

## BRIEFING 4

# The commute: safe transport to and from work

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 4: The commute: safe transport to and from work.**

## Understanding the issues

Safe transport helps to ensure equal access to work opportunities for women and men. But many transport workers lack access to safe transportation to and from work and frequently face violence and harassment on their commute to and from work.

Most employers provide no transport for workers regardless of their employment status, leaving them reliant on public or private transport. Where transportation is provided by employers, it often lacks proper security measures and is reserved only for permanent workers. Workers unable to access public transport may have to hitchhike to work, putting them at greater risk of violence and harassment.

Many transport workers work long, irregular, and unsociable hours, which means they often travel to and from work when public transport is limited or not operating, and when there are few people around. For example, cleaners who work early in the morning and late at night, and ticket sellers and drivers who start/finish their shifts outside of public transport hours. Workplaces can be isolated and remote, making commutes even more difficult.

Many transport workers rely on public transport for their commute to and from work. But reports of violence and harassment on public transport are common, and women are disproportionately affected. For example:

- Six out of 10 women in Latin American cities report physical harassment on public transit systems<sup>44</sup>
- Transit and train stations account for 39% of sexual assaults against women in France<sup>45</sup>
- In Sri Lanka, 90% of women have experienced sexual harassment while taking public transport.<sup>46</sup>

The commute to work is also the workplace for public transport workers. This means that they are not just using the service, they are a part of the service. This means that they interact with members of the public and are frequently exposed to violence and harassment from third parties.

The threat of violence and harassment for women on the commute forces them to choose between an unsafe commute, paying for nearby accommodation, or sleeping in the workplace (which comes with its own risks). For example, in Nairobi, safety concerns mean that female crew often have to stay in residential areas close to where buses are parked where rent is usually high.<sup>47</sup>

*“We had issues of rape because of the pandemic – especially workers who were working late at night who had to go on empty roads and had to find their way. We have had cases where people were robbed – especially women – their tyres were slashed, and some were even raped.” – Woman Transport Worker, Nigeria<sup>ii</sup>*

*“We are often ridiculed for saying ‘no’ to night duties or late-night shifts, but what we are actually saying ‘No’ to is the unsafe working situations that put us at risk of violence. We [women transport workers] have no issues with night duties, as long as we are safe as men, and not molested and groped on our way back home from work.” – Woman transport worker, India<sup>48</sup>*

Globally, the lack of access to safe transport is a major barrier to the industry for women and perpetuates **systemic exclusion of women from decent jobs in the workforce.**

*“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.” – Woman bus rapid transit ticket seller, Colombia<sup>49</sup>*

### **Unions have developed successful **campaigns** to address violence and harassment against workers on the commute.**

In the UK, train companies are beginning to introduce ‘Driver Only Operation’ and removing security guards from trains, exposing workers and passengers to violence and harassment. The National Union of Rail, Maritime, and Transport Workers’ (RMT) ‘Support the RMT Guard Guarantee’ campaign has been campaigning to make it a requirement to have a second person on the train for passenger and worker safety.<sup>50</sup>

The Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW) ran a campaign called ‘Freedom from Fear’ which focused on improving safety for women shop workers. Union representatives worked with local employers to support women travelling to and from work late at night and early in the morning.<sup>51</sup>

In India, some companies guarantee a door-to-door ride home if the employee has to work past 8pm. Women living in the same area will often be given a shared taxi and, sometimes, a company security guard.

### **Unions have also **negotiated with local authorities** to introduce measures to tackle violence and harassment against women transport workers.**

Women-only transport has been introduced in several cities to address safety and security issues for women workers and passengers. In Mexico City, the Atenea service was introduced in 2008, offering bus services on 50 routes for women with women drivers. In Delhi, free public transport has been introduced to improve the safety and security of women.

Such measures can be effective in the short term but need to be combined with a long-term strategy to make transport truly safe for women and shift the focus away from women changing their behaviour onto perpetrators.

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

There are also opportunities for **building alliances** with passenger groups and other key workers who use public transport for the commute.

In Nairobi, the Flone Initiative (an NGO working to make transport safer and more accessible for women) has built alliances with worker and passenger groups to end violence against women in public spaces. Working with unions, including the Public Transport Operators Union (PUTON) and Matatu Workers' Union (MWU), it has carried out training for women public transport workers on how to respond to sexual violence, has organised campaigns against harassment of passengers and has developed a crowd-mapping platform where survivors can map their experiences.<sup>52</sup>

In the USA, the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) launched 'Americans for Transit', a non-profit organisation campaigning for better public transport. The organisation has built coalitions with public transport workers to demand improvements in public transport to make it safe for everyone.

## How C190 can help

**C190 includes commuting as part of the 'world of work'.**

*"This Convention applies to violence and harassment in the world of work occurring in the course of, linked with or arising out of work: ... (f) when commuting to and from work." (Article 3, C190)*

**C190 states that employers and governments must address work arrangements and risk factors that increase violence and harassment. Public authorities have responsibility for informal workers.**

*"Each Member shall take appropriate measures to prevent violence and harassment in the world of work, including:*

- (a) recognizing the important role of public authorities in the case of informal economy workers;*
- (b) identifying, in consultation with the employers' and workers' organizations concerned and through other means, the sectors or occupations and work arrangements in which workers and other persons concerned are more exposed to violence and harassment; and*
- (c) taking measures to effectively protect such persons." (Article 8, C190)*

*"Each Member shall adopt laws and regulations requiring employers to take appropriate steps commensurate with their degree of control to prevent violence and harassment in the world of work, including gender-based violence and harassment, and in particular, so far as is reasonably practicable, to:*

- (a) adopt and implement, in consultation with workers and their representatives, a workplace policy on violence and harassment;*
- (b) take into account violence and harassment and associated psychosocial risks in the management of occupational safety and health;*
- (c) identify hazards and assess the risks of violence and harassment, with the participation of workers and their representatives, and take measures to prevent and control them; and*
- (d) provide to workers and other persons concerned information and training, in accessible formats as appropriate, on the identified hazards and risks of violence and harassment and the associated prevention and protection measures, including on the rights and responsibilities of workers and other persons concerned in relation to the policy referred to in subparagraph (a) of this Article." (Article 9, C190)*

# 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 language on commute can be used in their local context.

### Tasks

Organise participants into small groups. Ask them to read the section 'How C190 can help' in the briefing 'The commute'. Ask them to imagine that they have a meeting with the employer and/or government to discuss how violence and harassment on the commute can be addressed. Their aim is to come up with key demands that address the issue. Ask them to consider the discussion questions to help frame their discussion.

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

- For further information about commute see: Section 1.1, 1.3 and 1.5.
- For further information about concrete action points that unions can take see: Section 2.

## Activity

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### Aim

This activity encourages us to consider how to integrate C190 language on commute into our collective bargaining agenda and in lobbying governments.

### Tasks

In small groups, read the briefing 'The commute'. Imagine that you are meeting with the employer and/or government to discuss measures to tackle violence and harassment that workers face on the commute. Come up with four key demands that you can take to the employer, and four key demands that you can take to the government to tackle the issue. You should also think about arguments you can use to persuade them of the need to address the issue. Read the questions and consider your own experiences to help with your discussion.

- Do workers face violence and harassment on their commute to and from work?
- What are the risk factors for violence and harassment during the commute?
- What measures can we ask employers to introduce to address these risks? *Consider for example rescheduling working hours, providing transport for workers, occupational safety and health risk assessments, mitigation measures that can be introduced and policies that can be implemented.*
- What arguments can we use to convince them? *Remember, under C190 the employer is responsible for considering the safety of the world of work regarding violence and harassment, and this includes the commute.*
- What measures can we ask from governments or local authorities? *Consider what changes can be made to existing public transport (safety/security measures such as cameras, security guards, more women workers, better street lighting, extending provision of affordable or free public transport) and what we should demand in the development of new public transport infrastructure.*
- How might we use the Convention when negotiating with employers and/or governments?
- How might we use the Convention to educate our members and raise awareness on this issue?
- How can we build alliances or public support around this issue?