

HOW DOES CLIMATE CHANGE AFFECT URBAN TRANSPORT WORKERS?

As workers in the urban transport systems of our cities, we are on the frontline of the climate emergency. We are directly impacted by the changes in weather patterns, increased flooding, air pollution and lack of action by governments and employers.

The climate crisis affects our workplaces and communities. Its negative impacts are exacerbated by the lack of formal employment, gender-based discrimination against women workers, outsourcing, precarious work, low wages, and lack of freedom of association. The climate catastrophe reinforces a system that profits from cheap labour, unpaid women's work, and the continued squeeze on the public services that we, as workers, provide.

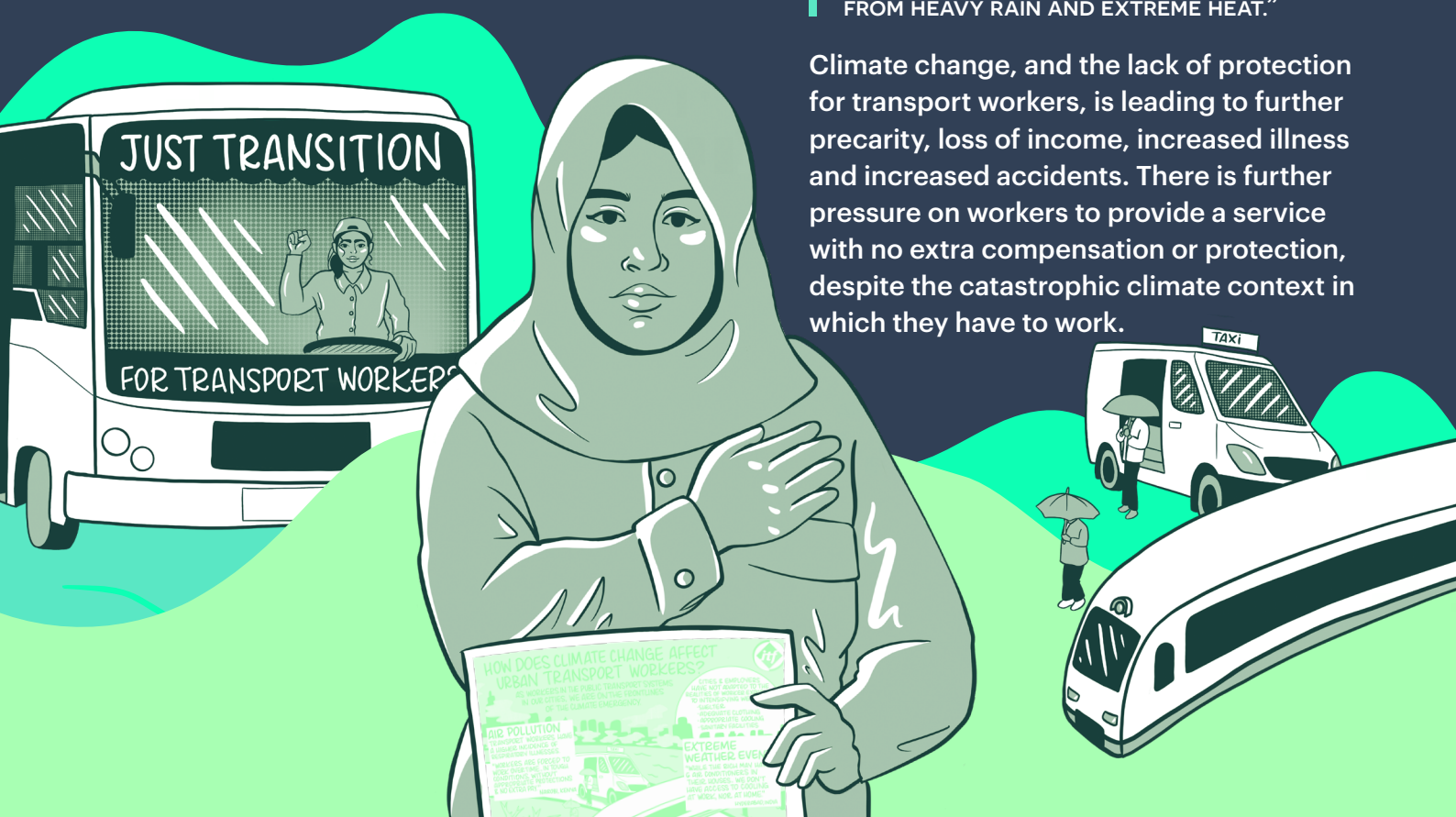
Urban transport workers are often presented as central to the fight against climate change. Expanding public transportation is one of the 'win-win' solutions that could improve services for communities, create jobs for workers and lower carbon emissions. However, the voices, experiences and realities of transport workers are too often excluded from these plans.

INFORMAL TRANSPORT WORKER, NAIROBI, KENYA:

“

TRANSPORT WORKERS HAVE NOT BEEN INVOLVED IN CITY PLANNING. OUR NEEDS IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ARE NOT ADEQUATELY PROVIDED FOR OR GIVEN ANY CONSIDERATION. DESPITE THE FACT THAT MOST OF US HANG AROUND BUS TERMINALS, THERE ARE NO STRUCTURES WHICH CAN PROTECT US FROM HEAVY RAIN AND EXTREME HEAT.”

Climate change, and the lack of protection for transport workers, is leading to further precarity, loss of income, increased illness and increased accidents. There is further pressure on workers to provide a service with no extra compensation or protection, despite the catastrophic climate context in which they have to work.



EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS

HOT DAYS AND COLD DAYS ARE BECOMING VERY HOT AND VERY COLD

Urban transport workers are highly exposed to the intensification of extreme weather events. Workers have to continue operating transport, delivering food, helping passengers and making cities run in the most dire circumstances. Extreme weather events are becoming more frequent. Cities and employers have not adapted to the new realities that workers experience in these conditions.

During hot days, workers suffer from a lack of shelter, appropriate cooling at their workplaces and adequate clothing. This leads often to situations of dehydration, exacerbated by the lack of sanitary facilities which makes women workers especially more reluctant to hydrate themselves.

Transport workers can even suffer weather extremes during the same working day.

SUBWAY WORKER, SANTIAGO, CHILE:

“

WHEN I STARTED WORKING IN THE SUBWAY MANY YEARS AGO, THE CLOTHING WE HAD WAS USEFUL FOR THE WEATHER. BUT TODAY, THE CLOTHING IS NOT USEFUL AT ALL. DURING WINTER, WE START WORK WITH TEMPERATURES OF MINUS 3 DEGREES CELSIUS, AND BY MIDDAY WE ARE HITTING OVER 20 DEGREES CELSIUS”.



PLATFORM PASSENGER SERVICE DRIVER, HYDERABAD, INDIA:

“

WHILE THE RICH MAY HAVE SIX AIR CONDITIONERS IN THEIR HOUSES, WE DON'T HAVE ACCESS TO COOLING AT WORK OR AT HOME. IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO COPE THIS WAY.”

FLOODING

Extreme weather events increase the intensity and conditions of flooding in cities. Flooding occurs both more often and more intensely, leaving urban transport workers vulnerable, while the pressure to continue providing services increases in those circumstances.

TRAIN WORKER, JAKARTA, INDONESIA:

“

IT USED TO RAIN IN OCTOBER, BUT NOW WE NEVER KNOW [WHEN IT WILL RAIN]. I WORK AT THE BUKIT DURI ELECTRIC TRAIN WAREHOUSE, WHICH IS SURROUNDED BY THE CILIWUNG RIVER. EVERY NIGHT, IF THERE IS A LITTLE RAIN, WE IMMEDIATELY CHECK THE CONDITION OF KATULAMPA AND MANGGARAI FLOODGATES TO OPEN THE FLOOD ANTICIPATION POSTS. I WORK IN A WAREHOUSE WHERE THERE ARE A LOT OF ELECTRIC TRAIN SPARE PARTS THAT NEED TO BE SECURED. THE POSITION OF THE WAREHOUSE IS ON THE FIRST FLOOR, WHILE LAST YEAR THE FLOOD REACHED TWO METERS”

DELIVERY WORKER IN CEBU, PHILIPPINES:

“

WE'VE FELT THAT THE TYPHOONS ARE GETTING WORSE, CREATING MORE FLOODING IN THE CITY, AND WE ARE REQUIRED TO DO THE DELIVERIES UNDER ALL CIRCUMSTANCES WITHOUT EXTRA SUPPORT”



AIR POLLUTION

Urban transport workers face the brunt of air pollution. Their health and that of passengers is put at risk. Due to their high levels of exposure to fumes from vehicles, transport workers have a higher incidence of respiratory illnesses, which often leads to high medical expenses, extra sick leave and chronic work-related illnesses.

Air pollution is markedly worse in cities of the Global South, and workers are directly affected by the intensity of pollution. Many transport workers do not have adequate ventilation when working indoors, and as outdoor and semi-outdoor workers, they are denied any options of mitigating their exposure to air pollution. Moreover, they have to work even when risk levels are such that other industries would be shut down or suspended. Lack of quality personal protective equipment (PPE), a structural problem well before the COVID-19 pandemic, has worsened.

INFORMAL TRANSPORT WORKER, NAIROBI, KENYA:

“

WORKERS ARE FORCED TO WORK OVERTIME, IN TOUGH CONDITIONS, WITHOUT APPROPRIATE PROTECTIONS AND WITH NO EXTRA PAY.”

DROUGHTS

Transport workers are also susceptible to increasing dry conditions and lack of rain. This leads to shutdowns in water supply, which in turn affects air quality and access to drinking water. Dehydration, due to a lack of access to drinking water, has become a major cause of illness for urban transport workers.



BUS WORKER IN SANTIAGO, CHILE

“

THE AIR QUALITY IN OUR CITY HAS WORSENERD WITH THE CONTINUED DROUGHT THAT WE’VE BEEN EXPERIENCING. IT HASN’T RAINED FOR MONTHS AND WE ARE WORRIED ABOUT ACCESSING DRINKING WATER.”



CLIMATE FACTS FOR WORKERS

TRANSPORT CREATES 21% OF CARBON EMISSIONS

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change



The highest impacts are felt by the working poor, women and young workers, and those in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) due to their high vulnerability and low adaptive capacity.

International Labour Organization 2019

By 2030, the equivalent of more than two percent of total working hours worldwide are projected to be lost every year, either because it is too hot to work or because workers have to work at a slower pace.



This equals

80 MILLION PERMANENT JOBS LOST TO EXTREME HEAT *ILO 2019*



Temperatures above 24–26°C are associated with reduced labour productivity.

AT 33–34°C, A WORKER OPERATING AT A MODERATE RATE OF INTENSITY LOSES 50 PERCENT OF HIS OR HER WORK CAPACITY.

ILO 2019

Workers who are exposed to extreme heat, prolonged work in hot environments or engaged in strenuous physical activity may be at risk of suffering from heat stress. Heat stress can lead to heat stroke, heat exhaustion, rhabdomyolysis (muscle tissue breakdown), and death.

US Centre for Disease Control



ACTIVITY

Gather in groups of workers and answer the following questions:

1. How do the climate events highlighted in this material affect you and your co-workers?
2. How has the situation changed over the years? Has it got worse? In which ways?
3. How does climate change impact informal workers compared to formal workers?
4. How does climate change affect women workers and young workers?
5. From the stories that you heard in the conversation, collectively or individually make a drawing of the effects of climate change in your workplace and in your life.

