

BRIEFING 1

Why C190 and R206 are important for transport workers

Taking action to end violence and harassment in the world of work requires a good understanding of the most important issues for transport workers, particularly for women transport workers.

This transport specific toolkit on C190 – the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) violence and harassment convention – consists of eight briefings which focus on aspects of violence and harassment that affect transport workers most significantly.

The briefings are available as separate documents, so that unions, officials, activists and members can focus on the issue or issues most important to them. Briefings can be hand-picked or the toolkit can be used in its entirety.

You are commencing **Briefing 1: Why C190 and R206 are important for transport workers.**

Understanding the issues

Transport workers are exposed to a high risk of violence and harassment because of the nature of their work. Workers on ships and aircraft find themselves in remote and isolated locations. Workers on buses, trains and taxis may frequently work alone. Many transport workers work at night or early in the morning, and handle cash. Transport workers frequently face violence and harassment from passengers, colleagues, managers, supervisors, members of the public, authorities and vehicle owners.

Women transport workers are disproportionately affected. This is because violence and harassment is an abuse of power and is exacerbated by inequality. Women’s inequality in society and specifically in the labour market, compounded by gender stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes, increases their exposure to violence and harassment. Intersectional discrimination leads to a greater risk of violence and harassment.

An ITF survey in 2018 found that 90% of women workers were aware of some form of sexual harassment in their workplace.³ A study by the

European Transport Workers’ Federation (ETF) in 2017 also revealed shocking levels of violence and harassment against women in the European transport industry. 63% of the respondents had experienced at least one recent act of violence, and 25% believed violence against women to be a regular occurrence in the transport sector.⁴

Violence and harassment at work negatively impacts workers’ health, wellbeing and dignity, and threatens equality, mobility and decent work. It is also a barrier to women working in the transport industry. The threat of violence and harassment stops women from applying to work in transport. Those who do are discouraged from staying in the sector if they feel unsafe, or worse still, experience violence or harassment.

These factors have also led to **systemic exclusion of women from decent jobs**

The fact that women usually have lower paid and precarious jobs has been shown to increase their risk of violence and harassment.

Factors leading to systemic exclusion of women from decent jobs



Working alone and in isolation



Handling money or valuable cargo



Commute to and from work



Adequate sanitation facilities



Informal or working in precarious conditions



Changes in the world of work



Psychosocial hazards and risks

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.”⁵

This imbalance in women’s access to transport jobs means that women’s concerns and safety needs are often ignored in the design of transport services, increasing women’s exposure to violence and harassment when using and working in transport. Transport workers, particularly women workers, are targeted to such an extent that violence and harassment has become normalised in the transport industry. The ETF survey also found that 26% of respondents believed harassment to be simply “part of the job”.⁶

Women are often afraid to report violence and harassment or are blamed when they do (known as victim blaming). Often employers have no policy to deal with violence and harassment which means that violence and harassment is underreported, and many women suffer in silence.

Transport workers are frequently exposed to violence and harassment from third parties, including customers, passengers, members of the public, authorities and vehicle owners.

“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, Sweden⁷

Working alone and in isolation – for example, at night, on a ship, at quiet times and on routes where crime is common and particularly when **handling money or valuable cargo** – exposes workers to an increased risk of violence and harassment.

Many transport workers work irregular or unsociable hours when public transport is limited, and employers rarely provide safe and accessible transportation to and from work where needed. This exposes workers to violence and harassment on their **commute to and from work**.

*“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.”
- Woman Ticket Seller, Colombia⁸*

Many transport workers also do not have **adequate sanitation facilities** at work. Poorly sited toilets in unsafe places, lack of separate toilets for women or no toilets at all often result to exposure to violence or the threat of violence (including gender-based violence such as rape, sexual harassment and offensive graffiti). This is a daily reality for transport workers and adds to their fear, vulnerability and stress, particularly women transport workers and also impacts their health dignity.⁹

“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.” – Woman Bus Conductor, India¹⁰

Many of the world’s transport workers are **informal or working in precarious conditions**, with women overrepresented in the most precarious forms of informal work. Precarious employment and informality increase exposure to all types of violence and harassment, particularly sexual coercion.

“I was asked for sexual favour from my superior and when I refused, he insulted me saying that “don’t pretend to be so moral, I know women from your caste are easy.” – Woman Transport Worker, India¹¹

Changes in the world of work including restructuring and privatisation have contributed to a rise in informal, precarious and non-standard forms of employment (NSFE) including outsourcing, contract work and gig economy work. This has eroded workers’ rights and working conditions, leading to inadequate safety measures, greater difficulty for workers to report incidents, and a lack of clarity around who is responsible for workers’ safety which has increased the risk of violence and harassment.

“I will give you a bigger percentage if you sleep with me’, the driver told me.” – Woman Taxi Conductor, Uganda¹²

Transport workers also face **psychosocial hazards and risks** that expose them to violence and harassment. These include anything in the design, management or organisation of work that could cause psychological harm or stress such as:

- Inadequate reporting procedures and policies.
- Limited security measures and understaffing (for example, workers are forced to act as security guards with passengers) and a lack of physical protection measures such as panic buttons, protective screens and CCTV.
- Working environments where workers are forced into aggressive competition with each other.

“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.” – Woman train host, Thailand¹³

The male-dominated reality of the transport sector is also a factor in why women transport workers are disproportionately affected by violence and harassment. In many countries, women are underrepresented in the industry, and it is still considered by many as ‘no place for women’.

“One day, when I was using the men’s toilet, since there was no specific one for women, a colleague opened the door from the outside. Many colleagues had access to the toilet’s keys. I reported my sad experience to my male colleague. I said that I would use the airport’s passenger toilets that have separate facilities for men and women, for as long as the company did not provide a toilet for women workers. Until this time, I had felt that he saw me as his colleague. Then he patted me on the shoulder and said, “Love, for you to stay here, you’re going to have to learn to pee standing up. This is a man’s place!” – Woman aircraft marshaller, Brazil¹⁴

Violence and harassment are frequently used to signal opposition to women working in a ‘man’s world’ in roles that are not traditionally ‘female’ or in senior positions. The concentration of women in precarious, lower paid and lower status roles in the industry means that women have less power and access to leadership positions, generating a climate for abuse of power, leading to violence and harassment. Women have limited protection and employers often dodge accountability for worker safety.

“It’s difficult to prove workplace violence, it happens in areas where there are no cameras, and is a ‘he said, she said’ situation. And the man is often in a position of power.” – Woman transport worker, Norway¹⁵

How C190 can help

C190 recognises that violence and harassment is incompatible with decent work and is a threat to equal opportunities for all.¹⁶ The link between violence and harassment and **systemic exclusion of women from decent jobs** is also referenced.¹⁷

The **Preamble of C190** states: *“Recognising that violence and harassment... prevent persons, particularly women, from accessing, and remaining and advancing in the labour market”*.¹⁸ Women’s disproportionate exposure to violence and harassment affects women’s participation in jobs in transport.

Violence and harassment is defined as a range of behaviours and practices (**Article 1, C190**). This is important for transport workers because the forms of violence and harassment they frequently face are generally dismissed and normalised as less extreme forms of intimidation and harassment. But these forms of violence and harassment take place over extensive periods as part of an escalating cycle of violence and can have equally devastating effects.

C190 takes a gender-responsive approach and includes gender-based violence and harassment (**Article 1, C190**). Women transport workers are disproportionately affected by violence and harassment because transport is a male-dominated sector, defined by unequal power relations.

All workers are covered by the convention, including in the informal economy and in private sectors (**Article 2, C190**). Many of the world’s transport workers are informal. The transport sector is also facing increasing privatisation, which has led to an increase in NSFE, defined by precarious work arrangements and avoidance of accountability for worker safety. These conditions expose workers to violence and harassment. The Convention has a broad scope, covering public and private spaces (**Article 3, C190**). Public spaces are the physical workplace for many transport workers.

Commuting, work-related trips and travel and sanitation are included as part of the world of work (**Article 3, C190**). Many transport workers work irregular or unsociable hours when transport to travel to and from work is limited or not operating. Employers rarely provide safe and accessible transport to and from work where needed, meaning

workers often face violence and harassment on their commute to and from work. For many transport workers, their workplace is mobile and may also be their accommodation (e.g., maritime, trucking, rail, bus, civil aviation). Many transport workers also lack safe access to clean toilets, which puts their health and safety at risk. For many transport workers, this problem is amplified because their workplace is a public place.

Third party violence is acknowledged and included (**Article 4, C190**). This is significant for transport workers as many transport workers are in workplaces where their work circumstances expose them to increased risk of violence from third parties – including from customers, passengers, members of the public, authorities and vehicle owners.

C190 highlights the importance of taking an *‘inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach.’* (**Article 4, C190**). Women’s empowerment needs to be at the heart of the solution. This includes removing barriers for women’s employment and addressing **systemic exclusion of women from decent jobs**. This is vital for women transport workers, because gender-based violence and harassment contributes to **systemic exclusion of women from decent jobs** in the transport sector.

Transport is recognised as one of the sectors in which exposure to violence and harassment is more likely (**Paragraph 9, R206**).

Domestic violence is recognised as a world of work issue. This is a breakthrough as the impact of domestic violence can spill over into the world of work. Unions can negotiate for employers to take measures to support those affected by domestic violence (**Article 10, C190**).

The Convention gives governments, employers, and trade unions responsibilities to deal with violence and harassment at work. Governments should adopt laws, regulations, and policies. Employers and trade unions should address violence and harassment through workplace policies, collective bargaining agreements and occupational safety and health (OSH) management. R206 gives more detailed guidance.

Unions should make sure these important aspects of C190 for transport workers are properly integrated into negotiations for its implementation at the national and local level.

Strengthening women's employment and equal opportunities in urban public transport

In 2019, the ITF and the International Association of Public Transport (UITP) signed a groundbreaking joint agreement to strengthen women's employment and equal opportunities in public transport. The agreement provides a comprehensive framework which can be used by employers and unions to negotiate equality measures in workplaces.

The agreement presents practical recommendations in nine areas, one of which

is 'health and safety at work'. The practical recommendations for addressing violence and harassment include:

- A clear process and guidelines for reporting violence against women.
- Training on violence against women for workers and management.
- Implementation of practical measures to address violence at work.
- Implementation of women's advocacy programmes in workplaces.
- Consideration of safety when travelling to and from work and what measures would be appropriate.

Read the [ITF/UITP Positive Employer Gender Policy](#).



ACTIVITY TO ENCOURAGE UNION ACTION

Facilitator notes

Aim

The aim of this activity is to encourage participants to understand why C190 is important for transport workers, and to consider how it can be used to take union action in campaigns and negotiations with stakeholders at different levels.

Tasks

This activity is in two parts.

Part 1: Organise participants into small groups. Ask them to consider the questions and write down their thoughts.

Part 2: Ask participants to read the briefing 'Why C190 and R206 are important for transport workers', then ask each group to draw a table with three columns and discuss the questions of the activity, noting down their answers in the appropriate column. Ask each group to report back on their discussion.

For more information see the 'Joint Global Union Toolkit':

- For more information on violence and harassment see Section 1.1, 1.3, 1.5.
- For more information about concrete action points that unions can take see Section 2.

Activity

Aim

This activity will help to better understand why the adoption of C190 is important for transport workers. It will also help us to consider how we can use C190 and R206 as tools in lobbying governments and negotiating with employers.

Tasks

Part 1

Working in small groups, consider the following questions based on your experience and union's activities:

- Do workers in your workplace or sector frequently face violence and harassment?
- What forms of violence and harassment are workers being exposed to?
- Has the union taken up the issue?
- If so, what action have they taken? If not, why not?

Note down your responses to the questions and then feed back to the group.

Part 2

Draw a table with three columns. Label the columns **raising awareness, negotiating with employers and lobbying governments for ratification and legislation**. Read the briefing and consider the following questions based on your experiences and union needs. Write your ideas in the appropriate column.

- What are the most important parts of C190 for your union and members?
- What elements of the Convention should be emphasised in a campaign?
- How might you use the Convention to educate your members and raise awareness of these issues?
- How might you use the Convention when negotiating with employers? What parts might be useful in workplace policies, collective bargaining, other agreements in the world of work or your union's workplace occupational safety and health agenda.
- How might you use the Convention in your campaigns or negotiations with governments?

Present your ideas back to the group.

Useful resources

- Joint Global Union Toolkit on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work and ILO Convention 190 and Recommendation 206 – download the [Facilitator Guide](#) and [Activity Workbook](#)
- [ILO Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment](#)
- [ILO Recommendation 206 on Violence and Harassment](#)
- [ITUC FAQs on Convention 190 and Recommendation 206](#)
- [ILO Transport Policy Brief 2013: Women in the Transport Sector](#)