

BRIEFING 5

Sanitation

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 5: Sanitation**.

Understanding the issues

Decent and safe sanitation facilities are a human right for all transport workers; they are also *“a labour right, a gender equality right, central to decent work in the global transport economy and essential to the health, safety, and welfare of all transport workers.”*⁵³

Limited access to decent sanitation affects not only transport workers’ health and dignity, but also increases the risk of experiencing violence and harassment at work.

Many transport workers work in workplaces without decent sanitation facilities provided for by the employer. Transport workers frequently report increased incidences of violence and harassment because of poor or non-existent sanitation facilities.

For many transport workers, their workplace is a public place and so they are reliant on public sanitation facilities which exposes them to third-party violence. Transport workers’ irregular and unsociable working hours also mean that public facilities are often unavailable to them.

“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, India⁵⁴

Many transport workers are mobile, working as drivers and conductors. This means they cannot easily or frequently access employer-provided facilities where they exist, especially when travelling long-distances. Mobile transport workers frequently face violence and harassment when using public facilities or using public spaces.

“We ease ourselves in a nearby bush at the destination of the border with the help of our workmates to shield us up because of the unsafe toilets within the place shared by both male and female.” – Woman transport driver, Uganda⁵⁵

Even transport workers with a fixed base find themselves facing facilities which are unsanitary.

In many parts of the world, much of the transport industry is informal - particularly for urban passenger transport, platform workers, and “last mile” delivery drivers. The informal transport industry denies workers access to basic rights including adequate sanitation facilities.

Because transport is dominated by men, there are rarely adequate facilities for women. Many facilities take no account of women’s biological needs. Often employers neglect women’s needs because

of taboos around menstrual health, hygiene and toilet access. Women transport workers may be forced to use sanitation facilities not designed for their needs, toilets may be in unsafe places, there may be a lack of separate toilets for women, or no toilets provided for women. All this puts them at greater risk of violence and harassment.

“We still have warehouses in the UK with no women’s or gender-neutral toilet. That tells us very clearly that we’re not welcome!” – Woman warehouse trucking coordinator, UK⁵⁶

Women may feel unable to use facilities that are not separate or do not offer gender-neutral individual cubicles with sufficient privacy. Women may avoid or delay using them, leading to health risks, particularly during menstruation and pregnancy. A lack of, or poorly scheduled toilet breaks makes the problem worse. Women also frequently face over-monitoring of their break times. Women may miss workdays, be disciplined for ‘performance issues’, or stop working in transport completely.

“Sometimes, I want to go to the toilet, but I haven’t finished my duty, so I have to hold it until I complete my shift. I was diagnosed with cystitis twice since working here for 18 years. It was a painful moment, I urinated blood.” – Woman train operator, Thailand⁵⁷

“Bus workers in some countries resort to using adult diapers due to lack of access to toilets. We share those shameful working conditions but can’t even afford to buy diapers.” – Woman bus conductor, India⁵⁸

If workplaces do not offer adequate sanitation facilities, or separate facilities for women, it sends a clear message to women about how they are seen in the transport industry.

“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, Brazil⁵⁹

Proper sanitation helps to improve gender equality and address violence and harassment at work

Unions around the world are negotiating for safe access to decent sanitation facilities, demanding clean, secure, and accessible sanitation facilities at depots and workplaces, and on routes at stations (not open to the public), together with regular scheduled toilet breaks. Unions have campaigned for separate facilities for men and women. ([See ITF Sanitation Charter and/or Sanitation Toolkit for examples of union action](#))

In Kathmandu, Nepal, the metropolitan administration responded to union demands from the Nepal Yatayat Mazdoor Sangh (NETWON) union and committed to building 42 free gender-responsive toilets for informal road transport workers.⁶⁰

The ITF’s [Transport Workers’ Sanitation Charter](#) offers guidance on action that should be taken by employers and governments. As a minimum, there should be:

- An appropriate number of accessible, secure and clean toilets for women and men, which are well lit inside and outside
- Good ventilation
- Lockable cubicles
- Appropriate hygiene (washing) facilities with clean water
- Affordable and appropriate menstrual hygiene products provided.

It states paid rest breaks are essential for transport workers, who should be able to access toilets when they need them during working hours — without delay, and with no loss of income.

The Charter focuses on the urgent improvements needed to protect the health and safety of transport workers. It emphasises the importance of a gender-informed approach to sanitation so that the specific issues affecting women transport workers are appropriately and adequately addressed. Unified action must be taken across all levels – global, national and workplace, and with all stakeholders – governments, employers, and investors – with implementation along supply chains. The Charter also includes examples of union action, an employers' checklist with requirements for decent sanitary facilities for transport workers, an annex on the health risks associated with lack of sanitation facilities, and an annex on the right to sanitation under international law.

The ITF has also developed a [Sanitation Toolkit](#) to support unions to implement the charter.

How C190 can help

C190 includes sanitation as part of the world of work.

- (a) *"This Convention applies to violence and harassment in the world of work occurring in the course of, linked with or arising out of work..."*
- (b) *in places where the worker is paid, takes a rest break or a meal, or uses sanitary, washing and changing facilities;" (Article 3, C190)*

C190 requires employers and governments to address work arrangements that increase the risk of violence and harassment.

"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)*

C190 requires employers and governments to take measures to identify risks and hazards in the world of work and take measures to prevent them.

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...:

- (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... (Article 9, C190)*

Recommendation 206 states that risk assessment should consider factors that increase the likelihood of violence and harassment.

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:

- (a) *arise from working conditions and arrangements, work organization and human resource management, as appropriate...*
- (c) *arise from discrimination, abuse of power relations, and gender, cultural and social norms that support violence and harassment. (Paragraph 8, R206)*

ACTIVITY TO ENCOURAGE UNION ACTION

Facilitator notes

Aim

The aim of this activity is to encourage participants to consider how the C190 language on sanitation can be used to campaign for better sanitation provisions for transport workers in their local context.

Tasks

Organise participants into small groups. Ask them to read the section on '*How can C190 help*' in the briefing 'Sanitation'. You can also provide them with examples from the ITF's Sanitation Charter, or local worker experiences to help with their discussion. Then, ask each group to draw a table with three columns. Ask them to discuss the questions and note down their answers in the appropriate column.

For more information see the '[Joint Global Union Toolkit](#)':

- For further information about sanitation see: [Section 1.1, 1.3 and 1.5](#).
- For further information about concrete action points that unions can take see: [Section 2](#).

Activity

Aim

This activity encourages us to consider how we can use C190 to campaign for better sanitation provisions for transport workers.

Tasks

Read the briefing 'Sanitation'. Then, draw a table with three columns. Label these columns **World of work**, **Government** and **Other stakeholders**. Read the questions below and discuss what key actions you might take at different levels based on your experience. Fill in your ideas in the appropriate column.

- Does your employer provide safe and decent sanitation facilities at work?
- Are there sufficient safe facilities for women to use?
- Are workers given sufficient time or breaks to use them as appropriate for specific needs of all workers — for example, women, disabled workers?
- If not, what can we ask from employers to improve them?
- How can the right to sanitation be integrated into the union agenda on occupational safety and health, and into occupational safety and health in the workplace (workplace policy, identification and assessment of risks, prevention, and control measures)?

The [ITF checklist](#) is useful to find out if employers are providing decent sanitation facilities for workers.

- What demands can we make to government?
- What demands can we make to local authorities who are responsible for public sanitation?



- Who else has the power to improve sanitation facilities? Regional inter-governmental organisations? Economic Employers? International financial institutions? What demands can we make to these organisations?
- How might we use the Convention in our negotiations?
- 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?

The [ITF Sanitation Toolkit](#) has tools to use to help in your campaigning.

Once you have finished, report your ideas back to the group.

Useful resources

- [ITF Transport Workers' Sanitation Charter with health risks, employer's checklists, international law](#)
- [ITF Sanitation Toolkit](#)