

## BRIEFING 2

# Third-party violence

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 2: Third-party violence**.

## Understanding the issues

Third-party violence is violence and harassment committed by perpetrators outside an organisation. For transport workers, this includes customers, passengers, members of the public, authorities, and vehicle owners.

*“One day I was operating the light train, and one male user was very upset because the service ended up one station before the final terminal. [...] many announcements were made in every station but this man did not pay attention.... He was yelling at me, very aggressive, I should say, so I kind of ran and went to the operation cabin. Next day, a male worker told us a similar story, the same man, but this time he was not that aggressive. Anyway, the day after that, a female operator was punched on her face by the same man. The only difference was that I ran to the cabin, but instead, she stayed there in front of him trying to give him explanations...” – Woman train driver, Mexico<sup>19</sup>*

Bus drivers, ticket sellers, taxi drivers, conductors and cabin crew frequently report physical, verbal and sexual violence and harassment from passengers, customers and members of the public. Many workers — particularly informal workers — also face violence and harassment from public authorities, including the police.

A 2017 survey by the European Transport Federation (ETF) found that almost half of sexual violence and harassment experienced by women transport workers was perpetrated by customers.<sup>20</sup>

*“The worst I’ve ever experienced is having a guy shout at me in front of a carriage full of passengers he hoped that I would die and that I would get raped. Over and over. This then followed by him calling me every swear word he could think off. Just because I told him his ticket was [invalid]...For a few weeks after, I was scared to go on that route again.” — Railway worker, UK<sup>21</sup>*

For many transport workers, third-party violence and harassment have become normalised because of the frequency, because of the pervading idea that the ‘customer is always right’, and because employers do little in the way of prevention.

*“Verbal aggression is a weekly occurrence; unfortunately, you get used to it. It really happens a great deal. I have become hard. Ten years ago, it affected me deeply in my soul. Now I laugh about it. I try to commiserate with aggressive people. An established customer found it necessary to target me for two years and regularly called me names. It is very tiresome. When he began talking about me with my co-workers, I finally lodged a complaint with my line manager.” — Road Transport Worker, Belgium<sup>22</sup>*

Psychosocial hazards and risk factors can also increase the risk of third-party violence. Risk factors in the transport sector include overcrowding, disruptions, delays and cancellations and the stress of commuting. Additionally, gender-stereotypes

and myths can give perpetrators the idea that they have a right to be violent or threatening.

The risk of third-party violence is greater where transport workers are responsible for selling or checking tickets, handling money or stopping fare evasion or dodging. Reports suggest that passengers frequently use threats and intimidation to attempt to get free rides.

*“I always get offensive remarks from passengers when I deny them to travel for free. They say things like bitch, whore, haven’t you had any dick in a while? I have even been spat at two times when denying free riders. Violence has been close when I refused. It is an intimidating atmosphere and verbal insults occur in most cases when I refuse passengers to ride for free.” — Bus Driver, Sweden<sup>23</sup>*

Transport workers frequently work alone and in isolation. Many also work at quiet times, late at night or early in the morning, in remote locations and on isolated routes and empty platforms, stations and depots. Working in these environments increases exposure to third-party violence. For examples, workers must often deal with verbally aggressive and physically violent drunk customers on late night services.

*“Several female drivers have been beaten by users with umbrellas, one even had sustained head injuries. The only thing the company did about it was tell them to go see their doctor. They are not going to adapt booths inside the buses just to protect us and let us drive.” – Woman bus driver, Colombia<sup>24</sup>*

*“We face violence and harassment from customers and passengers in Nigeria because of the social distancing measures. They will harass you, slap you, even when the lady just asks to see their ticket. Especially men will just react.” – Woman Transport Worker, Nigeria<sup>i</sup>*

Both women and men experience third-party violence, but women are disproportionately affected. **Systemic exclusion of women from decent jobs** means women transport workers are concentrated in customer and public-facing roles where third-party violence is a regular occurrence. Women transport workers frequently report sexually motivated attacks, derogatory and sexist comments, and physical and verbal abuse.

*“Usually, these incidents involve intoxicated men who become verbally aggressive if you do not take kindly to their sexual harassment. I’ve been spoken to disgustingly especially on late night trains...I feel a lot of anxiety when working on a train where there are groups of drunken men.” — Railway Worker, UK<sup>25</sup>*

Inadequate security measures and reporting procedures expose workers to an increased risk of violence and harassment, and perpetrators take this as an opportunity to inflict violence and harassment.

*“I have been spat at and screamed at by customers. Windows have been smashed or customers have tried to break into my work area or have even jumped over the counter. They often show no respect.” – Railway worker, Germany<sup>26</sup>*

Third-party violence is also a barrier to women’s employment in the transport sector.

## How C190 can help

**Convention 190 recognises that violence and harassment can come from third parties.**

*“Each Member shall adopt, in accordance with national law and circumstances and in consultation with representative employers’ and workers’ organizations, an inclusive, integrated and gender-responsive approach for the prevention and elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work. Such an approach should take into account violence and harassment involving third parties, where applicable...” (Article 4 (2), C190)*

**Recommendation 206 encourages employers to take third-party violence into account in workplace risk assessments.**

*“The workplace risk assessment referred to in Article 9(c) of the Convention should take into account factors that increase the likelihood of violence and harassment, including psychosocial hazards and risks. Particular attention should be paid to the hazards and risks that: (b) involve third parties such as clients, customers, service providers, users, patients and members of the public...” (Paragraph 8, R206)*

i). An ITF Study into the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Women Transport Workers ;Draft report

# ACTIVITY TO ENCOURAGE UNION ACTION

## Facilitator notes

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### Aim

The aim of this activity is to encourage participants to consider how the C190 and R206 language on third-party violence can be used in their local context.

### Tasks

Organise participants into small groups. Ask them to read the briefing 'Third-party violence' and then ask them to consider the questions. Based on their responses, ask them to write a set of action steps that can be taken. Ask participants to present back to the group in a plenary discussion.

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

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

## Activity

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### Aim

This activity will help you to consider how C190 and R206 can be used to take action against third-party violence.

### Tasks

Read the **Understanding the issues** and **How C190 can help** sections in the **Third-party violence briefing** then in small groups discuss the following questions based on your experiences.

- Do workers report experiences of third-party violence? If so, how frequently? What types of violence? Are particular workers or groups of workers targeted? Who are the most frequent perpetrators?
- Does your employer have a policy on third-party violence? Do you have an agreement on third-party violence?
- How can you integrate the language from C190 and R206 into your workplace policy/ies and/or other agreements that you have with employers?
- What steps can we take to integrate this language into the union agenda on occupational safety and health (OSH) including OSH and workplace policies, and identification and assessment of risks, prevention, and control measures?
- What challenges might you face? How can you overcome these challenges?
- How can your union build alliances or public support around this issue?
- How might you use the Convention to educate your members and raise awareness on third-party violence?
- How might you use the Convention when negotiating with employers?
- How might you use the Convention in your campaigns or negotiations with governments? What can your union ask for from governments?

After you have discussed these questions, in your groups come up with a set of action steps that your union can take at the workplace level, and in lobbying governments.

Present your ideas back to the group.