in the company with a driver's licence class C. I had to beg to be assigned a bigger vehicle, while some of my colleagues (who had obtained the licence after me) had been immediately assigned one without much trouble... Also for the moment I have not been allowed to work the night shift (which is paid more)...the supervisor tells me that 'because you are a woman, I will not send you'.***

Road transport worker<sup>23</sup>

In male-dominated industries like public transport, women frequently face a macho working culture, often made worse by a male-dominated management, where gender bias exists in recruiting, retaining, training and promoting women. This can put women off applying for jobs, makes them feel unwelcome or unsuitable when they do, and discourages them from staying in public transport jobs.

“

***I applied to become a driving instructor, as did three men. I had equal qualifications, no customer complaints, accidents etc., and several years' more driving experience. A man got the position, and I was brushed off with assurances that it had been a close call.***

Urban public transport worker<sup>24</sup>

“

**Unfortunately, in the past, despite having studied, I have not been preferred to male colleagues. Each time [there were] different excuses, like, ‘you’re young, you will have other opportunities, etc.’ whose aim was the deliberate exclusion of my skills from any serious and objective process of evaluation. Because it was preferred to advance men of lower professional value by setting selection criteria according to which only seniority and not skills made the difference.”**

Railway worker<sup>25</sup>



Train driver from the USA

Sex discrimination also exists in legislation. In some countries it is even illegal for women to work in certain transport roles. A 2018 study by the World Bank found that women in Moldova were not allowed to drive buses with more than 14 seats, and in Malaysia women were not able to transport goods and passengers at night.<sup>26</sup>

Women who face intersecting forms of discrimination (when people experience more than one discrimination, such as sexism and racism, or homophobia) also face barriers to employment in public transport. For example, LGBTI+ women often face sexism, homophobia and transphobia, which can create a difficult working environment.

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In some workplaces and countries it can be dangerous to be open about sexuality or gender identity.

Although women’s employment in the sector remains low, increasing numbers of women are entering the public transport industry for work, taking on traditionally male roles.

“

**Being a bus driver was supposed to be my profession. I like it and I do it for love.”**

Bus driver, Brazil<sup>27</sup>



Bus driver in Australia

An ITF study of five cities found that growing numbers of women are gaining opportunities to move into typically male-dominated areas in new forms of transport. In Mexico City, government policies to increase women’s workforce participation and the introduction of the new public transport system resulted in a seven percent growth in women’s participation in transport jobs between 2004 and 2014. In South Africa there was an increase of 19 percent in women’s employment in the transport industry in 2017-2018 as women took on jobs in the new MyCiti system.<sup>28</sup>



Bus mechanic in India

Despite huge achievements, gender stereotypes persist, often expressed in negative attitudes about women's driving abilities or suitability to work in public transport.

“

***You do not need a great mind or abilities. I mean, you do not need to measure distances, or deal with other cars. In those [trains] you stay in your rail and press some buttons, that is enough! That's why this technology is suitable for women to operate, otherwise you need men to handle all the difficulties.”***

Male trolleybus driver, Mexico<sup>29</sup>

In 1998, Saida Abad became the first woman train driver in Morocco, the Arab World and Africa. Despite this great achievement, she still faced negative perceptions about her skills and abilities as a woman working in public transport. As she retires, she reflects on her experience.



Rail maintenance worker in Russia



“

*The first day is unforgettable, for sure. That day I felt the full burden of responsibility hanging on my shoulders. I did not know how the passengers would react. So many questions in my head, and so many concerns. Yet at the same time, I was proud. When I brought the train to the destination and saw through the window of my cabin the masses of passengers getting off I thought to myself: 'I've brought all these people here safely!' Now that I'm retiring my senior manager informed me that, although I passed all exams and training the management was still calling him to double check if I could really drive the train.*

*They've all been satisfied with my performance. I've experienced many unforgettable moments especially when I was entrusted to drive the royal train from Casablanca to Marrakech. I practiced and drove the train for some distance with His Majesty King Hassan II by my side. When we reached Marrakech, the King received me. I was so happy and proud as a Moroccan woman. It was a feeling of pride, not arrogance. Hassan II congratulated me and I'll never forget what he said to me; 'Bravo, I felt as if a man was driving'.*<sup>30</sup>



Saida Abad, a train driver from Morocco





**WORK ORGANISATION AND WORK ENVIRONMENT**

Inequality and sex discrimination – entrenched in the way work is organised, the structures of work and the working environment – is a barrier to women’s employment.

Work environments are frequently not gender-responsive and fail to consider women’s needs, for example, lacking adequate sanitation facilities or appropriate OSH considerations. The organisation of work in public transport – usually around men’s needs – fails to consider the concerns and needs of women. Working hours (rolling shift work, split shifts, weekend work, late/early working hours) ignore caring responsibilities and increase exposure to violence and harassment, particularly when travelling to and from work at night or early in the morning, when no public transport is available.

**VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT**

Women public transport workers also face disproportionate exposure to violence and harassment when they’re at work. According to the ILO, ***‘violence against transport workers is one of the most important factors limiting the attraction of transport jobs for women and breaking the retention of those who are employed in the transport sector’***.<sup>31</sup>



Railway conductor in Japan

The inequality that exists for women working in public transport deprives them of their basic human rights under international law.

- **UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1979**
- **ILO Convention No.100 on Equal Remuneration, 1951**
- **ILO Convention No. 111 on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation), 1958**
- ILO Convention No.122 Employment Policy Convention, 1964
- ILO Convention No.155 on Occupational Safety and Health, 1981
- ILO Convention No.156 on Workers with Family Responsibilities, 1981
- ILO Convention No.175 on Part-Time Work, 1994
- ILO Convention No.183 on Maternity Protection Convention, 2000
- ILO Convention No. 190 on Violence and Harassment, 2019

If governments have ratified one of these Conventions, then it needs to be effectively implemented. If it has not been ratified, unions should be pushing for ratification. Some Conventions are fundamental (**in bold**), this means that they apply to all ILO member states, even if not ratified.



## 2.2 INFORMAL WORK AND NON-STANDARD FORMS OF EMPLOYMENT

**Informal work** is defined by the ILO as ‘all economic activities by workers and economic units that are – in law or in practice – not covered or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements’.<sup>32</sup>

Informal work can be described using four indicators:

- Lack of a written employment contract
- No job security
- Poor or non-existent social protection
- Denial of fundamental rights<sup>33</sup>

Most of the world’s public transport workers are informal, and in some countries, particularly in Asia and Africa, public transport is almost entirely informal. Although concentrated in the Global South, informal work is on the rise in the Global North too, exacerbated by growing economic insecurity.

Like the rest of the transport industry, informal public transport is male dominated, but women are also employed in and around informal transport workplaces. While women work in roles such as drivers and conductors, they are over-represented in the most precarious, insecure, and low paid forms of informal work, and concentrated in service occupations such as cleaning, vending, and catering.

A study in Nairobi, Kenya found that the informal matatu workforce is dominated by men who work in on-board crews and off-road service areas. But many women also rely on the industry for their livelihoods and are clustered in the most precarious forms of work, particularly street vending.<sup>34</sup> A study in Dakar, Senegal revealed similar patterns, with women overrepresented in more insecure and precarious commercial activities and trading.<sup>35</sup>

Gender stereotyping and sex discrimination question women’s capabilities of working

## WOMEN IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT

in better paid and more senior positions in the informal public transport economy, creating barriers to women accessing training to improve their skills and experience to progress to better paid jobs and access formal work opportunities.



***Ladies in this industry, we are discriminated because of our gender. People think that women cannot...drive...And yet we are capable of doing everything.***

ATGWU, urban transport worker, Uganda<sup>36</sup>

In Nepal, the ITWAN and NETWON unions found that vehicle owners frequently block women’s entry to work in better paid jobs driving buses and minibuses because they do not believe women are capable of operating four-wheel vehicles.<sup>37</sup>

Women in the informal public transport industry also face high levels of violence, harassment, and discrimination from passengers, colleagues, and the police.



***Women are facing a lot of problems in this sector. In that for example, if you want to get employment from this sector you have to offer your body...We face a lot of harassment...Because you find, after you’re going to pick money from those passengers somebody will just caress you. Somebody will just slap your butt.***

Matatu worker, Kenya<sup>38</sup>



***Women workers are especially harassed by the askaris (city council inspectors). The way they handle us is wrong. Sometimes the police officers put their hands in our pants. That is very bad. It’s embarrassing.***

Matatu conductor, Kenya<sup>39</sup>

Informal transport workers are more vulnerable to sexual coercion because they lack complaint mechanisms at work or access to those provided by the state, lack power and face poverty and economic insecurity.

“

*Life for women in Kenya is not easy. So most of us have to work really hard to get by... Unlike the few minibuses owned by transport companies where some basic union agreement exists, women find it challenging to work in this informal sector. An individual minibus owner hands the keys to the driver. Once the driver has the keys, he becomes your boss! When a woman is seeking work, this driver promises a job on condition that the woman will be 'paying' for it in certain ways...Once some of these men become too insistent many women quit these jobs... Many men tell us every day 'you women are weak and useless, and you can't do shit' as justification to demand their 'compensation' for giving us regular work. Only through women's activism in the union can we challenge this abuse of power in the informal transport sector.”*

Minibus conductor, Kenya<sup>40</sup>

**ILO Convention 190 (C190) on eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work<sup>41</sup>** is an important tool to enable unions to address violence and harassment in the informal economy.

- It applies to informal workers and informal workplaces, including public spaces. (Article 2 (2) and Article 3)
- It gives public authorities responsibility for regulating informal workplaces and preventing violence and harassment against informal workers. (Article 8)

**ILO Recommendation 204 (R204) on the transition from the informal to the formal economy** states that governments should

“

*'take urgent and appropriate measures to enable the transition of workers and economic units from the informal to the formal economy, while ensuring the preservation and improvement of existing livelihoods... while respecting workers' fundamental rights, and ensuring opportunities for income security, livelihoods and entrepreneurship' during the transition.*<sup>42</sup>

In several cities, the authorities are attempting to reform and formalise public transport. This has become a priority area for international lenders and IFIs, who fund transport development projects, advise governments on transport policy and provide loans to transport companies. Many governments are being encouraged to invest in new transport institutions, infrastructure and regulation towards formalisation of the informal transport industry. For example, the introduction and expansion of BRT in many cities in the Global South is presented as an opportunity to transition informal transport workers to formal employment with better working conditions.

Women occupy the most precarious jobs within informal transport. This means that the transition to formal, decent work is an important goal of trade unions to address inequalities for women. But formalisation processes also pose several challenges for informal workers. The introduction of formal transport systems has the potential to exclude the majority of informal transport workers, especially women, due to the mismatch between jobs created by new transport systems and those provided by labour-intensive, informal industries. Unless



proactive gender-responsive steps are taken, formal transport systems can simply reproduce gendered inequalities and miss opportunities to improve employment opportunities for women.

Unions need to lobby for a just transition for informal women transport workers, to ensure that formalisation processes include action for gender equality and that the rights and livelihoods of women workers are recognised and protected. This can include specific immediate demands for informal women workers, as well as longer-term demands to be addressed in the formalisation process.

**Unions should ensure that gender concerns are integrated into any formalisation process, including:**

- **Action on gender-based occupational segregation, to challenge the narrative of 'women's work' which could include demanding:**
  - **Affirmative action employment policies like ratios or targets for roles like driving**
  - **Non-discriminatory recruitment policies that target recruitment of women**
  - **Technical and skills training to support women's access to more skilled occupations**
  - **Equal pay for work of equal value**
  - **Opportunities for women workers when new technology is introduced**
- **Addressing gender-based violence and harassment**
- **Enabling workers' associations and unions, with women's representation, to fully engage in the process and ensure women union members are included in negotiating and bargaining teams<sup>43</sup>**

## WOMEN IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The organising of informal workers into unions or associations is also vital to strengthen decent work for women. To do this, unions need to build an understanding of the informal public transport economy. Training women in workplace mapping techniques can be an effective way to develop a detailed understanding of issues faced by women in informal workplaces.

ITF affiliated unions have adopted an **Informal Transport Workers' Charter<sup>44</sup>** which contains union demands, including those specific to the recognition of the rights and livelihoods of women workers in the informal transport industry. These include:

- *An end to violence and sexual harassment against women*
- *An end to employment discrimination, and equal opportunities for training, skills development and access to higher-paid transport occupations*
- *Adequate rest, sanitation and personal security facilities for women in transport workplaces*
- *Affordable quality childcare and other care services*
- *Equal pay for women and men*
- *Access to free or affordable sexual reproductive services*

**Non-standard forms of employment**

are defined as 'different employment arrangements that deviate from standard employment'.<sup>45</sup> This includes temporary employment, part-time and on-call work, temporary agency work and other employment relationships, as well as disguised employment, dependent self-employment, and on-demand services such as Uber, Lyft and Taxify.

Globally, there has been a rise in non-standard forms of employment driven by technological changes, labour market de-regulation and globalisation, growing economic insecurity and instability, and increased privatisation.



In public transport, privatisation has resulted in a shift towards outsourcing and subcontracting of jobs. This is eroding workers' rights, and negatively affecting passenger access and experience.

In many cases, this shift has led to lowering conditions and standards for workers and a growth in non-standard forms of employment, short-term contracts, and indirect forms of employment, including temporary agency labour. This is increasing with new technology and app-based companies entering the public transport industry, and is weakening union strength and collective bargaining power and making union organisation more difficult.

Women are disproportionately affected by the negative impacts of privatisation, restructuring and outsourcing.

In public transport the roles that women are typically concentrated in – customer service, cleaning, and catering – are often the first affected by restructuring. Wages are lowered and jobs are outsourced or cut. Equality measures – such as maternity leave and childcare provisions, and training opportunities for women – are frequently cut. Outsourcing also means that several different companies and/or state agencies may be involved in the day-to-day running of public transport systems. This negatively impacts on collective bargaining structures, employer policies and opportunities for women, including opportunities for career progression.

Organising workers affected by restructuring is a key target for unions to build union power and strengthen strategic campaigns to have a voice in industry changes.

Unions also need to campaign to be involved in restructuring processes to ensure they are carried out fairly, including through gender impact assessments. Women representatives must be included in negotiating teams.

## WOMEN IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT

### 2.3 WORKPLACE ISSUES

“

***A clean driving cab, time between trains to go to the loo (not on the train); flexible working hours; more than 6 weeks' maternity pay (if you're sick, you get 16 weeks); a privacy policy where your personal file isn't openly discussed with your colleagues; a zero-tolerance policy towards bullying and sexual harassment; and a less toxic work culture would be appreciated.”***

Railway worker<sup>46</sup>

Workplace issues that undermine a positive and equal work environment frequently affect the employment and retention of women working in public transport. Trade unions need to address these issues by working with public transport employers and governments to adopt laws and collective bargaining agreements that target the root causes of sex discrimination and ensure women have equal rights to paid work, safety, dignity and respect. By addressing the issues that affect women, working conditions will improve for all workers.



Informal transport ticket collectors in Dakar, Senegal



Bus conductor in India

### WAGE INEQUALITY

The jobs women typically work in public transport are usually lower status, lower quality and less well paid. Even when they are doing the same jobs as men, women may earn less because the hours they are able to work are limited because of their extra care responsibilities. Women may be reluctant to work at night because of the increased exposure to violence and harassment. But even when working the same jobs and hours as men, women are often paid less.

To address wage inequality in the sector, unions need to lobby governments and negotiate with employers so that legislation and collective agreements ensure:

- Equal pay for work of equal value, in line with ILO Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100)
- Fair assessment of work and equal pay audits
- Equal access to social security, maternity benefits, and pensions

“**As a long-serving and experienced driver, I found out that I was paid 3,000 pounds less than my male colleague with less experience. I raised a grievance but was made to feel like I was wrong.**”

Bus driver<sup>47</sup>

### SANITATION

Safe access to decent sanitation facilities is a human right for all transport workers. But many women working in public transport do not have access to separate, conveniently located, safe, secure, clean, and private sanitation facilities to accommodate their health and sanitation needs. This is a barrier to women’s employment in public transport.

Many public transport workers are reliant on public sanitation facilities, where they exist. These facilities are often shared with passengers and the public, exposing workers to violence and harassment.

“

***This one incident happened at bus depot in my division, a woman bus conductor had to ‘go to toilet’ but since there was no women only toilet at the bus depot, she went in open behind the Depot building in darkness, a passenger followed her, she was lucky to get alarmed at the right time and screamed for help.***”

Bus conductor, India<sup>48</sup>

Public infrastructure developments frequently fail to consider workers’ sanitation needs. Poor city planning and infrastructure provision means that there is often less toilet provision for women in public facilities or no toilets specifically for women.



“

***We ease ourselves in a nearby bush at the destination of the border with the help of our workmates to shield us up because of the unsafe toilets within the place shared by both male and female.”***

Driver, Uganda<sup>49</sup>

Irregular and unsocial working hours mean public transport workers often are unable to use public facilities or those in bars or cafes. In Bogota, Colombia, for example, the BRT system was not designed to include toilets in the stations. Instead, workers have made informal agreements to use the toilets of businesses near the station. However, this is not always useful because these businesses often open after operations start and close before operations end.<sup>50</sup>

In addition, public sanitation facilities and water points are often privatised and require workers to pay for using facilities in bars, cafés and restaurants. This means workers face huge expenses when tending to their sanitation needs. In Nairobi, Kenya, for example, workers spend up to 18 percent of their earnings on access to water and sanitation services.<sup>51</sup>

“

***Matatu workers [in Kenya] are forced to use toilets in restaurants along their journey. Often to use these toilets you have to pay for a meal or drink, so the drivers chose the cheapest restaurants to stop at. This means the facilities are often unhygienic and, in some cases, unsafe. This is especially the case for women transport workers who go to the toilet in groups of two or three, after one woman was raped.”***<sup>52</sup>

Women have health and safety concerns related to their biological need to access sanitary facilities. But taboos remain around women's menstrual health, hygiene and toilet access and inequality in the provision of public services. This means that women's menstruation and other needs are frequently ignored, and many women have no access to sanitary products at work.

## WOMEN IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The fact that women transport workers may be forced to use poorly-designed sanitation facilities in unsafe places, have no dedicated toilets or access to no toilets at all sends a clear message about how women are seen in public transport and restricts their participation in the sector. Women may feel unable to use sanitation facilities that are not sex-segregated, or do not offer private cubicles. Avoiding or delaying using the facilities could lead to health risks, particularly during menstruation and pregnancy.

“

***Sometimes, I want to go to the toilet, but I haven't finished my duty, so I have to hold it until I complete my shift. I was diagnosed with cystitis twice since working here for 18 years. It was a painful moment, I urinated blood.”***

Train operator, Thailand<sup>53</sup>

“

***Bus workers in some countries resort to using adult diapers due to lack of access to toilets. We share those shameful working conditions but can't even afford to buy diapers.”***

Bus conductor, India<sup>54</sup>

A survey by Unite the Union in the UK of lorry and bus drivers found that 70 percent did not have adequate access to toilets and washing facilities during their normal working day. Women drivers reported that a lack of access to sanitation facilities during menstruation was particularly humiliating and damaging to their health. During the COVID-19 pandemic, members also reported developing 'Covid-type' illnesses which they attributed to being unable to wash their hands during work.<sup>55</sup>

The public transport sector is characterised by intense pressure to meet schedules, with long and unsocial hours and a lack of, or poorly scheduled, toilet breaks. This is prevalent for those working in the gig economy – pressure to keep up with demand means they are unable to take regular breaks.



“

*Sometimes I have to work 6 hours without access to a toilet, which has taught me to drink very little. This unavoidable way of working caused many UTI's [urinary tract infections] and worse...since I started driving 15 years ago. One day management ... told me to have surgery or resign! I love my job and I do have a family to feed, so I had the surgery...Nobody should have to suffer what I've been through. When I started they gave me a plastic box of wet wipes for 'that time of the month!'"*

Train driver, Australia<sup>56</sup>



Bus driver in Ghana

## WOMEN IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT

### ITF TRANSPORT WORKERS' SANITATION CHARTER

The ITF has developed a [Transport Workers' Sanitation Charter](#) which provides guidance on action that employers and governments should take to ensure safe access to decent toilets for transport workers. This states that, as a minimum, 'there should be an appropriate number of accessible, secure and clean toilets for women and men, which are well lit inside and outside, and ventilated, with lockable cubicles, appropriate hygiene (washing) facilities with clean water, with affordable and appropriate menstrual hygiene products provided. Paid rest breaks are essential for transport workers who should be able to access toilets when they need them during working hours - without delay, and with no loss of income'.

The charter focuses on the urgent improvements needed to protect the health and safety of transport workers. It emphasises the importance of integrating a gender perspective into the right to sanitation to identify the issues particular to women transport workers, and to take action to address these issues. It states that unified action must be taken across all levels – global, national and workplace – and with all stakeholders – governments, employers, and investors – with implementation along supply chains.

It also includes an annex on the health risks associated with lack of sanitation facilities, an employer's checklist with requirements for decent sanitary facilities for transport workers, and an annex on the right to sanitation under international law.

The ITF has also developed a [Sanitation Toolkit](#).





Unions can negotiate for the implementation of sanitation policies and facilities in the workplace, negotiating with local authorities where appropriate, including for:

- clean, affordable, appropriate, safe and accessible toilet facilities at workplaces (eg depots, stations) but also on route for all transport workers;
- consideration of the needs of women, transgender, and other gender-variant workers, including clearly-labelled facilities or gender-neutral separate cubicles with sufficient individual privacy, and provision of free sanitary products for women workers;
- sanitation to be integrated into OSH planning, including risk assessments, implementation of measures and training, and reporting systems, including jointly agreed policies; and
- regular scheduled toilet breaks, and better planning of timetables, routes and schedules.

Unions can also lobby governments to improve sanitation facilities by effectively implementing and complying with international law obligations, amending national legislation in line with the ITF Sanitation Charter and improving public toilet provision by building gender-responsive, free, public sanitation facilities for all public transport workers.

Unions can also engage with IFIs and investors to ensure that the right to safe and secure sanitation and water is integrated into all lending policies and programmes.



Railway worker in the USA



## Case Study: UNIONS FIGHTING FOR SAFE ACCESS TO DECENT SANITATION FACILITIES

In **Kathmandu, Nepal**, the metropolitan administration responded to union demands from NETWON and committed to building 42 free, gender-responsive toilets for informal road transport workers.<sup>57</sup>

In the **UK**, ASLEF's campaign to improve provision led to station facilities for all staff being upgraded. Male train drivers had endured poor toilet provision by using containers, plainly unacceptable for women drivers.

In the **UK**, Unite the Union mounted a successful 'Period Dignity' campaign which persuaded employers to agree to provide free sanitary products for women workers.<sup>58</sup>

In **Russia**, ROSPROFZHEL uses the recommendations of the ITF Sanitation Charter and relevant ILO conventions to negotiate better sanitary and hygienic conditions for its railway workers. As a result of this initiative, the following programmes have been developed and are being implemented:

- Installation of sanitary facilities in railway stations and railway infrastructure. For example, over the past three years, 492 lavatories have been equipped on the Oktyabrskaya route, working conditions have been improved at almost 4,000 working places. Similar work is taking place across the entire Russian railway network.
- Equipment of locomotive cabins with toilets. For example, all new locomotives have dry closets and sanitary facilities and overhauled trains are being similarly upgraded.
- Improvement of working conditions when working in hard-to-reach and remote places, during track works: timely connection of power supply, water supply and sewerage; regular maintenance of dry closets; equipping service cars with dry closets; installation of modular sanitary facilities; and creating modular townships as a temporary city for workers.
- Improving working conditions for women. From 2021, women have the right to work as train drivers. The locomotives on which women work are all equipped with sanitary facilities, refrigerators and microwave ovens. There are separate rest rooms, toilets and showers for women in the rest houses (flats) for locomotive crews.
- ROSPROFZHEL is also campaigning to improve the conditions of railway crossings officers, of whom some 80 percent are women. Toilets are sometimes outdoors. The union fights for construction of a special modular building at each crossing, which not only has sanitary facilities with water and sewerage, but also facilities for storing equipment and tools. For example, on the Moscow Railway, all 219 crossings have been equipped with warm toilets. The same work continues throughout the network.



## OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH (OSH)

Because the public transport industry is male-dominated and highly gendered, work environment and design often do not reflect women's needs, including in terms of OSH, uniforms, PPE and the ergonomics of vehicles.

“

***Women wearing overalls have to almost completely undress in order to use washrooms, which are not always available at terminals and so public facilities must be used.***

GTPCWU, Ghana<sup>59</sup>

OSH provisions also often fail to effectively address women's reproductive needs, including during menstruation, pregnancy and menopause. Women are left to undertake strenuous activities and long working hours while pregnant or menstruating. This can lead to miscarriages as well as painful periods. When women return to work after pregnancy, their needs are often not considered.

This impacts the health and safety of women and contributes to the continued occupational segregation in the public transport industry.

“

***I was not able to extract milk after returning to work from maternity.***

Bus driver<sup>60</sup>

“

***Menopause-related illness is subject to disciplinary action.***

Railway worker<sup>61</sup>

## WOMEN IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Gender-responsive OSH management should be adopted to recognise effectively how gender and sex affect women and men in different ways at work. For example:

- Appropriate and proper-fitting uniforms and PPE for women transport workers, including during pregnancy
- Provision of suitable tools, equipment and adjustments to vehicles and workstations to accommodate women's needs
- Establishment of joint union-company OSH committees with women's representation
- More OSH research on women workers
- Use of body mapping to better assess work environments and necessary mitigation measures
- Risk assessments which consider the needs of pregnant women and new mothers
- Alternative duties for women in pregnancy and maternity, such as changes in shifts, jobs (for example, to an office role) and work locations; the ability to take time off; conditions and facilities for breastfeeding
- Initiatives on safe travel to and from work [see pages 40, 42-43]
- Sanitation facilities [see pages 22-26]

## Case Study: PPE FOR WOMEN'S BODIES

In Ghana, the GTPCWU found that the PPE provided for both women and men failed to accommodate differences in body shape and size. Many women found difficulties in using it and sometimes ended up not using any PPE at all.

The union's women's committee took up the issue with management and were able to negotiate for a local manufacturer to produce the PPE. The new manufacturer takes measurements from the women to ensure that the PPE is tailored to their bodies. As a result, women can now choose to wear a skirt or trousers, whichever they find more comfortable. The union also successfully negotiated for the provision of breastfeeding facilities and washrooms specifically designated for women in terminals.



Cleaner in Atlanta, USA

## Case Study: RIGHTS FOR WOMEN BUS CONDUCTORS

In India, the MSTKS successfully campaigned for improved rights of women bus conductors in Maharashtra state. The union's survey of its women members revealed that, of those who had been pregnant on the job at the Maharashtra State Road Transport Company, 85 percent had asked for light work or desk work – but only 43 percent had their request granted. Of those who were refused, 62 percent suffered a miscarriage. The high rate of miscarriage was believed to be because of the physical demands of the job, and the high risk of injuries due to poor quality roads and vehicles. The union campaigned for improved provision of maternity rights and, as a result, the women were granted three months' additional paid leave, which could be taken during pregnancy, in addition to the existing six months of maternity leave.<sup>62</sup>

“

*In the rural areas the road conditions is often very bad. Many women workers were suffering miscarriages from having to be on moving buses, standing up all day. After conducting the survey...the union was able to negotiate for 3 months extra maternity leave for the women workers. It is a great victory for us... This was made possible because women created a very strong network which made the issue visible.”*

Sheela Naikwade, MSTKS, India



## WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Many women face a double burden – carrying out most of the unpaid domestic work and caring responsibilities alongside paid employment – and have a greater need for flexible working hours. But the long, irregular, and unsocial working hours required by public transport employers make it difficult for these women to work in the sector. Options for part time work are also limited, particularly for better paid positions such as drivers, where flexibility in working hours is routinely not available.

“

***At the annual meeting, my manager asked me if I would like to participate in some projects. Before I could answer, he said I wouldn't be interested anyway because I have children.***

Railway worker<sup>63</sup>

“

***It is still assumed that women are unwilling or unable to reconcile family life and work. It is still very rare for women with children to be in management positions.***

Railway worker<sup>64</sup>

Women – overrepresented in the most precarious public transport work – face greater difficulty in negotiating better working hours to deal with family responsibilities. Employers rarely provide facilities for accommodation, or transport to and from work to support those working night shifts or early shifts, particularly when workers start work before public transport starts operating for the day, or finish work after public transport ends for the day.

“

***We are often ridiculed for saying 'no' to night duties or late-night shifts, but what we are actually saying 'No' to is the unsafe working situations that put us at risk of violence. We (women transport workers) have no issues with night duties, as long as we are as safe as men, and not molested and groped on our way back home from work.***

Transport worker, India<sup>65</sup>

Women are frequently not entitled to maternity leave with cash benefits and many companies have no provisions for childcare. Many are victimised for becoming pregnant, and maternity leave often affects a mother's opportunities on return to work. Women report facing lower wages, more precarious contracts and job losses. Employers rarely provide facilities to support mothers returning to work. Women often fear the impact on their job of taking maternity leave. Maternity is often seen as a women's issue and in many public transport workplaces, fathers have no right to paternity leave. This means that employers often hire men over women.

“

***As soon as I got pregnant my salary was frozen.***

Road transport worker<sup>66</sup>

The structures of the public transport industry need to be flexible enough for both women and men to be able to fulfil caring responsibilities. Unions need to negotiate for the implementation of policies and facilities that allow integration of family and caring responsibilities for all workers, including:

- negotiating maternity-related provisions and other caring rights (such as paternity leave, parental leave and carers' leave), as well as the provision of affordable childcare facilities;
- negotiating for flexible working arrangements such as changes to shift patterns, job shares, part-time work, reducing hours;



- negotiating provisions and policies to ensure fair re-entry to the workforce eg career break policies, support on return to work, guaranteed role at same pay on return; and
- equal access to flexible working arrangements for all workers

Unions can also lobby governments to enact and implement legislation to improve opportunities for women workers, including more flexible working hours, equal paternity and maternity rights and leave, state-funded social security, leave and childcare.

**2.4 IMPROVING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

Strengthening women’s employment needs be broader than just focusing on recruitment. Instead, it should address all parts of the **ILO framework *Women’s career cycle in the transport sector***<sup>67</sup>, including attraction, recruitment and selection; retention, career interruption and re-entry; and realisation of decent work.

Governments, employers, and unions must play a proactive role in increasing women’s employment and ensuring decent work. Policy measures should be developed in cooperation with trade unions, including women union representatives and leaders.



Women’s Career Cycle in the Transport Sector graphic from ILO Women in the Transport Sector report

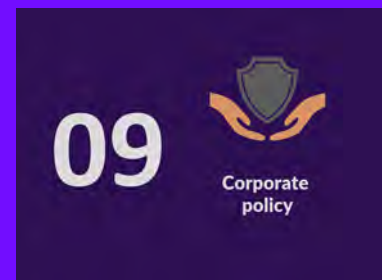
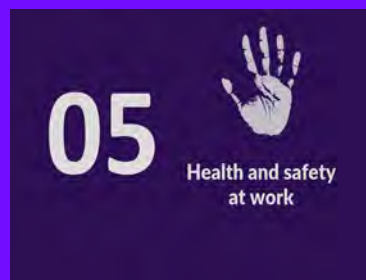
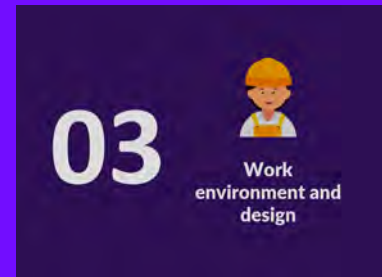
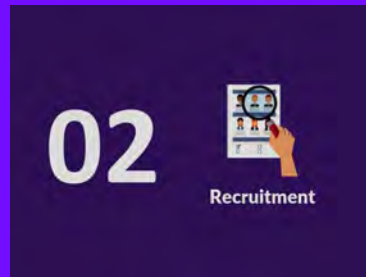
## ITF/UITP AGREEMENT: PROMOTING WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT

In 2019, the ITF and UITP (International Association of Public Transport) signed a groundbreaking [joint agreement](#) to strengthen women's employment and equal opportunities in public transport. The agreement provides a useful and comprehensive framework which can be used by employers and unions to negotiate positive equality measures in workplaces and companies. Both organisations acknowledged the ILO framework in developing the recommendations.

The agreement presents practical recommendations for policies to strengthen women's employment, equal opportunities and promote decent work in nine areas:

- Working culture and gender stereotypes
- Recruitment
- Work environment and design
- Facilities (including sanitation)
- Health and safety at work
- Work-life balance
- Training
- Pay equality
- Corporate policy<sup>68</sup>

The agreement is an important tool to re-build public transport in the aftermath of the pandemic.



### RECRUITMENT AND ATTRACTION

Jobs in public transport need to be accessible to women, but recruitment processes are often discriminatory. Attitudes about public transport being male dominated can stop women from applying for jobs in the sector. Job opportunities may be advertised in ways that are more accessible to men. Unions need to work with employers to develop recruitment strategies that target the recruitment of women and positively promote the sector to challenge perceptions around the gendering of work. Strategies include:

- Non-discriminatory recruitment and selection processes that are fair to women (eg neutral job descriptions that do not reinforce stereotypes and recognise transferable skills)
- Branding and advertising that appeals to women (eg including images of women workers in workplace literature, use of women role models in public campaigns, education and awareness activities targeting women's employment and challenging public perception of the sector)
- Women-only recruitment days (eg to address misconceptions around work in the sector)
- Partnerships with employment agencies and programmes that target women (including those returning to the sector)
- Broadening of outreach (eg with NGOs, industry councils, schools) – to include positive promotion of the transport industry and the important role of urban transport in society
- Quotas/targets to ensure women's employment, including in contracts for sub-contracted work
- Interview panels that include women, gender-neutral interview questions and selection, and training on unconscious bias
- Exit interviews with women workers so that patterns of gender inequality can be identified, and improvements made
- Affirmative action employment policies that increase the gender diversity of transport workplaces (such as recruitment to be gender blind or use affirmative action, ratios/targets for male-dominated occupations)
- Workplace training and awareness activities on equality and diversity for everyone to identify measures needed to address deeply entrenched attitudes in public transport sector/workplaces



Women transport workers at a union workshop in Dakar, Senegal





## Case Study: WORKPLACES FOR WOMEN

In the UK, Jaine Peacock started as a bus driver at Stagecoach in the eastern region in 2004. In her role as a Unite rep she has worked with the company to improve the workplace environment for women.

When Jaine started, the uniform was designed for men and not serviceable for women. She successfully pushed for a specific women's uniform, which included tweaks to tailored blouses (such as changing the side they buttoned up because the shirts would gape open between the buttons), the addition of button-down pockets to keep money safe, and for women's shirts to be tailored to be worn outside of the trouser. The union branch has also pushed the company to develop a maternity uniform. Because bus cabs were ergonomically designed for the average male, Jaine also worked with the vehicle design committee to establish a cab seat design that was adjustable to suit all shapes and sizes.

After identifying that women were underrepresented as drivers, Jaine also got the support of the local management to develop a recruitment campaign targeting women. This included holding an open day for women to come and try out driving a bus.

Other developments to improve the workplace for women have included:

- Installation of a new breakroom and toilet facilities
- Installation of lockers, particularly important for women to store clothes in case of emergencies
- Reassessment of rotas and driving times – many drivers had suffered water infections due to a lack of sanitation breaks, particularly difficult for women during their period
- Negotiating with the company to provide all female employees with a pack which contained an information booklet, a self-examination glove, and a video guide about breast cancer<sup>69</sup>



**TRAINING AND OPPORTUNITIES**

“

*The basic salary levels are equal between men and women when the contracts are signed. Then, women remain blocked at this level, with no possibility of advancement, while men merely undergo some simple additional training and their level is increased.”*

Railway worker<sup>70</sup>

Equal access to training, retraining, and reskilling opportunities for women of all ages are important to ensure women have the skills to move up in the industry and can access different roles, particularly when new transport infrastructure and/or technology is introduced. Strategies include:

- Skills development and technical training to facilitate industry entry and progression (eg paid apprenticeships; on-the-job training; positive action training, with preferential treatment for recruiting women for technical jobs; and ensuring women are not alone in training, using female instructors where possible)
- Support for women’s leadership and women’s access to higher-paid roles in transport
- Consideration of ‘just transition’ to support women transport workers of all ages in response to technology changes, or formalisation for women workers
- Introduction of coaching and mentoring or ‘buddy’ systems to complement formal training and re-training and ensure better access for women to leadership roles
- Retention of seniority or status (eg following a career break)
- Unconscious bias awareness training and training on gender equality for supervisors and management
- Training content, training methods and the timing and location of training courses to consider the needs of women workers

**WOMEN IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

**Case Study:  
OVERCOMING  
GENDER BASED  
OCCUPATIONAL  
SEGREGATION**

In Ghana, a bus driver training programme for women jointly run by the GTPCWU and transport company Metro Mass Transit aimed to challenge the occupational segregation in the industry by training women bus conductors to become bus drivers. The six-month programme took place in Accra, Ghana, and Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire. The first group of women successfully completed the course in June 2010, and all began working as bus drivers. As a result of the programme, by 2012, the number of women bus drivers had increased from 24 to 75.

But the union has since found that the initiative has not delivered sustainable results in the long-term. For various reasons, many women did not end up staying on as bus drivers:

- Gender stereotypes and societal perceptions meant that women were not made to feel welcome and were not comfortable in the traditionally male-dominated job
- Some women left after accidents
- The nature of the job meant that women did not have support systems or workplace facilities (creches, breastfeeding rooms) to raise their children

This clearly highlights the need for strategies to address all elements of women’s career cycle –training, work-life balance, providing facilities, and addressing gender stereotypes.



## **MONITORING AND ENFORCEMENT**

are also needed to ensure that policies are effectively implemented. Women should be directly involved in decision-making and monitoring. Written employment policies should be made widely available, and equality audits and analyses must be used to assess the efficacy of strategies. Policies should be developed to respond to any gaps. It also means the inclusion of effective and accessible grievance mechanisms and whistleblower policies.

## **PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYER RESPONSIBILITIES**

The expansion of public transport has the potential to provide economic opportunities through the creation of decent work. But unions need to campaign for public sector employers to ensure that decent work standards and opportunities for women are central to any new public transport system.

Public procurement is the process whereby public authorities purchase work, goods, or services from companies. In public transport, this can be projects funded by public funds, or private investment. Unions can strategically engage with public procurement by campaigning for standards that ensure decent work opportunities for women and negotiate for equality objectives to be included in procurement and development of new public transport systems. For example:

- Negotiating for gender impact assessments to be carried out in advance of new projects
- Establishing standards, targets, and objectives (setting equality action plans, just transition plans or affirmative action employment policies) to guarantee the representation of women in public transport workplaces, to be worked into tendering requirements and provisions of resulting contracts
- Negotiating guarantees for skills development and technical training for women

## **WOMEN IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

- Negotiating terms in contracts between management organisations and operating companies that address decent work and labour rights, such as minimum wages, hours, facilities and include gender equality measures, such as sexual harassment policies, and promotion and training opportunities
- Establishing monitoring mechanisms to ensure accountability

## **PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE: PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

Mass improvement and expansion of public transport is the only real option to reduce transport emissions and address the climate crisis. A massive expansion of and investment in sustainable public transport is also an opportunity to promote gender equality – by providing women passengers with safe, affordable, and equal access to public transport; and improving employment opportunities for women through the creation of decent jobs which both attract and retain women, and challenge occupational segregation in the sector.<sup>71</sup> Unions can:

- Demand a gender-responsive just transition through a redesign and expansion of the public transport system, which provides green and decent job opportunities
- Demand access to new jobs be guaranteed for existing transport workers with fair recruitment policies and skills development
- Demand involvement, with women's representation, in consultations over the planning and development of public transport
- Demand gender inclusive planning and gender impact assessments be undertaken before the granting of new climate funding by IFIs



## SECTION 2: QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

### KEY POINTS

- Gender-based occupational segregation exists in public transport. Women are underrepresented in public transport but overrepresented in the most precarious forms of employment.
- More women are starting to enter the public transport workforce and are gaining more opportunities to move into typically male-dominated areas, such as driving. But gender stereotypes persist, often expressed in negative attitudes about women's abilities and suitability to work in public transport.
- Women face workplace issues that undermine a positive and non-discriminatory working environment and affect their employment in the sector, including wage inequality, inadequate sanitation facilities, insufficient attention to women's OSH needs and poor work-life balance.
- The expansion of public transport provides potential employment opportunities for women, including the chance to shift from precarious or informal work into formal work.
- Unions should ensure that governments and employers work to increase and improve women's employment. But strengthening women's employment in public transport needs to be broader than just a focus on recruitment and must also include improving working conditions for women, adopting policies to assist women into employment, and supporting women's access to training.

### USEFUL DOCUMENTS

- [ITF/UITP \(2019\) Positive Employer Gender Policy](#)
- [ITF \(2018\) The Impact of the Future of Work for Women in Public Transport](#)
- [ITF \(2019\) BRT and the Formalisation of Informal Public Transport – A Trade Union Negotiating Guide](#)
- [ILO \(2013\) Transport Policy Brief, Women in the Transport Sector](#)
- [ETF \(2020\) Making the Transport Sector Fit for Women to Work in](#)
- [ILO Recommendation 204 Concerning the Transition from the informal to the formal economy, 2015](#)
- [ITF \(2020\) Informal Passenger Transport Beyond COVID-19: A trade union guide to worker-led formalisation](#)



### 3. ENDING VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT AGAINST WOMEN

*Violence and harassment against women is a widespread problem in public transport which contributes to gender-based occupational segregation in the sector, which is in turn a risk factor for gender-based violence. This section presents practical strategies that unions can use to address violence and harassment in public transport.*

#### 3.1 VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT AGAINST WOMEN IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT

ILO Convention 190 on eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work (adopted in 2019) defines violence and harassment as *'a range of unacceptable behaviours and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single occurrence or repeated, that aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, and includes gender-based violence and harassment'*.

Violence and harassment is endemic in the global transport industry and is experienced by both women and men. But women are affected disproportionately because violence and harassment is an abuse of power and is exacerbated by inequality. Women's unequal position in society and in the labour market, as well as gender stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes, increase women's exposure to violence and harassment. Intersecting forms of discrimination (such as sexism and homophobia) create a greater risk of violence and harassment.

Despite being the majority of passengers, women's access to public services is unequal. This means that women's concerns and safety needs are ignored in the design of transport services so they are more exposed to violence and harassment when using public transport.

## WOMEN IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT

- 6 out of 10 women in Latin American cities report physical harassment on public transit systems.<sup>72</sup>
- In France, transit and train stations account for 39 percent of sexual assaults against women.<sup>73</sup>
- In Egypt, 99.3 percent of women report having experienced sexual harassment. Women are most at risk on streets and when using public transport.<sup>74</sup>
- In Mumbai, India, 80 percent of women have faced sexual harassment on public transport.<sup>75</sup>
- In London, twice as many women as men said they do not feel safe using public transport.<sup>76</sup>
- In Sri Lanka, 90 percent of women have experienced sexual harassment while taking public transport.<sup>77</sup>
- In Nepal, 97 percent of young female students have faced sexual harassment while using public transport.<sup>78</sup>

Violence and harassment in the public transport sector continues to be a daily reality for women workers, regularly seen as part of the job.



***Verbal aggression is a weekly occurrence; unfortunately, you get used to it. It really happens a great deal. I have become hard. Ten years ago, it affected me deeply in my soul. Now I laugh about it. I try to commiserate with aggressive people. An established customer found it necessary to target me for two years and regularly called me names. It is very tiresome. When he began talking about me with my co-workers, I finally lodged a complaint with my line manager.***

Road transport worker, Belgium<sup>79</sup>

A survey by the ETF found that 63 percent of transport workers had experienced at least one recent act of violence. And 25 percent believed violence against women to be a regular occurrence in the transport sector.<sup>80</sup>



*In London,  
twice as  
many  
women  
as men  
said they  
**DO NOT  
FEEL SAFE**  
using public  
transport.*

*In France,  
transit and  
train stations  
account  
for **39%**  
of **SEXUAL  
ASSAULTS  
AGAINST  
WOMEN.***

*In Nepal,  
**97%** of  
young female  
students have  
faced **SEXUAL  
HARASSMENT**  
while using  
public  
transport.*

***6 out of 10  
women**  
in Latin  
American  
cities report  
**PHYSICAL  
HARASSMENT**  
on public  
transit systems.*

*In Egypt,  
**99.3%**  
of women report  
having experienced  
**SEXUAL HARASSMENT**,  
Women are most at risk  
on streets and when  
using public transport.*

*In Sri Lanka,  
**90%**  
of women have  
experienced  
**SEXUAL  
HARASSMENT**  
while taking public  
transport.*

*In Mumbai, India,  
**80%** of women have  
faced **SEXUAL HARASSMENT**  
on public transport.*



“

***My employer assumes that being verbally abused and assaulted is part of the job; some managers think if you can't cope then you should find another job, and some of them will openly tell you this.***

Railway worker, UK<sup>81</sup>

“

***I have been working for 15 years in a public urban transport company in Madrid, during which time I have suffered 12 instances of sexual and labour harassment by a superior in command. I have received public humiliations and insults, such as 'tomboy' for being a bus driver – 'a profession for men'. I have been constantly denigrated, humiliated, harassed, persecuted.***

Bus driver, Spain<sup>82</sup>

Violence and harassment is often used to signal opposition to women working in a 'man's world' in non-traditional female or senior positions. The highly gendered industry culture, where women are concentrated in service roles and largely viewed as unsuitable for jobs as driver or conductors, contributes to women being differently and disproportionately targeted by perpetrators of violence.

Women's concentration in precarious, lower paid and lower status jobs means they have less power and access to leadership positions. This generates a climate for abuse of power, leading to violence and harassment, and means that women experience limited protection and there is blurred responsibility for worker safety, both risk factors for violence and harassment. Women workers also frequently face sexual coercion from those in positions of authority.

“

***'I will give you a bigger percentage if you sleep with me', the driver told me.***

Taxi conductor, Uganda<sup>83</sup>

## WOMEN IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT

This also means that women often suffer in silence, and violence and harassment is underreported. When they do report it, women are often silenced – ignored, disbelieved, told to take it 'as a joke' or 'a compliment.' The fear of retaliation or job loss makes women afraid to report it.

“

***I suffered from sexual harassment from a co-worker, I told my boss and he did not do anything. Then I was thinking of going to the union, but my female co-worker did that once, and the Committee told her she must learn how to behave with men first. It is always our fault. Do you think I will go to union activities after that?***

Light rail worker, Mexico<sup>84</sup>

Inadequate government and employer action on gender myths and stereotypes contributes to the perpetuation of certain public transport jobs being seen as men's or women's jobs. This culture enables violence and harassment to flourish, including being used as a weapon against women.

“

***Sexual harassment...As we ladies, we can wake up, you go and look for a job...if they don't allocate you where you are working, you just go to the field, you say to the driver "I need work". So, most of the drivers they intend to have a friendship with you so that they can employ you...you see? So we are on the other side because you are in a problem and you want to work. Some women are forced to do that act – not that you are willing...but you are being forced.***

Matatu conductor, Kenya<sup>85</sup>

Women in public transport are also concentrated in public and customer-facing roles, increasing their exposure to violence and harassment.

“

*Usually, these incidents involve intoxicated men who become verbally aggressive if you do not take kindly to their sexual harassment. I've been spoken to disgustingly especially on late night trains...I feel a lot of anxiety when working on a train where there are groups of drunken men.”*

Railway worker, UK<sup>86</sup>

Public transport workers frequently work alone and in isolation (for example at night, at quiet times and on isolated routes, empty platforms, stations and depots). They experience workplace hazards and risks, including handling money, limited safety measures and employer-provided facilities (CCTV cameras, panic buttons, women-only sanitation facilities), and inadequate reporting procedures and mechanisms. These risks combined expose women to violence and harassment.

“

*I always get offensive remarks from passengers when I deny them to travel for free. They say things like bitch, whore, haven't you had any dick in a while? I have even been spat at two times when denying free riders. Violence has been close when I refused. It is an intimidating atmosphere and verbal insults occur in most cases when I refuse passengers to ride for free.”*

Bus driver, Sweden<sup>87</sup>

“

*I don't have a bed on the train to take a rest. I have to sleep beside the toilet, using a sheet as a curtain to make a partition between the passengers and myself.”*

Train host, Thailand<sup>88</sup>

Many transport workers work irregular or unsociable hours, when public transport for travel to and from work is limited. Employers rarely provide safe and accessible transportation. As a result, workers often face violence and harassment on their commute.

“

*For example, on a public holiday I arrived half an hour late, because there were no taxis available that day and they summoned me to a disciplinary process. Now I've had to ride my bike at 3:00am in a city where they kill you for a cell phone. I must go out and risk my life to try to get to my job quickly. The other day I fell, and I had to work with a wounded knee all day (...) the company should be more humane.”*

Ticket seller, Colombia<sup>89</sup>

Violence and harassment is a powerful barrier to women's equality and mobility, in society and in the workplace. The threat of violence and harassment can stop women from applying to work in transport jobs. Experiencing violence and harassment at work, or the threat of experiencing it can mean that women do not stay working in public transport, as acknowledged by the ILO: 'Violence against transport workers is one of the most important factors limiting the attraction of transport jobs for women and breaking the retention of those who are employed in the transport sector'.<sup>90</sup>



Ending violence and harassment against women, an illustration by Merlin Evans for the ITF





## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND WORK

Many public transport workers also face domestic violence, which can have a huge impact on the world of work. The effects of the violence limit women's economic empowerment: women who have experienced domestic violence tend to have a more disrupted work history and are more likely to work in precarious jobs. Domestic violence also affects co-workers, who may feel worried or distracted and face safety risks from abusive perpetrators at the workplace. A 2019 ITF study with male perpetrators of domestic violence<sup>91</sup> found that perpetrators are also affected by the impact of their actions, as their work performance and workplace environment suffer.

In a national domestic violence study in India led by women leaders from ITF rail and road transport affiliates of more than 15,500 workers (98 percent of them women), 75 percent reported direct or indirect experiences of domestic violence in their lifetime. And 9 out of 10 women said that experiencing domestic violence affected their ability to work.<sup>92</sup>



***This study itself has already been instrumental for breaking stigma and starting the discussion about domestic violence for women working in transport and other sectors. The report's findings are clear, domestic violence is a workplace issue, and it's time that governments, employers, unions and civil society organisations establish proactive practices, agreements and legislation to address the impact of domestic violence at work.***

Sheela Naikwade, MSTKS, India<sup>93</sup>

## WOMEN IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT

But many continue to believe that that domestic violence is a private issue that should not be dealt with in the workplace. Unions often do not see it as a union issue. Some societies treat survivors as culprits (victim-blaming). Overwhelmingly, survivors blame themselves. Some even consider domestic violence to be normal or justified because of incorrect myths about why domestic violence happens. But these myths are shaped by the inequality between women and men.

Domestic violence can never be justified. Domestic violence is not a private issue. It is a community, workplace, and a union issue. The workplace can provide financial security, support, and information to survivors of domestic violence and there are examples of best practice of union and employer action having a life-changing impact.

### 3.2 HOW DO WE ADDRESS VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT?

Decent work for women in public transport also means safe work. Unions, employers, and governments need to take action to address violence and harassment in the world of work. This will mean better protection for workers in public transport and improved safety for passengers.



## ILO CONVENTION 190 AND RECOMMENDATION 206<sup>94</sup>

In June 2019, at the International Labour Conference of the ILO, workers, governments, and employers made history by adopting the first ever international standards on violence and harassment in the world of work: **Convention 190 (C190)** – a legally binding treaty, and **Recommendation 206 (R206)** – non-binding guidelines on how the Convention can be applied.

The winning of **C190 and R206** is a huge victory for all workers, but particularly for transport workers and women. These standards were adopted following years of campaigning by the global trade union movement led by the ITUC, including the ITF. ITF Women played an important role within the workers' group to achieve language important for transport workers in the Convention. ITF affiliated unions took actions to secure the Convention through lobbying governments, campaigning to raise awareness and support, and providing evidence about the impact of violence and harassment on women in transport.

- C190 recognises that violence and harassment threatens equal opportunities and is incompatible with decent work. **(Preamble C190)**
- The link between violence and harassment and gender-based occupational segregation is referenced in the Convention. **(Preamble C190)**
- Violence and harassment is defined as a range of behaviours and practices. **(Article 1, C190)**
- It takes a gender-responsive approach and includes gender-based violence and harassment. **(Article 1, C190)**
- All workers are covered, including in the informal economy and in private sectors. Many of the world's public transport workers are informal. Public transport is also facing increasing privatisation. **(Article 2, C190)**
- Transport is recognised as a sector more exposed to violence and harassment. **(Para. 9, R206)**
- It has a broad scope, covering public and private spaces. Public spaces are the physical workplace for many public transport workers. **(Article 3, C190)**
- Commuting, work-related trips and travel are covered. Public transport workers often work at night and early in the morning and may have to stay in employer provided accommodation. For many public transport workers, their workplace is mobile. **(Article 3, C190)**
- Third party violence is acknowledged and included. **(Article 4, C190)**
- C190 highlights the importance of taking an 'inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach'. Women's empowerment needs to be at the heart of the solution. This will positively impact gender equality in public transport. **(Article 4, C190)**
- Domestic violence is recognised as a world of work issue. Unions can negotiate for employers to take measures to support those affected by domestic violence. **(Article 10, C190)**
- Governments, employers and trade unions have positive responsibilities to deal with violence and harassment at work.

The ITF campaign strategy on C190 is based on three pillars:

1. Raising awareness of C190 and what it means for unions and workers, in particular the language that is key for transport workers and women transport workers
2. Negotiating the language of the Convention into collective agreements and policies
3. Lobbying governments and national centres for ratification and implementation



### RATIFICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF C190

ILO member states have to decide whether to ratify the Convention – ratifying means governments must put the provisions of the Convention into national law. Workers and their unions have an important role to play to make sure language relevant for transport workers is incorporated into national laws. Unions can campaign for governments to ratify C190 and implement it into national legislation. Unions can also campaign to improve existing legislation using C190 language to protect women workers.

### WORKPLACE ACTION

Whether or not C190 is ratified, the Convention provides a foundation for unions to address violence and harassment in the world of work to ensure that all workers in public transport are protected. This can include:

- Adopting and implementing a workplace policy on violence and harassment using C190 language

- Integrating violence and harassment and C190 language into collective bargaining at different levels
- Practical measures to address violence and harassment for public transport workers (including, for example, installing alarms, CCTV and improved lighting; providing workers with radios; improving staffing levels at stations and on board; providing access to adequate sanitation facilities; providing safe transport to and from work; and changing work arrangements)
- Education and training for workers, supervisors and management on violence and harassment, the workplace policy, and measures introduced to implement it
- Reporting mechanisms with clear guidelines on reporting, including a trained contact person and a clear complaints investigation procedure
- Implementation of women's advocate programmes in workplaces [See page 45]
- Integrating violence and harassment into OSH management



Informal transport worker in Nepal



## Case Study: UNIONS LOBBYING ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AS A WORKPLACE ISSUE

Governments, employers and unions must work together to establish proactive practices to address the impact of domestic violence at work.

Unions can lobby for governments to introduce legislation to support workers affected by domestic violence, including granting additional employment rights, such as paid leave.

- In the Philippines, the law gives 10 days' paid leave for survivors and protects colleagues who help workers
- In Australia, the law gives workers five days of unpaid leave to deal with the impact of domestic violence
- In Canada, all provinces give leave (paid and unpaid) for cases of domestic violence. The Canadian Labour Code also provides five days of paid leave for workers in federally-regulated workplaces
- In New Zealand, the law gives 10 days' paid leave and survivors have access to flexible working arrangements

Unions can also take action in negotiations with employers. Employers need to recognise that they are responsible for a safe workplace, agree that domestic violence must be addressed as a workplace issue and negotiate domestic violence clauses into collective agreements or workplace policies. Clauses should outline the introduction of mitigation and support measures, including protocols and tools to protect and support survivors and intervene with perpetrators (such as *paid leave, workplace safety plans, flexible working arrangements, training to recognise warning signs, training a contact person.*)<sup>95</sup>

Unions must also recognise and prioritise domestic violence; it is not a women's issue. Men and trade union leaders should raise awareness and advocate to end domestic violence, challenge social norms around toxic masculinity, question myths and stereotype and put pressure on governments and employers.



## ITF WOMEN'S ADVOCATE PROGRAMME

The ITF has developed a [global Women's Advocate Programme](#) for the transport sector which is successfully tackling violence and harassment against women at work. The programme is based on a successful model originally developed by Unifor in Canada and trains union activists as women advocates to provide a workplace response to gender-based violence at work. This includes early intervention, confidential support and help to access community services and advocate for workplace safety planning and job security. The initiative is implemented by local unions and responsible workplace management. The programme also helps to empower women as individual survivors, and to collectively lead and shape change.

“

*I am a proud Nirbhaya (woman advocate) and also a survivor of Domestic Violence, the strong sisterhood and support we built as women advocates gave me courage to say no to violence and fight my battle, this also helped me access union support, save my job and self-dependence.”*

Bus conductor, India<sup>96</sup>

So far, the ITF has worked with transport unions in 11 countries. In Nepal, for example, the success of the programme has resulted in increased women's union membership, more support to address harassment from traffic police, and building of community alliances with the police, the media, and NGOs. The work has demonstrated both the crosscutting global need for women's advocacy in transport unions to support women survivors of violence and the need to fight for prevention in the workplace and in society. The model programme can be adapted for implementation in transport workplaces globally.<sup>97</sup>



Train driver in Switzerland



## AWARENESS RAISING

Educating, organising and activating union members to campaign for an end to violence and harassment in public transport, including domestic violence, is vital. Union leaders should spearhead awareness raising and empower activists to challenge discriminatory attitudes and myths that lead to violence and harassment.

In Nairobi, the Flone Initiative (an NGO working to make transport safer and more accessible for women) has built alliances with worker and passenger groups to end violence against women in public spaces. Working with the PUTON and the MWU, it has carried out training for women public transport workers on how to react and respond to sexual violence. It has also organised campaigns against harassment of passengers and has developed a crowd-mapping platform where survivors of sexual violence and harassment can map their experiences.<sup>98</sup>

In Bulgaria, the FTTUB have pioneered a campaign to address violence and harassment in public transport. Actions have included signing agreements with municipalities and companies which contain clauses on violence, establishing reporting mechanisms and training courses on de-escalation tactics and self-defence – the latter proved a powerful tool to enable women workers to feel more empowered. The union has also campaigned to raise public awareness and has built partnerships with NGOs working to end violence against women.

Sex-segregated transport has also been introduced in several cities to address safety and security concerns for women workers and passengers. In Mexico City, the Atenea service was introduced in 2008, which offers bus services with female drivers for women on 50 routes. Also, front access and front of trains in the BRT system are reserved for women or people with disabilities. Similarly in Delhi, free public transport has been introduced to improve the safety and security of women.

This has proven to be an effective short-term strategy, providing safe employment opportunities in public transport for women. However, this needs to be combined with a long-term strategy to shift the focus away from women changing their behaviour to accommodate male aggression, and onto perpetrators changing their behaviour.

## ENGAGEMENT WITH STAKEHOLDERS

C190 and R206 can also be used in campaigns and negotiations with policymakers at different levels. Unions can campaign for the language and the provisions of C190 to be integrated into policies and action taken by regional inter-governmental organisations, social partners and investors.

## SECTION 3: QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

### KEY POINTS

- Violence and harassment, including domestic violence, is a widespread issue for women in public transport. It is a powerful barrier to women's equality, shaping the safety concerns of women passengers and contributing to gender-based occupational segregation in public transport.
- In 2019, the first international labour standards on violence and harassment in the world of work were adopted at the ILO – Convention 190 and Recommendation 206.
- Unions can campaign to make sure the Convention is ratified and becomes part of national laws.
- Unions can use the language of the Convention to negotiate measures with employers at the workplace, to implement effective workplace responses and preventative measures through collective agreements, education and training, and mechanisms for investigation and responding to complaints, as well as the provision of paid leave for workers affected by domestic violence.
- Unions should also raise awareness to educate, organise and activate union members to campaign for an end to violence and harassment.

### USEFUL DOCUMENTS

- [ILO Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment, 2019](#)
- [ILO Recommendation 206 on Violence and Harassment, 2019](#)
- [FAQs on Convention 190 and Recommendation 206, ITUC](#)
- [ITF \(2020\) Impact of Domestic Violence in Workplaces in India, ITF](#)
- [ITF Women's Advocate Programme](#)
- [ITF Transport Workers C190 Toolkit](#)
- [Global Unions toolkit on C190](#)



## 4.

# INTRODUCING TECHNOLOGY TO ADVANCE GENDER EQUALITY

*New technology is one of the biggest challenges facing workers, affecting women's employment and equality in public transport. This section suggests strategies to ensure that technology produces benefits for women workers and does not exacerbate existing inequality.*

Further information about technological developments in public transport, including challenges for workers and workers' responses, can be found in:

- ***The Impact of the Future of Work for Women in Public Transport:*** ITF report based on research in five cities which discusses the impact of technological change on women's employment and includes case studies of trade union action.<sup>99</sup>
- ***Worker Control of Technology: The Smart City: Chapter 5 of the People's Public Transport Policy.***<sup>100</sup>

Technological change in public transport has the potential to improve employment for women workers – providing new opportunities for work, improving operation and safety, and offering more flexible working hours and patterns. But without worker consultation and union involvement, new technology can lead to job losses, downgrading of jobs and health and safety concerns. It can also further reduce gender equality.

For women in the sector, technological development risks reinforcing both the existing inequalities in the workplace and an economic model that incentivises precarious and informal work.

## WOMEN IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The basis of technological change is digitalisation – the increasing use of digital technology, such as the automation of ticketing and the growth of digital platforms (online intermediaries that connect and control information between producers, distributors, employers, workers, and consumers<sup>101</sup>, such as Uber).

New technology and digitalisation are applied through a biased, one-size-fits-all approach that fails to account for human diversity. Women's historic exclusion from the workplace and from decision-making means that their experiences are ignored in the development of new technologies, and technology can reinforce discrimination and inequality. Technology introduced to set work targets or shift schedules, for example, frequently ignore women's disproportionate share of caring responsibilities and need for work-life balance.

Women facing intersecting inequalities, such as those based on race, are disproportionately affected. Black and minority ethnic women are overrepresented in the lowest paid jobs which are at greatest risk of being negatively affected by technology. Racial biases also exist in technology.<sup>102</sup>

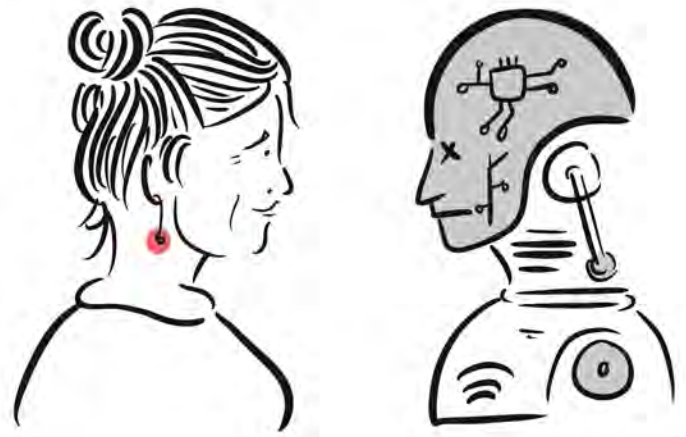
New technology is changing the skills needed for work and leads to more highly skilled jobs, but recruitment and training into these upskilled jobs is more likely to target men, which means that women may miss out on potential opportunities.



### 4.1 AUTOMATION

Automation has the potential to offer benefits for women working in public transport but studies have shown instead that they are often at the sharp end. The introduction of automation – for example, self-service ticket machines that replace traditional ticket booths – shifts labour onto passengers. This frequently leads to job losses, de-skilling of existing jobs and the hiring of outsourced workers on temporary contracts with much lower wages and conditions.

The jobs women typically do in public transport – ticketing, customer service, administration – are at greatest risk of being automated. And their work tends to be undervalued and lower paid, making it more vulnerable to automation.



In Bangkok, for example, automation in passenger rail has led to job losses in areas of work dominated by women. Customer service positions have been replaced by information machines. This has been accompanied by the hiring of outsourced workers on temporary contracts to fill gaps.<sup>103</sup>



Automation also harms working conditions and increases health and safety risks for women working in customer-facing roles. For example, women workers are forced to spend more time helping customers with technology, which exposes them to increased violence and harassment from passengers who become angry with machines that malfunction or break down. The risk is amplified by reduced staffing levels at stations, another by-product of automation. Women working as fare collectors report back pain due to carrying heavy coin trays from ticket machines and are exposed to risk of crime when emptying ticket machines.

In public transport, digitalisation has resulted in the development of automatic ticket vending machines, a shift to cashless payment systems and automatic information systems. This replacement of ticketing and customer service work with automated machines is downgrading women's wages and conditions and leading to jobs losses.





## Case Study: AUTOMATION OF TICKET SELLING IN BOGOTA, COLOMBIA

In Bogota, the BRT Transmilenio system was introduced in 2000. In 2012, other buses were incorporated into the integrated public transport system, which was followed by the automation of ticketing and the introduction of an integrated card payment system for all services. Recaudo Bogotá SAS was subcontracted to undertake bus operation, maintenance and fare collection. The company has recently installed automatic card top-up machines at gateways and stations of the BRT system to speed up operations and improve customer service.

However, the automation of ticketing has displaced women working in ticket-selling jobs and has led to a reduction in the percentage of women workers at the company – down from 80 percent to around 70 percent. The company is also making ticket clerks close ticket offices and go out into stations to encourage passengers to top up their cards using automatic machines. This means that the company will soon remove more ticket clerks, most of whom are women heads of household, from their roles.

Automation has also led to the downgrading of jobs. Recently, the company launched a campaign to generate jobs, mostly for men. However, the new recruits are hired on short, fixed-term contracts, and very few of the contracts are renewed.

Automation has also contributed to increased physical and psychological violence and verbal aggression from passengers frustrated by malfunctioning machines and queues to use machines due to queues. They experience increased complaints and requests for help from dissatisfied customers.

Workers also face workplace harassment from managers and supervisors because of the increased workload, and some have been threatened with having their shift or area changed if they do not cooperate with the company over the automated top-up equipment. Staff having to empty automated machines and carry cash are exposed to robbery and the risk of losing money.

During the pandemic, when the company implemented its Top-up Promotion Pilot Plan programme to make workers go out and encourage passengers to use automatic payment machines, often early in the morning or late at night, workers were exposed to greater safety risks. They also faced an increased risk of contracting COVID-19, particularly as safety measures were not being properly enforced.

The recent outburst of social discontent generated by the national government's attempt to impose an unfair and ill-adapted tax reform has further exacerbated the risk to ticketing staff. Discontent with the BRT system and its failure to fulfil its promises has made stations a target for public protests, putting these frontline workers on the receiving end of physical and psychological aggression from irate demonstrators who attack and vandalise stations. There have been three weeks of terror and anxiety for the workers, who receive no response or understanding from company management. To date, 52 of the 139 stations belonging to the Bogotá mass transport system have been vandalised, increasing the risk of fixed-term contracts being terminated and not renewed.

Women workers in the SNTT union have been organising to tackle the negative impacts of automation on workers in the public transport system. The union has been using social media and holding demonstrations to denounce the external top-up systems, as well as highlighting the lack of safety for workers. The union also participated in a Just Transition workshop for transport workers, which resulted in it drafting a letter to Bogotá City Hall calling for a just transition which included retraining, relocation, and compensation for Bogotá mass transport system workers. The union has also been working hard to secure alternative jobs for workers, through relocation to other areas in the company, such as administration and driving.



Automation does have the potential to secure and strengthen women's employment opportunities, if it is developed and implemented with proper consultation of unions and the involvement of women.

Unions can ensure that jobs are protected by negotiating for redeployment to other roles or new jobs with favourable conditions. Redeployment should be accompanied by negotiated training opportunities to perform new roles, as well as agreements for permanent employment in these new roles. Unions can also negotiate for women to have the opportunity to enter different roles that challenge gender-based occupational segregation.

In Mexico City, for example, the introduction of self-service ticket machines on light rail affected the jobs of the predominantly female ticket sellers. However, the union was able to negotiate a transfer to office positions or to jobs in ticket machine facilities for many of the women. Workers reported improved conditions at work and the creation of new positions for women in an (outsourced) company to assist passengers with problems related to payment cards. Although the company did not offer the same working conditions, women found the flexible working schedules useful for managing childcare responsibilities alongside work.<sup>104</sup>

“

***Now I just help users who do not know how to use the machine. At the beginning there were a lot of people who need my help, but now, I stay most of the time free, I do not need to deal with stressful situations anymore. Usually I just work a lot when there is a football match, when the demand is very high and they need our help.”***

Light rail worker, Mexico<sup>105</sup>

Automation can bring benefits for women in public transport. For example, the introduction of power steering to reduce physical demands on operators could provide more opportunities for work in driving. This could enable more women to enter traditionally male

jobs. However, it is important to note that this may reinforce negative stereotypes and could imply that discrimination against women on vehicles without power steering might be justified.

Unions should negotiate for training and skills development, including vocational training qualifications, to ensure women benefit from new jobs. This could also include negotiating for a quota or target for reservation of jobs for women when new technology is introduced.

Automation can also improve health and safety, making public transport jobs more attractive for women. For example, the introduction of traffic monitoring systems can enable workers to monitor and respond to congestion and traffic incidents. The introduction of CCTV or emergency response buttons can act as a remedy support for survivors of violence and harassment. Cashless payments can also lead to the removal of heavy coin trays, a cause of back pain among fare collectors. Unions should negotiate for the health and safety concerns of women workers in new technology to be addressed through gender-responsive OSH management.

**In public transport, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased use of automation and digitalisation, particularly with the introduction of cash-less payment systems as part of health and safety measures. This trend is likely to continue as the world recovers. This is going to hit women public transport workers hardest. Unions must urge employers to consider the impact that this will have on women's employment when expanding public transport and should undertake a gendered analysis of the impact of the pandemic on the public transport sector.**



## Case Study:

# SAVE THE TROLLEYBUSES IN MEXICO CITY

In Mexico City, a project was proposed to introduce a new bus corridor running only on electric buses, which would in effect replace the concession-operated buses and threaten the trolleybuses. Although this had the potential to provide new employment opportunities for women, there was concern about the threat to the livelihoods of women workers, particularly those working as ticket collectors.

The ATM union ran a successful campaign to support trolleybuses under threat, under the banner 'Let's save the trolleybuses'. This meant that when automation came in 2017 the union was able to protect workers' jobs. One of the main campaign tools was a survey of passengers which identified massive public support for trolleybuses among passengers. This was vital in engaging passengers to support the campaign. The survey also asked both passengers and non-users of public transport what they thought the main problems with it were, and what should be improved. The union presented this information to the government and the survey results have been used to inform further developments in public transport. The union is now a key stakeholder in government consultations around public transport.

The union had a clause in its collective agreement which meant that workers whose jobs were affected by the automation were redeployed to different roles and also received training and retraining opportunities, including to become conductors and drivers. This was particularly important for women workers. The union has also established a structure with the company which states that when new trolleybuses are introduced, there will be a quota for women to work as operators. Cable buses are now also being introduced in Mexico City.

ATM union has negotiated opportunities for women to work in the new system, including reservation for women to work as drivers. It has also built alliances with environmental organisations, including Greenpeace, to highlight the environmental benefits of public transport systems like electric buses and cable buses, whilst also emphasising the need to create employment opportunities for women.

As Alma Teresa from ATM union explains:

“

*We are using this as an opportunity to make transport more inclusive for women whilst also fighting for a healthy environment. Our next step is to increase the visibility of the importance of having women working on our public transport systems and building further links with the community.”*

## 4.2 THE GIG ECONOMY

The rapid growth of the gig economy is transforming the world of work and challenging the operation of public transport. Gig economy platforms (the use of digital platforms to allocate work through apps) is impacting on the way work is organised and the nature of employment relationships.<sup>106</sup> These digital platform technologies are being deployed in public transport through ride-hailing and ride-share apps, such as Uber, Lyft and Grab. This is changing how and where public transport workers work, and who they work for.

Several studies suggest that the gig economy has the potential to offer work opportunities for women in public transport. Some platforms promote the benefits of this type of work for women, claiming that it provides access to flexible employment opportunities and greater economic empowerment. An ITF study indicates that women are attracted to the flexibility offered by the gig economy, particularly those balancing earning a livelihood with having a disproportionate share of caring responsibilities. It also provides a route to working as a driver in public transport where barriers might exist elsewhere.<sup>107</sup> A survey by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) of women in six countries found that the flexible working offered by platform work is attractive for women drivers and enables greater numbers of women to enter taxi driving jobs.<sup>108</sup>

However, claims that the gig economy offers truly flexible working opportunities are dubious, particularly given that drivers are penalised if they do not accept rides, and often need to work long hours to make a decent living. Gendered inequalities are often reproduced in the algorithms used for digital technologies in gig economy platforms. Workers are also exposed to new forms of control management through the technology, which can lead to a stressful working environment.



Illustration by Merlin Evans for the ITF

Working in the gig economy also negatively affects workers' rights and gender equality. The employment situation of gig economy workers is often inconsistent and unclear. Work is negotiated through the platform and most on-demand gig economy platforms do not classify workers as employees, but rather as self-employed or independent contractors. This means that workers are deprived of the protections that they are entitled to and that are normally provided by employers, including regularity of work, income and working conditions, or employer contributions towards social security or healthcare. Without recognition as employees, workers cannot enjoy rights to safety at work, freedom of association or collective bargaining and therefore tend to be paid less than directly-employed workers. It also makes union organisation difficult.

Women's disproportionate share of care responsibilities and unequal position in the labour market mean they may be forced to accept work in the gig economy, often at the expense of decent employment conditions.

Women also face barriers to employment in the gig economy. Earning a decent income is often dependent on workers owning a vehicle, and many women face unequal access to vehicle ownership, technology and loans or finance to buy or rent a car. Achieving profitability may require women to work long hours, often late at night, which might be difficult for women with caring responsibilities and which poses a higher



risk of violence and harassment. This means women lose out on higher earnings and are frequently forced to work multiple jobs just to make ends meet, so embedding a gender pay gap in the gig economy, too. A study of Uber drivers in the US found that men earn 7 percent more per year than women on average.<sup>109</sup> Not all women benefit equally from work in the gig economy - those who are completely reliant on the gig economy as their sole income gain least.<sup>110</sup>

Women working in the gig economy also continue to face a disproportionate risk of violence and harassment when working, largely due to the precarious nature of the job and the irregular legal status of gig economy workers in some places.<sup>111</sup> This means women are less likely to report experiences of violence and harassment and may have no legal recourse against abusive passengers.

Unions need to campaign to ensure women benefit equally from the opportunities that the gig economy offers. Unions need to lobby governments to effectively regulate online platforms to protect the rights of women workers by enshrining platforms as direct employers of workers to ensure decent wages, regulate working hours and conditions, and provide social security.

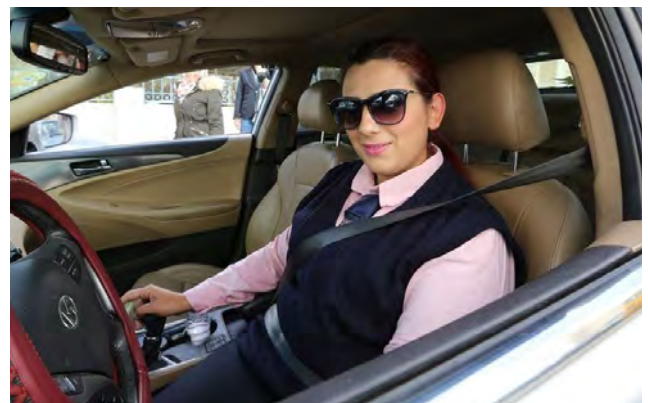
**In 2021, after a long battle by Uber drivers in the UK, the UK Supreme Court ruled that Uber drivers are workers, rather than self-employed contractors. This means that they will benefit from the rights of other workers. In making its decision, the Supreme Court judgment emphasised five key aspects which evidenced the worker status:**

- 1. Uber sets the fare**
- 2. The drivers have no say in contract terms, which are set by Uber**
- 3. Drivers face penalties for not accepting rides**
- 4. Uber exercises control over how drivers deliver services (eg ratings system)**
- 5. Uber restricts communication between passenger and driver to a minimum**

**ITF GIG ECONOMY EMPLOYER PRINCIPLES**

The ITF has developed [gig economy employer principles](#) which are aimed at the root causes of the problems gig workers face. These principles include:

- 1. Health, safety and PPE for all workers**
- 2. Correct employment status classification**
- 3. A labour protection floor**
- 4. Living wages**
- 5. Human and humane control**
- 6. Fair digital contracts**
- 7. Workers' data rights**
- 8. Gender neutral software**
- 9. Access to social protections**
- 10. Paying taxes**



Taxi driver in Jordan (Getty)



Taxi driver in the USA

### 4.3 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UNIONS

Without union intervention and consultation in policy discussions, technology has the potential to exacerbate gender inequality in public transport. To strengthen women's employment and promote decent work for all, women transport workers and trade unions need to work with employers and governments to proactively intervene in policy decisions to ensure that women's needs are considered. They also need to ensure that new technology is used to confront the impacts of sex discrimination, rather the reproducing inequalities and mechanisms of exploitation.<sup>112</sup>

Unions should:

- Campaign to ensure that unions are key stakeholders from the start in consultation on all new technological developments in public transport (including platform work), that gender implications are included, gender impact assessments are provided and corresponding action is taken

- Ensure that relocation agreements and policy guidelines on job restructuring also cover jobs mostly done by women, such as ticketing, and are not only for drivers
- Highlight evidence that passengers prefer human interaction over machines, advice from public transport inspection and monitoring organisations on the need for more workers in ticket collection and customer service, and the safety risks to passengers of cutting staff
- Negotiate promotion, training and retraining opportunities to support women of all ages into higher paid work, such as in driving, supervisory and management positions, and roles created by new technology
- Campaign for stronger regulation of online platforms
- Campaign for policies to help address technology and gender inequality – at the workplace, at government level and in regulation, including making use of opportunities linked to the UN SDGs and ensuring that such discussions explicitly include labour rights and gender inequality.<sup>113</sup>



Russian rail worker at ticket machines



## SECTION 4: QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

### KEY POINTS

- New technology in public transport, including automation and the rise in the gig economy, brings benefits and risks for women's employment in public transport.
- Technological changes can provide better employment opportunities for women working in public transport and can improve working conditions to make the sector more attractive for women.
- However, inequalities exist in access to new employment opportunities and technology has the potential to exacerbate harmful gendered inequalities.
- Unions need to lobby governments and negotiate with employers to ensure that women benefit from the new jobs that technology creates in public transport – by ensuring that: they are key stakeholders in any consultations, training opportunities are provided, gendered inequalities in technology are addressed and mitigated, the gig economy is properly regulated and workers' rights are respected.

### USEFUL DOCUMENTS

- [ITF \(2018\) The Impact of the Future of Work for Women in Public Transport](#)
- [ITF Women Transport Workers – Positions and Responses to the challenges of the future of work](#)
- [Worker Control of Technology: The Smart City: Chapter 5 of the People's Public Transport Policy](#)





## 5. INVOLVING WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING AND POLICY

*Women – including women transport workers – need to be involved in policy decision-making and planning around public transport to ensure that specific issues for women are addressed. This section outlines how unions can campaign to ensure that this happens and emphasises the importance of promoting women's activism in unions.*

### 5.1 INVOLVING WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING

The development of new transport systems and/or changes to existing systems have the potential to bring huge benefits for women public transport workers. But to build a sustainable public transport system characterised by decent work, the needs and concerns of women need to be meaningfully included in decision-making. Without women on decision-making bodies, public transport infrastructure will not adequately represent or address the issues that women face. This means that women – as both workers and passengers – need to be involved in development, decision-making, planning and implementation of any public transport policy.

**Social dialogue, negotiation and consultation** are opportunities to ensure that women's voices are heard and for their concerns to be integrated into public transport policymaking. Unions can use social dialogue to ensure policy developments specify the benefits to gender equality that public transport infrastructure will bring, including women's increased participation in decent public transport jobs. This includes incorporating quotas or targets towards gender parity and women being in union negotiating teams. However, unions must recognise that quotas and targets alone are not enough to make sustainable gains. Gender stereotypes and perceptions

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can mean that women are made to feel unwelcome or are not comfortable in negotiations, so unions also need to campaign to change the culture and to empower women.

At the development and planning stage, unions can also lobby for the use of **gender impact assessments, labour impact assessments that include gender, and the use of gender-disaggregated data** to identify how policies can be developed to meet the needs of women as transport workers and passengers. This can also help to better understand the economic and social impacts of public transport projects on women.

**Gender demands should also be integrated into investment principles for funding of public transport infrastructure projects.**

Trade unions can lobby IFIs such as the World Bank and the IFC to ensure rigorous provisions are put in place in all lending policies so that labour rights are protected, decent work and gender equality are promoted through funded projects and there are consequences for non-adherence. Trade unions can also campaign for women workers to be involved in consultations throughout project design, development and implementation. Women workers can demand the use of gender-disaggregated data and gender impact assessments to identify the impact of measures on women's livelihoods, employment opportunities and safety and security.



## THE SAFEGUARD FRAMEWORKS OF INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS (IFIs)

IFIs like the World Bank fund many transport development projects across the world, advise governments on transport policy and provide loans to transport companies. Each IFI has a set of safeguards that stipulate the basic protective standards to be met by borrowers in order to receive IFI finance. The ITF has identified IFI safeguards as a strategic entry point for women workers impacted by IFI-financed projects to protect their rights and demand a more gender-responsive approach from IFIs and their borrowers. Women workers can also use safeguards to demand an improvement to working conditions and employment opportunities specified for women in public transport projects. Where gender considerations are not properly considered in safeguards, trade unions can also campaign to demand better and stronger safeguards focused on gender, or for gender to be better integrated into existing IFI safeguards.

The ITF has developed a trade union toolkit on the safeguard frameworks of IFIs to enable activists to understand and strategically engage with safeguards.

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Trade unions can also use **public procurement** to ensure that any public transport policy and/or infrastructure improves the situation for women workers. This might also require campaigning for funding for training opportunities, because inadequate training opportunities among women public transport workers has proven to be a barrier to women accessing new jobs created as a result of public transport projects.

Trade unions can **integrate gender demands into organising and leverage strategies and demands around public transport** to campaign for better representation of women's needs, and to ensure women have equal access to social and labour rights and protections.



Public transport passengers in Dakar, Senegal



## Case Study: NAIROBI

In Nairobi, Kenya transport unions organised a BRT march to coincide with International Women's Day on 8 March. Workers from TAWU, MWU and PUTON, with backing from the ITF, marched through Nairobi to present to the transport industry with a position paper on BRT implementation in the city. The unions called on the Kenyan government to pay attention to specific issues when planning the BRT system, including ensuring optimal gender equality in every aspect. Demands presented included:

- The Nairobi Metropolitan Area Transport Authority should work with the unions to tackle gender imbalance and discrimination against women workers in the BRT project, including access to sanitation facilities, wage equality and a safe workplace
- Priority must be given to including workers' voices, through their trade union representatives in the BRT design and implementation process
- BRT operating companies must be required to give first consideration for employment to those workers at greatest risk from the project, through a transparent recruitment process
- A retraining programme should be put in place for workers at risk of losing their jobs to the project
- There should be a process to formalise and improve the matatu industry and integrate it with the BRT system<sup>114</sup>

## WOMEN IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT

**Building alliances between different groups**, including worker-passenger groups alliances, is also an effective tool to ensure that specific issues for women in public transport are addressed.

For example, in the USA, public transport union ATU launched Americans for Transit, a non-profit organisation campaigning for better provision of public transport for passengers. It organises amongst public transport riders to enable them to advocate for their rights and needs to be addressed in public transport. It also demands access to safe, reliable, and affordable public transportation for all. The organisation has built coalitions with public transport workers to demand improvements to public transport to enhance mobility and to work towards a public transport system that works for everyone.

### 5.2 PROMOTING WOMEN'S ACTIVISM IN UNIONS

Globally, transport unions are at the forefront of the struggle to tackle gender inequality in public transport and improve women's access to decent work. But the occupational segregation in the public transport workforce is often also reflected in the lower participation of women in trade unions. In some cases, women's union membership parallels their employment in the sector, or is sometimes even lower. Women's participation in union committees and structures is also generally low. This means that transport unions continue to be male dominated.

There are many barriers to women's involvement in a union:

- Women's double burden of unpaid caring responsibilities limits their time available for union activities. Union structures often do not consider women's multiple roles.



- Women do not join and/or are not active in the union because they do not see the benefits or think that it does not effectively represent their concerns and interests.
- Women often do not have access to the skills and training needed to take on leadership roles in the union.
- Structural inequalities, gender stereotypes and myths, including those leading to violence and harassment, exist in the union.

Unions need women and men among their ranks to build trade union power and to effect change in the interests of all working people. Union organising campaigns are important for trade unions to better represent the interests of women workers, and need to tackle the issues important to women in order to organise and retain them as members. Unions must also build an understanding of the nature of women's work in public transport – mapping is an effective way to do this.

Unions also need to find creative ways to encourage women to join – such as workplace visits, forming women's groups, building alliances with local community or outreach groups, and peer organising.

Once part of the union, space needs to be created for women to participate fully in the formal union structures and enable women to actively engage with the union.

Structural changes in the union itself are often needed to ensure that women's voices and concerns are integrated at all levels. Formal requirements for women's representation (targets, quotas, percentages) can be an effective tool but should not be used in isolation as the only way to address women's participation and leadership in unions.

### Case Study: WOMEN IN DECISION MAKING

In 2015, women activists in the MSTKS union in India achieved a breakthrough. After three years of attending meetings of the all-male executive committee, the first woman was elected to the committee. In 2016, the women's wing of MSTKS formed a Nirbhaya (fearless) Advocate Committee, which has since developed empowerment activities for women, and training on masculinity and gender for the executive board. These activities have helped to bridge the gap between young men and women workers in the union, created a space for women within the union and supported women into leadership positions.

In 2017, reservation for women workers was included in the union structures. The group then went on to unanimously vote for two positions at each level of the union to be reserved for women worker representatives. This will ensure a lasting long-term voice for women throughout the organisation. The youth wing of the union is now actively supporting women on priority issues – including sexual harassment committees and violence-free workplaces. The work carried out by MSTKS has also created a safe space for women to share their experiences of violence.

Women's committees, structures, networks, and chapters can also encourage women's empowerment within the union and can contribute to women's voices being integrated into the bargaining agenda, particularly if there is a structural link built between the women's committees and the agenda of the union as a whole.

### Case Study: EMPOWERING WOMEN WORKERS

In the Philippines, the NCTU created a women's chapter which helped to increase women's confidence and strength, and challenge inequality and patriarchy. As a result, women now know their rights and speak out and defend themselves. This has led to a reduction in abuse and violation of women in the transport sector. Women have also now become more visible in rallies and strikes.

In Nepal, women workers face high levels of discrimination within the transport sector. ITWAN and NETWON have been working in partnership to lobby the government to provide loans for women transport workers to buy their own vehicles to reduce their reliance on vehicle owners who are likely to discriminate against them. The unions have also formed a joint women's committee for informal women transport workers to build solidarity and share practical activities.

Unions also need to provide education and training to allow women to take an active role in the union and build women's leadership. This can develop the capacity of women trade unionists to become active in leadership roles. This needs to include access for women workers to adequate information on social and labour rights and protections, including rights as trade union representatives.



Train driver in the USA



## SECTION 5: QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

### KEY POINTS

- Women – as workers and passengers – need to be involved in public transport policy decision-making, planning and implementation, to ensure that specific issues for women are addressed.
- Unions can use social dialogue, negotiation and consultation to ensure women's voices are heard, and lobby for the use of gender-impact assessments and the use of gender-disaggregated data to identify the impact of public transport projects on women.
- Gender demands should also be integrated into investment principles for funding of public transport infrastructure projects.
- Unions should integrate gender demands into organising and leverage strategies and in their campaigns, to achieve better representation of women's needs and concerns and ensure women have equal access to social and labour rights and protections.
- Unions should also promote women's activism in trade unions.

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- ITF Toolkit on Safeguard Frameworks of IFIs

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