

RESEARCH REPORT

**SANITATION RIGHTS  
ARE HUMAN RIGHTS  
PUBLIC TRANSPORT  
WORKER VOICES**

NOVEMBER 2022



# ITF

**THE INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT WORKERS' FEDERATION (ITF) IS A DEMOCRATIC, AFFILIATE-LED GLOBAL FEDERATION OF 670 TRADE UNIONS IN 147 COUNTRIES, REPRESENTING OVER 18 MILLION WORKING MEN AND WOMEN IN ALL TRANSPORT SECTORS. THE ITF PASSIONATELY CAMPAIGNS FOR TRANSPORT WORKERS' RIGHTS, EQUALITY AND JUSTICE.**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The 15 workers' stories presented in this report depict public transport workers' experiences in accessing decent sanitation facilities. The stories are drawn from 13 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, Latin America and the Middle East. 20 in-depth interviews were carried out with workers in urban public transport – including mobile workers (drivers, conductors, guards) and non-mobile workers (ticket sellers, customer service roles, maintenance) – from different sectors of public transport – rail, bus, taxi, and informal transport. They included the union leaders representing the workers, all of whom have long and deep experience of working in the sector. The report looks at the potential impact of limited access to sanitation facilities on the workers' health and safety and their lives, and points out the risks for workers associated with a lack of proper access to toilets, restrooms, and washing facilities. The study's participants also state how they think their trade unions can make and are making a difference through their collective bargaining with employers and local authorities.

The study's overall objective is to provide evidence-based information on public transport workers' experiences accessing decent sanitation facilities. The lessons and good practices revealed through the research are compiled in this report, which will support trade unions interested in improving access to sanitation facilities for transport workers. The report will also be used by the ITF to develop policy briefs and future campaign materials to improve the working conditions of public transport workers. It builds on the ITF Sanitation Charter which provides guidance on what action employers and governments should take to ensure safe access to decent sanitation facilities for transport workers (in all sectors).

This study identifies eight key issues that need to be addressed in order to improve workplace sanitation conditions and to ensure that public transport workers have safe access to decent sanitation facilities:





## KEY FINDING 1: PUBLIC TRANSPORT WORKERS ARE DENIED SAFE ACCESS TO DECENT SANITATION FACILITIES

Most interviewed workers stated that there are no provisions for sanitation facilities. Only a few – from countries including Mexico, Egypt, and Thailand – said that their sanitation needs are catered for. The interviewed workers all affirmed that sanitation access is a human dignity issue and a fundamental right.

**“If these [the facilities] were not well equipped when employees come to work, they would feel ‘I do not have equality. I am a worker and human, but why would you not support me with these facilities?’ If the facilities were not well equipped, this would cause living and working life to be unhappy.”**

Woman trackwork technician, Bangkok

**“[My supervisor] said to me, ‘you need to carry a plastic container and then use paper’. I thought it was a joke until I found myself in that situation. It is a system that we all use! Because there are no toilets inside the train, that is the only thing you can use when the train is in motion!”**

Woman train driver, Johannesburg

**“The toilets are not very clean. These bathrooms are not regularly cleaned. We also do not have change rooms as we are few women in this field, so we find many problems with a lack of changing rooms and poorly maintained toilets.”**

**Woman metro driver, Tunis**

Workers who are not satisfied with the provision or adequacy of workers' access to sanitation facilities all reported that toilet access is a pervasive problem and needs to be well addressed by the union movement. Those with the most extended experience in urban public transport services expressed this opinion most strongly. Workers who cannot access toilet facilities stated that they do not have adequate sanitation facilities at their workplaces and cannot take the time to attend to their needs. They may be forced to urinate in public areas, defecate in the open, use containers, or even soil their clothes.

**“There’s no soap. You have to bring those ‘luxuries’ yourself. When we enter the toilets, we splash a bit to clean them before using them. The toilets do not meet regulatory standards. The toilets need to have bleach, soap and regular cleaning, plus visitors’ toilets and toilets for male and female conductors for public health reasons.”**

**Woman informal bus conductor, Dakar**

**“Both washrooms are common for all. Washrooms are not cleaned. Housekeeping staff clean it regularly, but it should be done frequently. There is not enough equipment for hand cleaning; the soaps need to be provided.”**

**Man metrorail senior engineer, Jaipur**

**“The toilets lacked proper sewage drainages; most of them were blocked. You find that litter is all around. There is no good disposal system.”**

**Woman informal bus conductor, Nairobi**

Access to toilets and washing facilities is essential for public health to prevent the spread of diseases. The interviewed workers also highlighted that the related public health impact affects not only the workers themselves, but also their colleagues, cleaning staff and the public, who are all potentially exposed to human waste. It also leads to untreated human waste entering the environment, creating pollution and spreading chronic diseases.

**“Commuters in all trains are hoping to go and utilise toilets, but toilets are not ready. You found that toilets are locked even at some stations. You need to go and release yourself, but you don’t have any platform to do it. So you have to hold it in for a long time.”**

**Woman train driver, Johannesburg**

## **KEY FINDING 2: PUBLIC TRANSPORT WORKERS HAVE TO PAY FOR USING PUBLIC SANITATION FACILITIES**

Many public transport workers rely on public sanitation facilities, where they exist. Public sanitation facilities and water points are often privatised and require workers to pay for using facilities in bars, cafes, shops and restaurants. In India, for example, Uber drivers in Mumbai spend 10-50 Rupees of their earnings per day on access to public toilets (daily earnings are between 2000-2500 Rupees per day for 8-12 hours driving before petrol and other costs), while in Jaipur, public transport workers must pay to access safe, drinkable water.

**“The government provides washrooms, but they are unavailable in many places. They are not clean, and they are closed evenings. So public toilets are not our favourite option to use. Even if we find one, we need to pay 10 Rupees to use the toilets. If we use the washroom, then we have to pay for it. Even sanitary napkins are not free. You have to put a coin, and only then will you get that sanitary napkin. You get nothing without money.”**

Woman app-based transport driver, Mumbai

**“We all have a list on our hands. Where else do I drive by? Where else can I go? Are coffee shops there, fast-food restaurants? There is a little coffee, ok, maybe if you go and buy something to let me use the bathroom. As workers, we build these maps in our hands.”**

Woman transit bus operator, Vancouver

## **KEY FINDING 3: LACK OF SUFFICIENT BREAK TIME AND ACCESS TO TOILETS LEADS TO HEALTH RISKS**

Public transport workers provide scheduled services and often work alone or far from sanitation facilities. The study found that transport workers are not given adequate time during working hours for toilet breaks, so many encounter barriers to using toilet facilities when needed.

**“For women, particularly, they find it hard to use those toilets, and there’s no alternative, and we cannot leave our work and go to people’s homes and ask to relieve ourselves. It isn’t easy. We can’t hold on. We work for at least seven hours and cannot hold on from 5 am until 1 pm without going to relieve ourselves. It’s impossible.”**

Woman informal bus conductor, Dakar

**“We have to hold it in because we may have a bathroom next to the station. But sometimes there’s nobody to cover for us, and we could not leave to find a bathroom. We have to hold it, and it causes urinary infections. Sometimes workers relieve themselves in their trousers, which is another risk – more emotional than physical.”**

**Woman ticket clerk, Bogota**

Schedule demands and routes affect workers’ toilet access even between runs, and facilities are not always adequate at terminal locations. Access on the road is an even more significant challenge.

**“Most of the time, passengers do not appreciate it if you leave the bus on your road. Sometimes they don’t see us as being human and having needs. They don’t know I haven’t gotten out of the seat because of traffic jams, winter, or buses running late. They don’t know I have been running the bus for hours.”**

**Woman bus driver, Ontario**

Workers who were interviewed reported difficulty finding sufficient facilities during early- and late-hour shifts. They use toilets before and after runs at the hub, where toilet facilities are often inadequate, and they have to make unscheduled stops to relieve themselves in limited time due to schedule pressure.

The lack of sufficient break time and access to toilets in some workplaces leads transport workers to eat and drink less to avoid defecating or urinating for several hours, thus putting them at a higher risk of malnutrition. Delaying urination and refraining from drinking water to avoid using the toilet often leads to dehydration in heat and causes internal injuries such as acute kidney damage and urogenital infections. For menstruating women, adequate sanitation becomes even more sensitive, and the lack of access to it puts them at a higher risk of urogenital infections.

**“There is an agreement between the company and the owner of some business premises, which allows us to use their bathrooms. We come to work at 3.30 am, but the toilets are open at 6 am. So, we have to seek access after 6.00 am. Given how cold it gets here in Bogota, we cannot enter a bathroom when we need it. Then, the same thing also happens on the evening shift, working shutdown hours, because these agreements end at 6.00-7.00 pm in the evening, but the system operates until eleven at night, and the workers are there until 11.15 pm. So when we need to go to the bathroom, we really cannot do so.”**

**Woman bus ticket seller, Bogota**



**“We are in traffic all day. We drink less water and mostly face the problem of diabetes because there is no time for meals. We wait seven or eight hours to go to the toilet. We have to control ourselves and hold on to it during this time. Many women who have delivered babies have had an operation, so the doctor told them they could not hold it for many hours. Those women get so much pain in their stomachs after going to the washroom.”**

Woman app-based transport driver, Mumbai

**“Sometimes it’s difficult to go to the toilet, even in the bus stations when we come in. There are many restrictions by employers and bus station management. We have to inform somebody. Somebody has to look after our vehicle. We have to make the vehicle secure. If we have just come into the bus station, picked up at the last bus stop, and go through the bus station to another destination, we have to take all the passengers off the bus to ensure that the bus is secure. Sometimes people overlook that and hold their bladder, which greatly affects their health and mental status. They even develop prostate issues.”**

Man bus driver, London

## **KEY FINDING 4: LACK OF ACCESS TO SAFE, CLEAN SANITATION FACILITIES CAN SUBSTANTIALLY IMPACT THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF TRANSPORT WORKERS**

The lack of adequate sanitation facilities at work within a reasonable time is likely to affect workers’ safety, as well as their physical and mental health.

The interviews with workers showed that there are several significant areas where sanitation access and public transport workers’ health are connected. For example, limiting voiding might lead to illnesses such as urinary tract infections. Access may be needed more frequently for workers with existing health concerns, such as irritable bowel syndrome, or by pregnant women. Restricted bathroom access is likely to increase the risks of accidents, stress, and possible health effects, including fertility problems, urinary tract infections, constipation, and stress-related illnesses such as hypertension.

**“The big washrooms, bathrooms, and clean toilets. The airport has all these things. We feel good when we are at the airport. But when we start driving, we face many problems regarding toilets because we cannot go to the washroom for eight hours.”**

Woman app-based transport driver, Mumbai



The study found that access to safe and clean sanitation facilities is a significant concern that affects workers' health, stress levels, and job satisfaction. The public transport workers who were interviewed highlighted the enormous stress experienced by workers who cannot reach a restroom in the time available or feel they cannot take the time to do so. They all reported distress, anger, fear, and humiliation when unable to get to clean, safe facilities promptly. Some workers said that they did not drink much because they knew they would not be able to stop and use a bathroom, which caused insufficient replacement of water loss and dehydration. Their fear of future illness adds to the stress of holding while driving.

**“[While driving,] when you are thinking, ‘oh my goodness I have to go use the washroom’; it will make you want to use it more. Nobody wants to have an accident at work, especially as an adult; it is embarrassing and should not be happening.”**

Woman bus driver, Ontario

**“This has caused issues for colleagues unable to resist their urges, so they have soiled their clothes. This also creates psychosocial or emotional risk through them feeling wet or dirty. Often, among my colleagues, this is not viewed as something that can happen or occur at any moment.”**

Woman ticket clerk, Bogota

**“Most of the time, I have to relieve myself at home before going out to work. I try not to use public places because I don't want to go to unsanitary bathrooms. But I know it may be serious for the kidneys' health.”**

Woman metro driver, Tunis

## **KEY FINDING 5: LACK OF GENDER-SEGREGATED AND SAFE SANITATION FACILITIES AFFECTS THE RETENTION LEVELS OF WOMEN IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

A lack of both decent sanitation facilities and the time to access them could prevent women transport workers from fully engaging in or accessing the workplace.

The study found that the work environment of transport workers is frequently not gender-responsive and fails to consider women's needs, such as a lack of decent and safe sanitation facilities or appropriate occupational safety and health considerations. Problems identified included not having access to women-only facilities, the dirty and unsanitary condition of toilets, and shift working preventing women from using the facilities when they needed to. These challenges affect the retention levels of women in the industry.

**“The facilities we have in the main office are pretty appropriate. All of them are new, clean and separated. There are one or two toilets on each floor. However, in this warehouse, maybe because most of the staff members are men, only 2 out of the 150 workers are women, there is no separate toilet for female staff.”**

Woman head of train maintenance warehouse, Jakarta

**“The facilities sometimes are not favourable, I’ll be honest. We used to have his and hers toilets five years ago, but someone complained because males began using the ladies’ washrooms. Male workers use the women’s toilet because they only have a few minutes to get off the bus and go to the toilet quickly. After the complaints by women workers, the company management decides to make all toilets unisex. From a female perspective, we find that sharing the washroom with men is unsafe and dirty. We have to wipe the seats before we use them.”**

Woman bus driver, Ontario

**“We mostly use the ones at the petrol pump. The bathrooms are not so clean. There is a washroom for ladies; I don’t know why they mostly keep it locked, so we have to use the gents’ washroom. That gives a bad feeling. And like when we cannot hold it in anymore, it is all about holding it in only, sometimes we also have to go to the gents’ toilet.”**

Woman, app-based transport driver, Mumbai

**“We have young women who are coming into the sector. We can’t lose these women. We are the only ones who can advocate for our basic rights like having good sanitation in our public toilets.”**

Woman informal bus conductor, Nairobi

## **KEY FINDING 6: PUBLIC TRANSPORT WORKERS ARE OFTEN SUBJECT TO HARASSMENT, INCLUDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE SUCH AS SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND RAPE, SIMPLY FOR SEEKING TO USE A PUBLIC RESTROOM**

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

Women transport workers, in particular, are often subject to harassment, including gender-based violence such as sexual harassment and rape, simply for seeking to use a public restroom. This was

exacerbated by the lack of appropriate safe and secure sanitary facilities during Covid-19 measures, when many public spaces were closed. All the interviewed workers said that the need to ensure safety (locks, protected space, lighting) is one of the most critical considerations for siting and selecting public restrooms.

**“We had to buy something at a nearby shop to use the toilet. You had to be on good terms with the bakery or cafeteria owner, to be able to access the bathroom. You had to consume something. There are even cases of people harassed because they went to use the toilet and the owner let her approach the toilet and yelled at her, like, in front of everyone, ‘One who won’t buy anything but is always around’, or something along these lines.”**

Woman bus ticket vendor, Sao Paulo

**“It is across this parking area. It is, right now, 5 am, and this is when I am going to work. It is dark; it is not safe. I always go to the bathroom when I get to the garage. Because if you see a bathroom, you go to the bathroom in our sector. But it is winter now. It is darker now, so it is not safe.”**

Woman transit bus operator, Vancouver

**“Women and men both use these toilets. Sometimes you find the toilets only one or two. So you have to wait for the other person to come out. That causes an increased risk of sexual harassment and assault against women. There was a ... case when a man came out of the toilet and he touched the waiting lady.”**

Woman informal bus conductor, Nairobi

## **KEY FINDING 7: THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS INTENSIFIED PUBLIC TRANSPORT WORKERS’ LACK OF ACCESS TO SANITATION FACILITIES**

During the pandemic, transport workers were a critical part of the global response to manage the situation as the coronavirus spread and country after country went into lockdown. They worked on the front line to keep the world going, moving medicine, key workers, food and other essential goods.

The study found that the pandemic has further exacerbated and exposed public transport workers’ lack of access to sanitation facilities, due to the closure of public facilities, coffee shops, and restaurants that transport workers mostly use. This also showed that having decent sanitation facilities became even more critical for workers and public health.



**“Covid-19 has been a nightmare, even now. If you find one [a toilet], you don’t know whether it is safe to use. It has been tough for all of us as workers. Even though you are not touching anything and not feeling anything, your mind is telling you that if you touch this, if you enter here, you will catch this Covid. We have seen our colleagues pass on; our family members pass on. So, psychologically it had a lot of impact on us.”**

**Woman train driver, Johannesburg**

**“Especially in the first year of the pandemic, we worked part-time, and all restaurants and public facilities were closed. We bought masks and hand sanitiser with our own money until the government could do it.”**

**Woman metro driver, Tunis**

## **KEY FINDING 8: TRADE UNIONS CAN EFFECTIVELY CAMPAIGN FOR IMPROVED CONDITIONS AND ENSURE THAT PUBLIC TRANSPORT WORKERS ARE GRANTED SANITATION DIGNITY IN THE WORKPLACE**

Trade unions can be a strong force for change and can effectively campaign for improved conditions in the public transport industry. Involving trade unions from the beginning of infrastructure planning is paramount to having decent sanitation facilities for all.

**“It is certainly necessary for these new systems that are being created to include proper union participation to avoid this problem.”**

Woman ticket clerk, Bogota

**“[The first step...] is to build sanitation facilities at all bus stops. We have terminals. So, if we have a bus stop, there must be a bathroom facility. As a union, we are responsible for securing this right and improving workers working conditions.”**

Woman bus driver, Ontario

Every worker interviewed affirmed that collective bargaining agreements and effective union activism are the main instruments to guarantee the safety and health of public transport workers through access to decent sanitation facilities.

**“Our union worked with the local health authorities and mapped workers’ ailments and health problems. This occupational health mapping found that many health problems were caused by the lack of a decent sanitary facility.”**

Woman bus ticket vendor, Sao Paulo

**“These rights do not remain just a dead word on paper but must be fulfilled proactively, and effectively. For instance, our union management is on the street every day. We inspect the terminal stations; we inspect the garages every day. We make surprise visits during the night shift, which are random. It is not only on the collective agreement paper. We follow up on everything to ensure that workers have decent sanitary conditions.”**

Woman bus ticket vendor, Sao Paulo

**“As a union, we worked to identify major problems related to workplace sanitary conditions. So we have identified three main problems: lack of safe and clean drinking water, poor conditions of existing washrooms, and lack of sanitary equipment.”**

Man metrorail senior engineer, Jaipur



**“At first, men, women, and travellers were entering the same bathrooms, but with the union’s efforts, we now have a separate bathroom with a lock on its door. This is a good improvement.”**

Woman metro driver, Tunis

**“We have language in our collective bargaining agreement that says we must have warm running water and soap. Like this, we need clear and precise language in collective bargaining agreements to ensure access to decent sanitation facilities for all public transport workers.”**

Woman transit bus operator, Vancouver

All workers who were interviewed stated that they believed that trade unions need to develop implementable strategies for achieving improved sanitation access and begin to negotiate ways to address sanitation.

**“The unions have to recognise there’s a problem in access to decent sanitation facilities. They’ve got to be active on it, and they’ve got to campaign vigorously, even with other unions. Not just one union but other unions also, to ensure that all unions are fighting under the banner of TUC or ITF, whoever they are. Because it’s a problem for all their members, not just one particular section of the workers.”**

Man bus driver, London

**“Trade unions need to stand together with commuters and voice this issue out!”**

Woman train driver, Johannesburg



## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Safe access to decent sanitation facilities is a basic human need and should be freely available in any setting, including the workplace.

Adequate water and sanitation facilities in employment are necessary components of the right to safe and healthy working conditions. Sanitary facilities in good condition, clean, safe, sufficient in number, and easy to access are essential to ensure the hygiene and dignity of transport workers and avoid the transmission of certain infectious diseases. Workplaces should have sanitary provisions, including segregated toilets, washrooms, breastfeeding rooms, and changing facilities.

According to the research participants, having adequate facilities means workers can access toilets whenever they need to; there should be separate facilities for men and women, with lockable doors; they should be clean, properly maintained, and equipped with a steady supply of toilet paper, soap, hot and cold running water, and drying facilities; and women's toilets must have a means for disposing sanitary supplies.

To increase retention levels of women in transport work, their specific needs should be considered in infrastructure development and design. Trade unions can ensure that employers take this into consideration and do not use a one-size-fits-all approach.

The research participants expect their unions to negotiate with local authorities to ensure free access to public toilets. Transport workers must be offered free sanitary towels and subsidised access to public restrooms.

By using collective bargaining as a powerful tool, they believe that trade unions can make it compulsory for employers and public authorities to provide toilet facilities at each end of every bus route; ensure that workers can access fully equipped, safe, and secure sanitation; and ensure that sanitation facilities provide privacy and ensure dignity. The interviewees also believe that trade unions should monitor employers to ensure that they comply with local and international labour standards and regulations on improving workplace sanitation conditions, including ensuring that measures are gender-responsive.

They want trade unions to campaign and work together with employers and governments to develop gender-sensitive policies and guidelines on preventing Covid-19 in workplaces, paying particular attention to workers' access to adequate washing and sanitary facilities when they need to use them.

# INTRODUCTION

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The right to sanitation at the workplace is reflected in UN Resolution 70/169, which affirms that “the human right to sanitation entitles everyone, without discrimination, to have physical and affordable access to sanitation, in all spheres of life.” On World Toilet Day, 19 November 2019, the International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF) launched a Transport Workers’ Sanitation Charter. This covers the concerns of transport workers around the world and provides guidance on what action should be taken by employers, governments and other bodies to ensure safe access to decent sanitation facilities for transport workers. It also includes a checklist on requirements for decent sanitary facilities for transport workers.

Safe access to decent sanitation facilities is a human right for all transport workers. But many public transport workers do not have access to separate, conveniently located, safe, secure, clean, and private sanitation facilities.

This research was conducted for the ITF and was designed as an Action Research, using a qualitative methodology involving key informant interviews with selected transport workers. The population size of this study was 20 selected transport workers from cities in Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, Latin America and the Middle East. The study sampling was determined in consultation with ITF and employed by the researcher to collect workers’ stories around the globe. The ITF invited selected transport workers to participate in the research through focal points in their respective countries. This comprises a qualitative sample of 20 key informant interviews and 15 workers’ stories (13 women and two men) developed in a storytelling format.

The 15 stories presented in this report depict public transport workers' experiences in accessing decent sanitation facilities. Workers told their stories during interviews:

- 01. Mabu Molele, Johannesburg / South Africa**
- 02. Naomi Njeri, Nairobi / Kenya**
- 03. Safaa Ibrahim, Cairo / Egypt**
- 04. Lobna Harbi, Tunis / Tunisia**
- 05. Ndeye Arame Fall, Dakar / Senegal**
- 06. Luiza Helena, Sao Paulo / Brazil**
- 07. Vivian Acosta, Bogota / Colombia**
- 08. Roxana Saldana Garzon, Mexico City / Mexico**
- 09. Komol Khamnikom, Bangkok / Thailand**
- 10. Gini Aristi Hartono, Jakarta / Indonesia**
- 11. Vikas Kshatriya, Jaipur / India**
- 12. Rinku Sharma, Mumbai / India**
- 13. Angela Ransome, Ontario / Canada**
- 14. Krista Lee Hanson, Vancouver / Canada**
- 15. Taj Salam, London / UK**

# MABU MOLELE

Train driver

Johannesburg, South Africa

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## WORKERS NEED CLEAN, SAFE, ACCESSIBLE TOILETS

**“My supervisor said you need to carry a plastic container and then use paper. I thought it was a joke until I found no toilets inside the train.”**

Mabu Molele from Johannesburg has worked in the transportation industry for 18 years. She began her career as a customer service officer in public transportation, before moving to train operation, where she has worked as a train driver since 2018.

Recalling her first day on the job, Mabu said she asked her male chief, though a little embarrassed, where she could get her toilet needs. *“He looked at me with a beautiful smile and said to me, ‘you need to carry a plastic container and then use paper’. I thought it was a joke until I found myself in that situation. It is a system that we all use! Because there are no toilets inside the train, that is the only thing you can use when the train is in motion!”*

Mabu highlights that the lack of accessible toilet facilities affects both workers and passengers.

*“Commuters in all trains are hoping to go and utilise toilets, but toilets are not ready. You found that toilets are locked even at some stations. You need to go and release yourself, but you don’t have any platform to do it. So you have to hold it in for a long time.”*

She knows this situation will eventually cause serious health problems, and she is worried.

*“It affects you, and you find that in the long run. You cannot hold your urine for a longer period. Your blood cannot be able to resist anything because now you are used to holding yourself for a longer period. So you can only help yourself by carrying maybe one bottle of water.”*

Transport workers are on the frontline in the pandemic, in direct contact with passengers and are putting themselves at risk of contracting the coronavirus by carrying out their everyday duties.

Mabu says:

*“Covid-19 has been a nightmare, even now. If you find one [a toilet], you don’t know whether it is safe to use. It has been tough for all of us as workers. Even though you are not touching anything and not feeling anything, your mind is telling you that if you touch this, if you enter here, you will catch this Covid. We have seen our colleagues pass on; our family members pass on. So, psychologically it had a lot of impact on us.”*

She adds that there used to be toilets on trains, and the solution is to install them again for both workers and commuters.

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*“This system used to be there. The problem was that those trains, like they used to put toilets inside the coaches. But now you found that those toilets are not serviced or maintained. The coaches will smell all bad.”*

A proud SATAWU (South African Transport and Allied Workers Union) member since 2006, Mabu claims that accessing decent toilet facilities is the most basic worker and human right, and that trade unions need to give special attention to solving this problem.

*“These humans need to relieve themselves if and when nature calls. We are human beings! We need to be treated as human beings as well. However, we have not made much noise about it as trade unions. It means that we need to go back and understand the people we represent being affected. Trade unions need to stand together with commuters and voice this issue out!”*



# NAOMI NJERI

**Informal bus conductor  
Nairobi, Kenya**

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## **TRANSPORT WORKERS NEED GENDER-SPECIFIC TOILETS AT WORKPLACES**

**“Toilets are used by women and men, which causes an increase in the risk of sexual harassment and assault against women.”**

Naomi Nijeri from Nairobi, Kenya, has been working in public transportation since 1995 and is now a matatu conductor for Umoinner SACCO. She is a member of the Transport Workers Union of Kenya (TAWU) and holds the position of vice-chair for the Women in Transport Association.

Naomi says all transport workers must use public toilets run by companies after privatisation of the public sanitation services.

*“They have given out public toilets to private people to run them. You cannot find these public toilets everywhere. They are not on our terminals; they are not everywhere. We have to walk far to reach the toilets each time.”* However, she says, these facilities are not clean most of the time and don't have adequate equipment. *“The toilets lacked proper sewage drainages; most of them were blocked. You find that litter is all around. There is no good disposal system.”*

As public toilets are not gender-specific, women are expected to share them with men. *“Women and men both use these toilets. Sometimes you find the toilets only one or two. So you have to wait for the other person to come out. That causes an increased risk of sexual harassment and assault against women. There was a case; when a man came out of the toilet, he touched the waiting lady.”* Naomi says this recent incident was reported.

These facilities are costly for most workers because they pay for them themselves. Naomi demands that public toilets be accessible for all transport workers, especially women, as she claims the lack of sanitation facilities also creates an obstacle for women transport workers' long-term employment in the industry. *“As long as you prove you are a woman working in transport you could use these facilities for free. We have young women who are coming into the sector. We can't lose these women. We are the only ones who can advocate for our basic rights like having good sanitation in our public toilets.”*



Naomi highlights the importance of collective effort to ensure that all transport workers access the proper sanitation facilities.

*“Today, women working in the transport industry as a member of the Transport and Allied Workers Union, we are engaging with National Metropolitan Services and the Ministry of Health to construct proper gender-sensitive sanitation facilities like bus stops. We are also a member of the TAWU and the Women in Transport Association under the Flone Initiative<sup>1</sup>. We need to work together to change this situation. We need to encourage all stakeholders in the Matatu industry, public service industry and other public services to follow proper sanitation rules like clean running water with soap, sanitisers, and even offering free masks because of the Covid virus, which is alive with us.”*



<sup>1</sup> The Flone Initiative is a women-led organisation working towards the creation of safe, sustainable and accessible public transportation spaces for women and vulnerable groups in Africa by influencing behavioural change, generating knowledge and movement-building.

# SAFAA IBRAHIM

Administrative officer  
Cairo, Egypt

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## GOING TO THE TOILET WHEN YOU WANT IS A HUMAN RIGHT

**“We follow the hygiene process very well and monitor everything.”**

Safaa Ibrahim is an administrative officer in the Public Transport Authority (PTA), where she has been working for 26 years.

Safaa is the first female trade unionist elected at the PTA level. She is also secretary of both the Women Public Transport Authority Union and the Egyptian Workers Union for Women.

*“I run the hospital for Public Transport Authority workers, and I’m always there. My work ends at 3 pm. That’s the official working hours. I’m here with six trade unionists, and we don’t have regular working hours as trade unionists. I start my working day by learning about workers’ problems. I get to know everyone’s problems until the end of the working day. I get calls all day long; I can’t turn off my phone. It’s open 24/7.”*

Good hygiene processes at the hospital ensure that all workers access clean and adequate bathrooms.

*“The hospital must have a disinfectant and steriliser and be cleaned constantly. We know that the women’s toilet is at the end of this corridor, and the men’s toilet is at the end of the other corridor. If one of them isn’t clean, I call the cleaners. We follow the hygiene process very well and monitor everything.”*

Safaa says public service workers also have to access clean sanitation facilities.

*“We have workers who specialise in cleaning. They even clean buses at night. Plus, Public Transport Authority workers come to clean the entire hospital each Thursday. All workers can easily access the toilet facilities and the water.”*

Safaa believes that the role of trade unions is vital to ensure that all workers access decent sanitation facilities. She says:

*“As a member of the general partnership; I have the right to enter any sector. Each sector has a trade union committee, which carries out the follow-up process. If there is any complaint, they contact me, and for any criticism I get, I try to solve it as hard as possible. To ensure all workers access the safe and clean toilets, we must carry out the follow-up process.”*







# LOBNA HARBI

**Metro driver  
Tunis, Tunisia**

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## **IT IS MORE THAN JUST A TOILET: IT IS ACCESS TO FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS**

**“I have to relieve myself at home before going out to work. I try not to use public places because I don't want to go to unsanitary bathrooms. But I know it may be serious for the kidneys' health.”**

Lobna Harbi, a transport worker from Tunisia, is passionate about her job as a light metro driver for the Transtu Company, which she has done for over six years. Recalling why she chose this profession, Lobna says,

*“I was very much into men's jobs throughout my study period because I was studying technology. I liked this field very much and applied for this position. So, I started working in this field. My job is great! I feel like I'm doing my duty to the travellers.”*

Lobna says that though they have a gender-specific bathroom at the workplace, their conditions are deplorable.

*“The toilets are not very clean. These bathrooms are not regularly cleaned. We also do not have change rooms as we are few women in this field, so we find many problems with a lack of changing rooms and poorly maintained toilets.”*

She says that, like other workers, she has to use public facilities because of poor workplace sanitation practices.

*“If the bathroom is not clean and I can't do my business there, I must go to public places, such as restaurants near my workplace. I have to buy something or pay to use the public restroom, but it is a nominal price. Fortunately, it does not affect our budget.”*

When she leaves the central station to run the metro, it becomes more challenging for her to access a clean bathroom. That is why Lobna often uses her bathroom at home before work and holds herself during the day.

*“Most of the time, I have to relieve myself at home before going out to work. I try not to use public places because I don't want to go to unsanitary bathrooms. But I know it may be serious for the kidneys' health.”*

Lobna says the Covid-19 pandemic has further exacerbated workers' already disadvantaged positions in accessing decent sanitation facilities.

*“Especially in the first year of the pandemic, we worked part-time, and all restaurants and public facilities were closed. We bought masks and hand sanitiser with our own money until the government could do it. The Tunisian Labour Union also contributed by providing more cleaners and hygiene kits. So, the cleaning process has intensified, especially in the workplace and the drivers’ room because we rotate our shifts there.”*

Lobna demands more cleaners in workplaces.

*“We go to the bathrooms a lot, and entering the filthy bathrooms is troubling. There must be cleaners regularly to clean bathrooms. The hygiene process should be regular throughout the day and not only once daily because many people walk in it, not just one or two.”*

She points out the role of the trade unions in improving sanitation in workplaces.

*“At first, men, women, and travellers were entering the same bathrooms, but with the union’s efforts, we have a separate bathroom with a lock on its door now. This is a good improvement. We need to consult with the Tunisian Labour Union to find solutions to such problems.”*

Lobna believes in the power of organised workers to improve sanitation conditions and ensure access to adequate sanitation.

*“We are trying to improve everything through the union regarding working conditions related to hygiene. It will be better.”*



# NDEYE ARAME FALL

**Informal bus conductor  
Dakar, Senegal**

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## **BUILD GENDER-SPECIFIC BATHROOMS THAT MEET INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS**

**“There’s no soap at toilets. You have to bring those ‘luxuries’ yourself.”**

Ndeye Arame Fall is a conductor in public transport in Senegal and has held the position of president of the Dakar Dem Dikk Democratic Road Transport Union (SDTR) since it was founded in 2019.

*“Since I’ve been President of the union, I’ve tried to help women transport workers. We try to revive their needs or expression of their needs and ensure that women – and their working conditions – are properly valued.”*

However, women in the transport industry have several problems.

*“As an occupation, it’s not too difficult. However, harsh working conditions make it difficult. Sometimes you get up at 3 am to go to work. There are physical assaults and verbal abuse, and harassment, too. But we try to keep going, as we don’t have many other options.”*

Poor sanitation facilities are one of the main problems workers are dealing with, according to Ndeye.

*“Because there are no male and female toilets. Plus, they only clean them once, in the morning, and they’re in use until 10 pm or 11 pm, and even passers-by and customers come in.”*

The lack of hygiene products in existing bathrooms is equally concerning.

*“There’s no soap. You have to bring those ‘luxuries’ yourself. When we enter the toilets, we splash a bit to clean them before using them. The toilets do not meet regulatory standards. The toilets need bleach, soap and regular cleaning, plus visitors’ toilets and toilets for male and female conductors for public health reasons.”*

Ndeye explains how this situation is adversely affecting workers.

*“For women, particularly, they find it hard to use those toilets, and there’s no alternative, and we cannot leave our work and go to people’s homes and ask to relieve ourselves. It isn’t easy. We can’t hold on. We work for at least seven hours and cannot hold on from 5 am until 1 pm without going to relieve ourselves. It’s impossible.”*

Ndeye believes that access to decent toilets is the right of every worker and that this will only happen if the union raises its voice on this issue.

*“We’ve spoken to the company manager, discussed it, and raised claims. He came and conducted inspections. I showed him the toilets myself. We told him to create toilets for women and men and toilets that meet international standards. Now we’re waiting for any action on our claims.”*





# LUIZA HELENA

**Bus ticket vendor  
Sao Paulo, Brazil**

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## **THE RIGHT TO ACCESS A TOILET IS A BASIC HUMAN NEED!**

**“We guaranteed sanitation rights in collective agreements, and these rights do not remain just a dead word on paper!”**

Luiza Helena has worked as a collector (in-bus ticket vendor) in urban transport for more than ten years. She holds a secretary role for Women and Affirmative Policies at the Conductors' Union of Guarulhos. She works with women transport workers on gender diversity and affirmative action toward labour diversity.

Luiza recalls the poor sanitary conditions at workplaces before the collective agreement.

*“When I started working in urban transportation companies, we had an extremely precarious situation. We had to buy something at a nearby shop to use the toilet. You had to be on good terms with the bakery or cafeteria owner - to be able to access the bathroom; you had to consume something. There are even cases of people harassed because they went to use the toilet and the owner let her approach the toilet and yelled at her, like, in front of everyone, ‘One who won’t buy anything but is always around’ or something along these lines.”*

Luiza thinks the public often underestimates having safe and clean bathrooms.

*“People often joke with me, but it’s just a restroom, for crying out loud, but has anyone ever tried to go and not use the bathroom? Has anyone ever tried to use a toilet without paper? Has anyone ever tried to have a menstrual period without access to a restroom to do their hygiene? Nobody goes through that.”*

*“There is a mistaken feeling that we always have to be working with no break. After all, we are workers. This doesn’t seem right because not even enslaved people were treated this way. They had all their difficulties, but there was a process [they could relieve themselves in the field], totally precarious in that period, but it did exist. And today, we are in the 21st century, and people have this wrong understanding that we should always be working with no bathroom breaks.”*

Luiza explains the union’s effort to improve workplace sanitation conditions:

*“Our union worked with the local health authorities and mapped workers’ ailments and health problems. This occupational health mapping found that many health problems were caused by the lack of a decent sanitary facility. There were many cases of high blood glucose due to too much junk food, street food, and a very high issue of urine infections. Many people had urinary infections due to either drinking water and not having a place to use a bathroom or even not drinking any water in fear of using the bathroom and not having anywhere to go.”*



*“So, we mapped out the problems to see the possibilities and opportunities for each workplace. Then in the light of identified opportunities, we guaranteed sanitation rights in collective agreements.”*

Luiza notes that they use the collective bargaining agreement effectively to ensure that all workers access decent sanitation facilities.

*“These rights do not remain just a dead word on paper but be fulfilled, proactively, and effectively. For instance, our union management is on the street every day. We inspect the terminal stations; we inspect the garages every day. We make surprise visits during the night shift, which are random. It is not only on the collective agreement paper; we follow up on everything to ensure that workers have decent sanitary conditions.”*



# VIVIAN ACOSTA

**Ticket clerk  
Bogota, Colombia**

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## **HEALTH AND SAFETY IN THE WORKPLACE IS A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT!**

**“...sometimes there’s nobody to cover for us, and we could not leave to find a bathroom. We have to hold it, and it causes urinary infections. Sometimes workers relieve themselves in their trousers, which is another risk – more emotional than physical.”**

Vivian Acosta has worked as a ticket clerk in the TransMilenio system (which consists of several interconnected bus rapid transit lines) since 2015. She is one of the transport workers who serve the city's transport system of about eight million inhabitants and help those passengers get about by topping up their travel cards.

Vivian's biggest challenge is accessing toilets during work hours to meet her basic need as a human being.

*“There is an agreement between the company and the owner of some business premises, which allows us to use their bathrooms. We come to work at 3.30 am, but the toilets are open at 6 am. So, we have to seek access after 6.00 am. Given how cold it gets here in Bogota, we cannot enter a bathroom when we need it. Then, the same thing also happens on the evening shift, working shutdown hours, because these agreements end at 6.00-7.00 pm, but the system operates until eleven at night, and the workers are there until 11.15 pm. So when we need to go to the bathroom, we really cannot do so.”*

Vivian says they are in difficulty managing these poor conditions as workers.

*“This has caused issues for colleagues unable to resist their urges, so they have soiled their clothes. This also creates psychosocial or emotional risk through them feeling wet or dirty. Often, among my colleagues, this is not viewed as something that can happen... at any moment.”*

Moreover, Vivian says many workers have suffered from urinary infections due to the lack of bathrooms.

*“We have to hold it in because we may have a bathroom next to the station. But sometimes there’s nobody to cover for us, and we could not leave to find a bathroom. We have to hold it, and it causes urinary infections. Sometimes workers relieve themselves in their trousers, which is another risk – more emotional than physical.”*

Vivian notes that the economic-political atmosphere of Colombia also adversely affects workers' rights to access decent sanitation.



*“Everything that’s been happening here in Colombia, with the issue of demonstrations, the issue of vandalism and the issue of blockades. All of that also has a major impact on bathroom access. We often couldn’t get to a bathroom, even if we had one nearby, due to demonstrations and damage to various premises and station infrastructure. So, we’ve always been impacted, whether by the pandemic issue or that of mobilisations. As workers, our ability to access a bathroom when needed has always been affected.”*

She points out the importance of working together to design and manage city transport systems.

*“They are the ones responsible for designing all this construction work that is done in the city. But really, the response that they’ve given is that this system was supposedly created only for passengers.”*

According to Vivian, involving trade unions from the beginning of infrastructure planning is paramount to having decent sanitation facilities that all can benefit from.

*“They now design such infrastructure, new mass-transport systems, they have never included the unions. The only ones involved in these processes have been businesspeople and the state, while the reality is that the workers have been excluded, and that is why these problems are occurring because they’ve never really considered workers’ needs. They think about how to maximise the financial gains for business people – and even for the state.”*

She says the solution is evident:

*“It is certainly necessary for these new systems that are being created to include proper union participation to avoid this problem.”*



# ROXANA SALDANA GARZON

Medical services manager  
Mexico City, Mexico

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## ACCESS TO TOILETS IS A HUMAN RIGHT NO MATTER WHERE YOU ARE

**“Sanitation is a workers’ right, and the union always protects such rights.”**

Roxana Saldana Garzon has worked in Mexico City public transport system for over 21 years. She is a proud member of the National Union of Public Transport System Workers (NSTC). She says,

*“It’s been quite a long time, and for me, it’s been a pleasure and a privilege to form part of this Public Transport System, which does constitute our means of travelling to different places here within the city. We have 12 lines, and the truth is that I am a rank-and-file worker; I have to say that. I started on the bottom rung, and I’ve been working for the union for eight years.”*

Roxana is in charge of the Medical Service Office, where people are given first, second, and third-tier care.

*“As a service manager, I oversee the medical service for our comrades, which is the most important of the various services we have on the Metro or at least one of the most important because it’s the service that ensures our comrades have the best possible health support in a timely and appropriate manner.”*

Roxana’s role in the workplace is vital for workers’ health and safety.

*“It’s not only the eight hours of work that I do, as I have to be on 24-hour standby. There is no advance notice of health issues! We are often surprised and have to deal with some serious emergency, an accident, or such a situation. Therefore, in this role, we have to be on standby 24 hours per day.”*

Roxana says they have adequate toilets and wash facilities at workplaces.

*“The toilets, I’d say that I do my rounds, and at all the clinics, there’s a public toilet for people to visit. There are toilets in each metro station and public toilets in different parts of the city. Every one of my comrades working at a station has its bathroom facilities. The toilets at each station are separate units, one for men and one for women, only for workers. So, there is no problem in that regard. I feel that facilities are adequate, and I’m satisfied with the service provided about toilet facilities.”*



Roxana says accessing decent sanitation facilities is a fundamental human right, and unions need to monitor the implementation of this right.

*“It is a workers’ right, and the union always protects such rights. So, those rights include us having our bathrooms to meet the needs that every human being has. To an extent, nobody is free from such needs. So, that’s why the national union monitors such work. The only union concerned with ensuring such care for workers has been the National Union of Public Transport System Workers (NSTC), where I’m now working as Medical Services Secretary.”*



# KOMOL KHAMNIKOM

Trackwork technician  
Bangkok, Thailand

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## A CLEAN WORK ENVIRONMENT PROMOTES A HEALTHIER WORK ENVIRONMENT

**“If the facilities were not well equipped, this would cause... life to be unhappy while working.”**

For seven years, Komol Khamnikom has been working as a trackwork technician for Siemens in the Bangkok Mass Transit System, commonly known as the BTS Skytrain. She recalls:

*“Before working for Siemens, I worked as a train cleaner. Siemens Management saw me and suggested that I should take an exam. And the reason I work for Siemens is because I want to have a secure job and receive a high salary to look after my family.”*

As a trackworker, she ensures the equipment's service activity, including installation and maintenance. She says,

*“No more than eight people are working in the team daily. We are swamped every day. If we grind the rails and do welding, we do not have time to talk to each other because we work with limited time. We have to finish the job on that day. Because if we don't finish the job, trains won't be able to run, and there will be problems to follow later.”*

Komol is very satisfied with the sanitary conditions at her workplace.

*“There are lockers - shower rooms, toilets, everything. It is all well equipped with facilities. There are many toilets and shower rooms – there are about ten shower rooms. These are sufficient. Everyone has their locker. Shoe racks, everything. They provide everything - everywhere is well-equipped. There is also a cleaner who keeps everything clean.”*

Komol notes the importance of well-equipped workplace facilities *“Because if these were not well equipped when employees come to work, they would feel ‘I do not have equality. I am a worker and human, but why would you not support me with these facilities?’ If the facilities were not well equipped, this would cause working life to be unhappy.”*

As a member of the Metro and Rail Transport Workers' Union (MRTU), Komol highlights unions' roles in ensuring that workers' rights became more visible with Covid-19.

*“When there is the union, things to do with facilitating alcohol (gel), toilet cleaning, things like these, are stricter due to the Covid-19 pandemic. So, when there is a union, they play quite an active role. It is the same for the implementation of sanitation rights. Unions play a key role in ensuring decent sanitation for all workers.”*





# GINI ARISTI HARTONO

Head of train maintenance warehouse  
Jakarta, Indonesia

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## DEVELOP GENDER-RESPONSIVE SANITARY POLICY IN WORKPLACES

**“If I were to offer a solution, I would like them to build another more proper and gender-separate toilet.”**

Gini Aristi Hartono has been working in a warehouse for train maintenance in Bukit Duri Dipo in Indonesia for 12 years. For over a year, she has held the position of Head of Warehouse, where they support the operations for train maintenance.

She is satisfied with her workplace's sanitation condition though she says they don't have gender-specific toilets, making work-life difficult for them.

*“The facilities we have in the main office are pretty appropriate. All of them are new, clean and separated. There are one or two toilets on each floor. However, in this warehouse – maybe because most of the staff members are men,... only 2 out of the 150 workers are women – there is no separate toilet for female staff.”*

As women transport workers, they also consider alternative facilities.

*“Fortunately, across from the warehouse, next to the train tracks, there is a guesthouse or dormitory for the train drivers who work the morning shift to stay overnight. So, if there is no train in front of the warehouse, I use the toilets in the guesthouse. However, if there is a train on the track, I have to use the common toilet. So, we have to check it first.”*

She highlights the importance of gender-specific toilets.

*“There are only four toilet rooms near the vicinity, and two are bathrooms. So, if I were to offer a solution, I would like them to build another more proper and gender-separate toilet.”*

Gini says unions are essential to improve sanitation conditions at workplaces.





# VIKAS KSHATRIYA

**Metrorail senior engineer  
Jaipur, India**

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## **CLEAN DRINKING WATER AND SANITATION ARE ESSENTIAL TO EVERY PERSON'S LIFE**

**“The fact that, in this century, workers have to pay for accessing safe and drinkable water!”**

Vikas Kshatriya works as a senior engineer in Capon Metrorail Cooperation in Jaipur, India. He has held the position of president at Jaipur Metro Workers Union since 2016.

Before the union, Vikas says the workers experienced many problems such as wage rates, leave, promotion, and lack of proper sanitation facilities.

*“But after the union was founded, we started advocating for these. Many of those problems have been solved. Promotions are being done right now.”*

However, Vikas says the lack of decent sanitation facilities remains the most significant workplace problem.

*“As a union, we worked to identify major problems related to workplace sanitary conditions. So we have identified three main problems: lack of safe and clean drinking water, poor conditions of existing washrooms, and lack of sanitary equipment.”*

Vikas says that although Metro management provides water for workers, it is not clean and safe to drink for human health.

*“The Metro Management has provided water, but they are not working. The problem is that BIS on that water is not drinkable water. Therefore, all the staff have started a temporary solution: they buy water independently and purchase water canes. This problem still exists because workers have to pay to access safe and drinkable water.”*

Vikas says the poor conditions of existing sanitation facilities are equally concerning for metro workers.

*“The problem is there is no differentiation. Both washrooms are common for all. Washrooms are not cleaned. Housekeeping staff clean it regularly, but it should be done frequently. There is not enough equipment for hand cleaning – soap needs to be provided.”*

Vikas highlights the importance of union activities to improve sanitation conditions at workplaces.

*“As Jaipur Metro Workers Union, we have raised our voices. We agitated about our demands to improve sanitary conditions. For instance, during Covid-19, we raised our demands to ensure health and safety conditions for workers, then the organisations began providing sanitary equipment due to our efforts, due to our agitation.”*







# RINKU SHARMA

Ola and Uber Driver  
Mumbai, India

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## TOILET BREAKS ARE A BASIC NECESSITY

**“We drink less water and mostly face the problem of diabetes because there is no time for meals.”**

Rinku Sharma has worked as an Ola and Uber driver for five years. She works at the international airport with 200 women transport workers, mainly drivers of trucks, auto vehicles and rickshaws.

Rinku says they are satisfied with the airport's sanitary conditions:

*“The big washrooms, bathrooms, and clean toilets. The airport has all these things. We feel good when we are at the airport. But when we start driving, we face many problems regarding toilets because we cannot go to the washroom for eight hours.”*

She says the number of public toilets is inadequate to meet their needs.

*“The government provides washrooms, but they are unavailable in many places. They are not clean, and they are closed evenings. So public toilets are not our favourite option to use. Even if we find one, we need to pay 10 Rupees to use the toilets. If we use the washroom, then we have to pay for it. Even sanitary napkins are not free. You have to put a coin, and only then will you get that sanitary napkin. You get nothing without money.”*

Rinku says lack of access to sanitation has a harmful impact on their health.

*“We are in traffic all day. We drink less water and mostly face the problem of diabetes because there is no time for meals. We wait seven or eight hours to go to the toilet. We have to control ourselves and hold on to it during this time. Many women who have delivered babies have had an operation, so the doctor told them they could not hold it for many hours. Those women get so much pain in their stomachs after going to the washroom.”*

Like her colleagues, Rinku often drives to petrol stations to use the bathroom.

*“We mostly use the ones at the petrol pump. The bathrooms are not so clean. There is a washroom for ladies; I don't know why they mostly keep it locked, so we have to use the gents' washroom. That gives a bad feeling. And like when we cannot hold it anymore, it is all about holding it in, only sometimes we also have to go to the gents' toilet.”*

Rinku demands that public washrooms be free for all women, including women transport workers. She says:

*“My request for the Indian government is that washrooms and sanitary napkins be free for women. Also, new washrooms should be built to ensure that washroom facilities are everywhere and accessible.”*

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# ANGELA RANSOME

Bus driver  
Ontario, Canada

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## ACCESS TO SANITATION FACILITIES FOR ALL!

**“If we have a bus stop, there must be a bathroom facility.”**

Angela Ransome has been a bus driver since 2014 and is a member of UNIFOR (43 local), Canada’s largest private-sector union. Angela says she is passionate about her job.

*“I can drive anything, I like driving for a living, I like to have my office as windows and view, and I am moving under nice weather and sometimes under bad weather. I love doing what I do.”*

She says, however:

*“The facilities sometimes are not favourable, I’ll be honest. We used to have his and hers toilets five years ago, but someone complained because males began using the ladies’ washrooms. Male workers use the women’s toilet because they only have a few minutes to get off the bus and go to the toilet quickly. After the complaints by women workers, the company management decided to make all toilets unisex. From a female perspective, sharing the washroom with men is unsafe and dirty. We have to wipe the seats before we use them.”*

She describes access to sanitation facilities as the biggest challenge for transport workers.

*“The lack of sanitation facilities at terminals is a big problem for bus drivers. Sometimes there are no washrooms even made available to us.”*

Accessing the toilets while on the route is another concern for workers.

*“We cannot go to the washroom if our schedule is too tight, and sometimes there is no facility; You go to washrooms, there are no washrooms to use. So, it is better to sit and wait. Especially leaving the passengers on the bus and going to the toilet can cause problems. Most of the time, passengers do not appreciate it if you leave the bus on your road. Sometimes they don’t see us as being human and having needs. They don’t know I haven’t gotten out of the seat because of traffic jams, winter, or buses running late. They don’t know I have been running the bus for hours.”*

Angela says bus drivers often could not move from their seats for five hours.

*“We usually get a break and do the second part to complete the working hours. But there have been times when I have been driving for five hours 45 minutes. I could not get out of my seat. Because I was too busy, too behind, and I had angry customers.”*



She highlights that even considering the need for a toilet while driving the bus and finding a suitable facility is a stress factor.

*“When you are thinking, ‘oh my goodness I have to go use the washroom’; it will make you want to use it more. Nobody wants to have an accident at work, especially as an adult; it is embarrassing and should not be happening.”*

As a member of the union’s health and safety committee, Angela works closely with the union to improve working conditions. According to Angela, the first step for ensuring access to decent sanitation facilities *“is to build sanitation facilities at all bus stops. We have terminals. So, if we have a bus stop, there must be a bathroom facility. As a union, we are responsible for securing this right and improving workers’ conditions.”*



# KRISTA LEE HANSON

Transit bus operator  
Vancouver, Canada

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## ACCESS TO SAFE AND CLEAN SANITATION IS A FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHT

**“There is no running water in toilets, so one cannot wash their hands. Sometimes it is clean, but often it is not. It is cold and stinky. That is our official bathroom!”**

Krista Lee Hanson has worked as a public transit bus driver in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, for 17 years. As a proud member of UNIFOR local 111, she says bus drivers often face challenges in accessing sanitation on the way.

*“The office workers’ building has no issues with the bathroom facilities. They have a range of facilities, like male and female separate bathrooms. But when I take my bus to East, one of my routes, I need to find a coffee shop to access the washrooms.”*

She says:

*“Technically, the coffee shop is one of my official washrooms; it is on one bus stop. But they have only one bathroom. Sometimes there is a long line. Sometimes the bathroom is closed. I might have people on my bus.”*

For her, finding a proper toilet while passengers are waiting on the bus is also very stressful.

*“If you work in an office and need to go to the bathroom, you know where the bathroom is and are free to go. Even in a factory, you know where the bathroom is.”*

The situation for transport workers, on the other hand, is different.

*“I may be an hour and a half away from the bathroom, and maybe, there is a train and buses not moving, so I am two hours from the bathroom. Or I may get somewhere, and the bathrooms are closed, and that is the only bathroom on my road.”*

She mentions how they developed the list of available bathrooms to access when they need them.

*“We all have a list on our hands. Where else do I drive by? Where else can I go? Are coffee shops there, fast-food restaurants? There is a little coffee, ok, maybe if you go and buy something to let me use the bathroom. As workers, we build these maps in our hands.”*

Krista Lee says bus drivers usually have a ten-minute break to use the bathrooms when they come to terminals.



*"In 10 minutes, first, I park the bus, then walk to Portia Potti bathroom by the end of the road. It is across a big parking lot. I have a key that is a special key for bus drivers."*

She underlines that a portable toilet has deplorable conditions and does not meet their needs.

*"There is no running water in toilets, so one cannot wash hands. Sometimes it is clean, but often it is not. It is cold and stinky. That is our official bathroom!"*

Krista Lee also worries about her safety and the safety of other workers, as they do not feel safe going and using the portable toilets in the parking area.

*"It is across this parking area. It is, right now, 5 am, and this is when I am going to work. It is dark; it is not safe. I always go to the bathroom when I get to the garage. Because if you see a bathroom, you go to the bathroom in our sector. But it is winter now. It is darker now, so it is not safe."*

Krista Lee thinks the collective bargaining agreement is a powerful tool to improve sanitation rights

*"We have language in our collective bargaining agreement that says we must have warm running water and soap. Like this, we need clear and precise language in collective bargaining agreements to ensure access to decent sanitation facilities for all public transport workers."*





# TAJ SALAM

**Bus driver  
London, United Kingdom**

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## WATER AND SANITATION ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

**“We need a constant fight to improve sanitary conditions for drivers.”**

Taj Salam has worked as a bus driver for over 35 years in London. He is an elected trade union branch secretary and the National Industrial Sector Committee chair for passenger transport for Unite the Union. He also holds the vice chair position on the ETF (European Transport Workers' Federation) Urban Public Transport Committee.

Taj says that even though they have sanitation facilities at workplaces, they are not adequate to meet the needs of workers.

*“We do have separate toilets. We have a female, male and an accessible toilet. However, do they meet our needs? I would say they do for the female or the women's toilets because there are only several female drivers. As for the male toilets, I would say they are not adequate. Because, for example, we have three or four cubicles for 400 people. It's just not adequate.”*

The number of locker rooms is also inadequate, considering the number of workers who need to use them.

*“There are some locker rooms for the engineering staff and drivers. But the locker rooms for drivers are minimal. We only have about 90 lockers for 400 people. So people are always putting their names on a list to see if a locker becomes available.”*

Taj says going to the toilet could be difficult as they are in a vehicle.

*“Sometimes it's difficult to go to the toilet, even in the bus stations when we come in. There are many restrictions by employers and bus station management. We have to inform somebody. Somebody has to look after our vehicle. We have to make the vehicle secure. If we have just come into the bus station and picked up at the last bus stop, and go through the bus station to another destination, we have to take all the passengers off the bus to ensure that the bus is secure. Sometimes people overlook that and hold their bladder, which greatly affects their health and mental status. They even develop prostate issues.”*

Taj adds:

*“We need a constant fight to improve them. Regarding the toilet facilities, Unite the Union, my union, has had a campaign on the right to toilet breaks for about five or six years. You may have seen it on the side of buses. We've also put on buses, and that is to say that the drivers are suffering from a lack of sanitation facilities. So, therefore, we call on the government, we call on the employers, we call on the federations, and, you know, on the union to make sure that they don't forget this. This is a very, very important part for our drivers.”*

Taj says trade unions need to ensure free access for drivers to public toilets.

*“For the urban public transport, most public toilets opened in the country have been shut down by the local councils or governments. For those that are still available, you have to pay for that. We ask the union to ensure they get free access to any toilets whenever they negotiate with local governments or authorities. That is the most important thing that we have. Instant and free access to toilets.”*

He thinks that all unions should work together to improve the sanitation conditions of workers.

*“The unions have to recognise there's a problem in access to decent sanitation facilities. They've got to be active on it, and they've got to campaign vigorously, even with other unions. Not just one union but other unions also, to ensure that all unions are fighting under the banner of TUC or ITF, whoever they are. Because it's a problem for all their members, not just one particular section of the workers.”*



# ANNEX

## INTERVIEW GUIDING QUESTIONS

Date of the interview:	
Place of the interview:	
Start time of the interview:	
End time of the interview:	

Name- Surname	
Male/Female	
Age	
Sector	
Occupation	
Country	
Affiliated union	
Contact Information	

01. Could you introduce yourself? (How long have you been working in urban public transport?)  
(Ice-breaking question before recording)
02. Can you describe your typical workday in your current role? (Ice-breaking)
03. How satisfied are you with the sanitary conditions at your workplace (e.g., toilets, locker rooms)? Do they meet your needs? (The researcher will elaborate on that question to collect workers stories of problems, effects of issues on their life, health, etc.)
04. What are the challenges to the lack of safe access to decent sanitation facilities?  
(The researcher will elaborate on that question to collect different experiences/issues/impacts for urban public transport workers linked to sanitation.)
05. How can we ensure access to decent sanitation facilities for all public transport workers?  
What have unions done to address the sanitation problems?
06. What do you want to say about the impact of Covid-19 on access to decent sanitation facilities?



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49-60 Borough Road  
London SE11DR  
+44 (0)20 7403 2733