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World
Forward

**MAKE WORK SAFE:
ELIMINATING
VIOLENCE AND
HARASSMENT
AGAINST AVIATION
WORKERS**



THE INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT WORKERS' FEDERATION (ITF) IS A DEMOCRATIC, AFFILIATE-LED GLOBAL FEDERATION OF 740 TRADE UNIONS IN 150 COUNTRIES, REPRESENTING NEARLY 16.5 MILLION WORKING MEN AND WOMEN IN ALL TRANSPORT SECTORS. THE ITF PASSIONATELY CAMPAIGNS FOR TRANSPORT WORKERS' RIGHTS, EQUALITY AND JUSTICE.

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INTRODUCTION

A respectful work environment is integral to all employees and organizations. A survey of more than 3,700 individuals working in the aviation sector from around the world reveals that for 90% of them, the working conditions are deteriorating (ITF, 2022). A safe and respectful work environment which includes access to adequate sanitation facilities, safe commutes, and a harassment-free work environment is a right of every individual.

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) acknowledges that “There is growing concern from airlines, governments and passengers at the increasing frequency and severity of these incidents that involve violence against crew and other passengers, harassment, and failure to comply with safety and public health instructions [and] due to loopholes in existing international air law, such offenses often go unpunished” (IATA, nd). Although such problems have always existed, they have worsened during and since the Covid-19 pandemic. Data from the UK Civil Aviation Authority, the US Federal Aviation Authority (FAA), and the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) all point to a long-term trend of increasing frequency and severity of unruly passenger incidents (IATA, 2022). The passage of the International

Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 190 is an opportunity for affiliate members of the ITF to negotiate violence and harassment clauses in collective agreements and work towards improving safety.

Further impacting the working conditions of the civil aviation sector are concerns about safe commutes to and from work. Many aviation workers commute long distances to work, in part because living in major cities from which airlines fly has become increasingly expensive and in part because airports are often located in areas outside of city centres that are difficult or expensive to reach (Priddy, 2020). Commuting is made more difficult for the many aviation workers who need to arrive at, and leave work, at non-commuting hours, necessitating long waits for public transit or requiring workers to have access to personal forms of transportation. The time and distance involved in commuting often cause fatigue, a concern for civil aviation professionals who are responsible for passenger safety (Brown & Whitehurst, 2011). For women workers, in particular, there is the added concern of travel at night, alone, and in areas where there is insufficient lighting and security.

Finally, there is a need to consider aviation workers’ access to safe sanitation facilities.

Civil aviation workers from around the world, particularly security and customer service workers, may have limited access to appropriate toilets and have to forgo breaks until they are replaced (ITF, 2021). The ITF notes that for far too long, transport workers have been denied basics like access to toilets and washing facilities and that many employers avoid the conversation about a lack of sanitation access because such conditions are simply part of the job, a problem highlighted in ITF's Sanitation Rights Toolkit (ITF, 2022).

At their conference in September 2022, aviation affiliates of the International Transport Workers' Federation requested that information be gathered on measures that have successfully prevented, reduced, and responded to incidents of third-party violence against aviation workers, increased access to safe commuting, and improved sanitation conditions. The scope of research reflects key elements and principles detailed in ILO Convention 190 – Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No.190) which recognizes the right of everyone to a workplace free from violence and harassment and encourages Member States to develop an integrated and gender-responsive approach for prevention and elimination of violence and

harassment in the workplace including third party violence and harassment. Furthermore, C190 explicitly defines the world of work as encompassing, “places where the worker... uses sanitary, washing and changing facilities... and commuting to and from work”, among other contexts. The aim of this work is to highlight best practices to support unions seeking to address this issue in their own jurisdictions.

Findings from the study can help form the basis for developing policy, model collective bargaining clauses, and build capacity for ITF affiliates in the civil aviation industry to address these issues.

A mixed methods approach was used to understand and document best practices in reducing third-party violence and providing adequate access to safe commutes and sanitation facilities. This work included a global survey of union members representing aviation workers, followed by interviews to provide in depth information about best practice. A survey was sent to aviation union members in May of 2024. Responses were received from 221 respondents from 32 countries. A subsample of participants shared more information through an interview.

WHAT DID WE FIND?

PART 1: THIRD-PARTY VIOLENCE

What do we know?

Third-party violence and harassment refers to violence and harassment against workers that is perpetrated by someone who is not an employee, such as a client, customer, patient, pupil, or another service user. This type of violence and harassment most commonly includes verbal harassment, psychological harassment, and physical violence.

There has been growing research discussing the importance of addressing harassment and violence perpetrated by a third party (Berlingieri et al., 2023). ILO Convention 190 responds to such issues by outlining different provisions and measures to make workplaces free from harassment and violence.

A Canadian study conducted with participants working in airlines, hospitality, and the gaming sector found that third parties are one of the most common types of perpetrators of sexual harassment and violence (Berlingieri et al., 2023). Similar findings emerged from research with flight attendants in North America where the most common perpetrators were identified as passengers. Sexual harassment by clients has significant consequences for those experiencing it such as lower job and health satisfaction, more stress, less attachment to their organization, and thinking more about quitting (Węziak-Białowska et al., 2020).

What did we find?

All respondents to the survey indicated that the workers they represent experience third-party violence particularly in the form of unruly and disruptive behaviour from passengers. Some of the most common forms of behaviour experienced included shouting (70.1%), aggressive posturing (64.7%), swearing (64.3%), threats (63.3%), rude gestures (62%), name-calling (50.7%), and sexual innuendo (23.1%). Other behaviours were reported less frequently such as wounding, kicking, biting, punching, and spitting.

Well, it's hard because I've seen it's so prevalent now. It's happening everywhere. And people think that they've been given some sort of ticket to do whatever they want, whenever they want, say whatever they want.

We do have passengers who harass you, people who touch you when you don't want to be touched. People who think every flight attendant is a personal maid or servant who can be sent back and forth.

Several interview participants discussed third-party violence as a prevalent issue experienced by civil aviation workers across the globe. Examples were provided of instances of yelling, stalking, swearing, spitting on workers' faces, and grabbing their ties from across the counter among other incidents. Several interviewees mentioned that third-party violence has worsened since Covid-19.

Well, it started a little bit in 2020 summer, but then even more in 2021. It's not only the screaming. The screaming happens every day. Screaming at someone and insulting – that's normal. This is not good because people would not like to go to work because they know they will be screamed at.

What are some of the best practices related to reducing third party violence?

Almost all survey respondents (95%) identified that companies have adopted at least one measure to mitigate or eliminate third-party violence. The most common measures taken were posting signs warning passengers that harassment and violence of staff will not be tolerated (46.2%) and putting in place flight bans for passengers who harass or are violent

Figure 1. Measures Taken to Reduce Third Party Violence

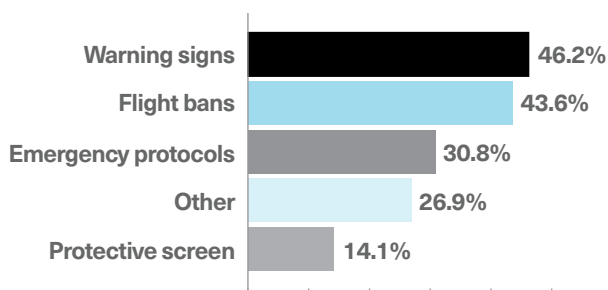
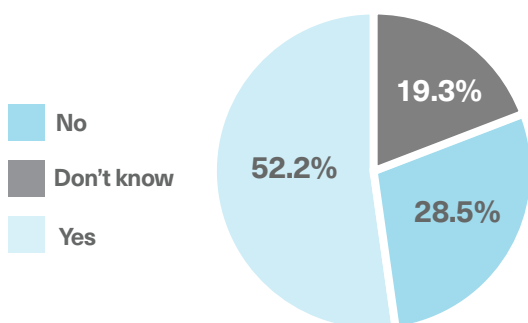


Figure 2. Inclusion of clauses about Harassment and Violence in Collective Agreements



towards staff (43.6%). Other common measures included implementing emergency protocols (30.8%) and installing protective screens (14.1%).

Additionally, over 50% of respondents indicated that collective bargaining includes clauses on harassment and violence. Respondents appreciated and valued these measures, and interviewees often commented on their importance.

As a union, our biggest contribution towards keeping employees safe from sexual harassment is a clause in our collective labour agreement which expressly prohibits discrimination and sexual harassment of any nature.

Some of the other measures highlighted in interviews included creating easy-to-remember emergency numbers that were available 24 hours a day and would alert the nearest security officer in case of an emergency. Participants also indicated that unions have exchanged information with each other to discuss what can be done to make work workplaces safe, especially for women.

The most important thing was an emergency number with four numbers. Very easy. You could call the security room... 24 hours, and they would alert the nearest officer.

Collection of and reporting on data is another important best practice in understanding and addressing third-party violence. Importantly, two-thirds of respondents (65.4%) indicated that employers do collect data about incidents of unruly, disruptive, or violent passengers, and in some cases, about actions taken after the incident and the consequences of those actions. Interviewees also highlighted their work to encourage members to speak out to report their concerns. These two measures work in tandem. Respondents shared that when data collection policies were in place, they felt

more comfortable and confident encouraging survivors of harassment and violence to report.

We encourage our members who have experienced sexual harassment to come out and speak up, because there are institutions that can help you. Talk to your line manager. Talk to somebody you trust. Come to the union. Talk to us. From there on, the employees can be channelled to the right persons for further assistance. But the first measure... must be to talk about the event. We also try to work together with other unions to find ways and means of ensuring that employees, particularly women, are safe in the workplace. We do so by exchanging ideas, best practices when dealing with sexual harassment.

Best practice highlight: **Bologna Airport**

With incidents of harassment and violence increasing, trade unions called for the commitment of all parties to address this issue. The set of actions to address third party violence in Bologna demonstrates the importance of social dialogue. To formalize a strategy, the Italian Civil Aviation Authority (ENAC) organized a meeting in early 2022 with representatives from the Bologna airport and trade unions, supported by the Prefecture of Bologna, ENAC, and law enforcement officers at the airport (State Police and Finance Police), to collaboratively develop a more effective system for managing potentially dangerous situations that could lead to aggression.

Of note are the union actions leading up to this meeting (D. Modonesi & M. Verga, personal communication, February 10, 2023). During the summer of 2021, there was a surge in physical violence by passengers against front-line workers, largely due to frustrations over Covid-19 restrictions. In response, trade unions organized a strike in October 2021 to draw attention to the issue and push for aviation worker safety to be prioritized by local institutions.

Once convened, this group committed to work together to identify solutions and remedy the situations of third-party violence and harassment experienced by the workers. As a result of these discussions, several mutually reinforcing actions were taken:

1. An agreement was established for a better system for managing crises that may lead to aggression at the airport.
2. The airport in Bologna ran a campaign to raise awareness about the need to prevent harassment aimed at passengers. They displayed informational video signs throughout the air terminal which were also shared on the airport's main social media channels to remind passengers of correct behaviour and possible penal sanctions for aggressive behaviour on the part of passengers.
3. A structured and coordinated reporting system was implemented for episodes of violence and subsequent intervention. Bologna's response system ensures that, in the event of a critical situation and violent escalation, any airport operator involved can alert the Security Control Room which is overseen by the airport's security guards. The Control Room, after recording the call in a special software system called HEELP, triggers a request for intervention by law enforcement officers, State Police, and Finance Police, who respond based on their proximity to the reported area. The patrol on duty, responsible for guarding the perimeter of the airport, is notified so that it can provide necessary support if they are in the vicinity.
4. The procedure for initiating the alert procedure in case of aggression was included in the Airport Regulations and distributed to all the airport operators, through specific communications, and published on the airport website.
5. Training was provided to staff about customer care and conflict management.

6. In 2022, the Bologna airport updated its Health & Safety Risk Assessment document to align with national Health & Safety laws, aiming for a clearer definition of the prevention and protection measures to be implemented. The updated assessment considers the risk of aggression associated with each role that involves direct contact with passengers. According to the protocol, the Bologna Airport and the trade unions will meet biannually to review data on incidents of aggression and ensure that the procedures are being effectively applied at the airport.

The actions taken in Bologna serve as an instructive example for several reasons. They show that strike action can be effective in bring attention to a problem and in pressuring other social actors to become involved in seeking solutions. They emphasize the importance of social dialogue and demonstrate what can be achieved through collaboration among various groups to implement effective solutions. Additionally, they highlight key elements of an effective best practice response, such as recognizing workplace violence and harassment as a workplace hazard and integrating it into the occupational health and safety framework. This approach also showcases the potential impact of implementing multiple strategies to ensure a safe working environment for aviation staff.

What can be improved?

As highlighted, an important component of response to third-party violence is having a system to report incidents of third-party violence. The primary concern for improvement among survey respondents was the difficulty of reporting incidents and the potential ineffectiveness of the reporting process.

Fewer than half of survey respondents reported that making reports about third-party violence was easy to navigate and 42% indicated that reporting systems were difficult.

Survey respondents also expressed concerns about the inconsistency of consequences for individuals who behave in an unruly, disruptive, or violent manner. Respondents indicated that the consequences for third-party violence were applied either never or rarely (43.5%) or only sometimes (32.9%) by the organization. Fewer than one quarter (23.7%) of respondents reported that third-party violence was responded to consistently. Given these reports, it is not surprising that when asked if the consequences resulted in deterring the behaviour, over 50% indicated that they did not.

Interviewees shared more information about the challenges of reporting and follow-up. One interview participant expressed frustration that policies and legislation can limit the actions that can be taken to ensure the safety of civil aviation workers. For example, they are not able to take stricter actions like imposing a ban against those passengers who are causing certain types of harm, particularly harm associated with video recording and posting on social media.

You know, that recording, they're putting it on Twitter, they're putting it on Facebook. They're putting it on all these social media platforms for the whole world to see. And once it goes there, that's it. You can't put the paste back in the tube. It's out in the world forever. And that is abusive to people. I mean, people recognize your face. You're working at an airport, so that kind of stuff. That's probably the most difficult one because it's multifaceted and there are different players in it that own some of that blame.

Another participant shared how the policies dictate that in instances of harassment and violence, the burden of evidence lies with the worker who has been a victim of violence, and that the benefit of the doubt is often given to the customer.

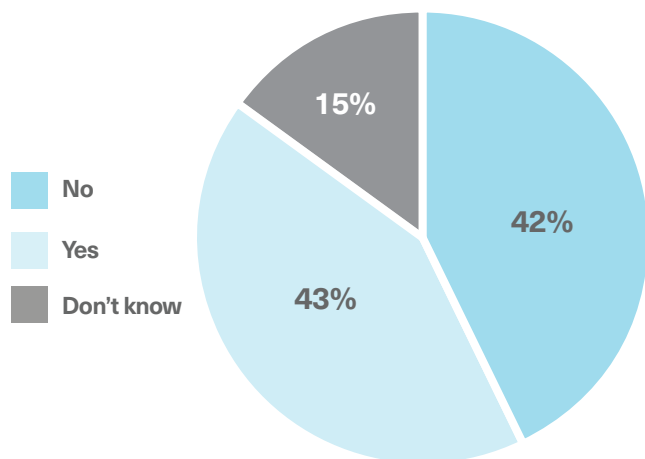
...there's no repercussions. And for a lot of times there aren't, you know what I mean? They claim that, oh, they said this to me or did this to me, but there's no proof of it. The customer's always right theory is what happens nowadays.

Given these results, a significant concern is that the lack of effective response to third-party violence could result in the normalization of these behaviours. This underscores the need for a critical analysis of the policies and legislation frameworks to ensure the safety of both workers and passengers.

Occupational Health and Safety experts have identified elements that form the foundation of robust policies that address third-party violence and ensure the safety and well-being of workers in high-risk sectors (see European Agency for Safety and Health at Work EU OSHA; 2023; Third-party Violence and Harassment; Pillinger, 2023). Policies should provide a comprehensive definition of third-party violence and harassment, including physical, verbal, and non-verbal abuse. This ensures that everyone involved understands what behaviours are unacceptable.

Conducting thorough, gender-responsive risk assessments help to identify potential threats

Figure 3: Ease of Reporting Incidents of Third-Party Violence



and mitigate risks. This is vital in customer-facing roles where third-party violence is more prevalent.

Regular training for workers, managers, and employers is essential. Training should focus on recognizing signs of third-party violence, de-escalation techniques, and proper response protocols. It's also important to raise awareness among staff about the availability of reporting mechanisms and support structures.

Effective policies must include accessible, confidential reporting systems that workers trust. When employees feel safe to report incidents without fear of retaliation or ineffectiveness, it enhances the likelihood of addressing and resolving issues.

Ensuring that there are clear and consistent consequences for perpetrators of third-party violence is also critical. This deters future incidents and reinforces the importance of maintaining a safe environment.

Psychological and practical support for workers who experience violence or harassment is necessary. Support options should include counselling services and ensuring that workers feel protected and supported after an incident.

A coordinated approach involving unions, employers, and law enforcement is often necessary to effectively manage third-party violence. Policies should foster collaboration between these groups to develop a comprehensive response system.

Finally, legislative frameworks play a crucial role by establishing the minimum standards that must be included in workplace policies. This is precisely what makes ILO Convention C190 so vital. Countries that ratify the convention commit to adapting national and regional legislation to align with its core elements and principles. In countries where C190 has not yet been ratified, unions continue to lobby governments to adopt this critical convention, aiming to protect workers from violence and harassment in the workplace.

PART 2: SAFE COMMUTE

What do we know?

Aviation workers identify their commute to the workplace as an area of concern. Long commuting hours are a norm instead of an exception for most aviation workers (Pisarski, 2006). There are several factors contributing to the long-distance commute including economic reasons. Airports are typically located near metropolitan cities, where rising costs of living often make it difficult for aviation workers to afford living nearby. Public transport to airports may not be accessible or may be expensive (Brown and Whitehurst, 2011; Pisarski, 2006). Parking at airports is also expensive. Finally, many airport workers need to commute at times when there are fewer people around such as very late at night or early in the morning which limits public transport options. This often leads to long walks through large empty and potentially unsafe parking areas when arriving at or leaving the airport.

The time spent commuting to work comes at a price, both direct (actual travel expense) and indirect (loss of time spent with the family and personal time) (Brown and Whitehurst, 2011). Commuting exerts stress on physical and mental health, and familial relationships (Schaefer, 2005). For women workers in particular, travelling alone at night, in largely deserted areas can increase the risk of sexual harassment or violence. The realities of workers' commutes should be considered, and appropriate measures should be implemented to ensure that the workers have the necessary resources to work safely and productively.

What did we find?

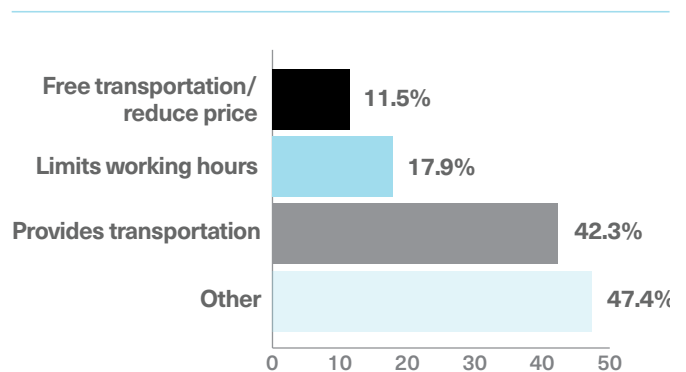
Union representatives responding to the survey were asked if the workers were provided travel assistance to and from work by their employers. Almost one third (31.7%) of respondents indicated that their organization

provides such assistance, while the remaining workers must manage their commute without support. When support was provided, it most commonly involved providing transportation, improving access to public transportation, limiting working hours, and providing free or reduced-cost parking.

Respondents expressed concern about worker safety during commutes, with over 40% reporting that their commute poses some level of risk—ranging from slight to moderate to very). In describing concerns, interview respondents spoke about the exhaustion stemming from long and uncertain commutes and the toll it took on them. They also shared stories of the kinds of safety concerns that arise for workers. For example, in the following excerpt, the interviewee discusses forms of third-party violence and how it intersects with her sense of safety travelling to and from work:

Apart from verbal and physical abuse at our workplace, we also have cases of stalking. Crew members get stalked on social media but some also get followed up after work. Such unwarranted advances can be very intimidating.

Figure 4: Measures Supporting a Safe Commute



What are some of the best practices related to commute?

Several survey respondents identified measures taken to mitigate or eliminate risks related to commutes. 42.3% of respondents reported that companies provide transportation, 17.9% indicated that companies limit working hours, 11.5% reported that the company offers free/reduced-price public transportation passes, and 47.4% reported other measures.

An example of agreements supporting safe commutes is the one implemented in Amsterdam. In June of 2022, Schiphol, FNV and CNV established a joint agreement regarding better terms and conditions of employment, including changes in support for commuting workers. One component of the agreement states:

Schiphol will agree with the relevant employers providing services on behalf of Schiphol that as soon as possible (no later than at the time of contract change) 100% of the commuting costs for all employees in operational service will be reimbursed based on Public Transport. In those cases where it is not reasonably possible to travel to work by public transport (if, for example, public transport is not sufficiently available due to working hours), employers will pay an appropriate travel expense allowance as a minimum as set out in the relevant collective bargaining agreement or employment conditions scheme or an equivalent other reimbursement scheme. This also means that in such cases, employers will provide employees with a parking space free of charge as soon as possible, at the latest when the contract changes. (Schiphol Social Agreement, June 2022)

Best practice highlight: A case of DSS Airport in Senegal

The DSS Airport in Senegal is an interesting case study in safe commuting. Significant challenges arose for workers in Senegal when the airport moved locations to 55km outside the city. With this move, getting to the airport became impossible for many workers. Public transport in Dakar is expensive and not reliable. Taking taxis could cost a worker half their salary. Clearly, commuting support was needed for aviation workers.

To address this challenge, unions advocated for the implementation of policies to support commuting. The resulting agreement ensures that commuting services are available for workers based at DSS Airport in Senegal. Each company runs its own service, and they all have their own transportation policy. Transportation is provided to all employees, regardless of their employment status, whether temporary or permanent, to and from work. Provisions include:

- Bus service from the DSS airport to Dakar and other nearby areas.
- Buses drop off along lines going to different suburbs.
- Buses drop-off and pick-up at specified points.
- Advocacy and support for the development of transportation lines based on where the workers live.
- For workers not covered by these services, taxis are provided.
- Workers receive transport allowances in support of commuting costs

These changes have facilitated the commute for aviation workers, while companies benefit from punctuality and greater predictability of worker arrival times.

What can be improved?

While some participants described their commute as safe, other interview participants discussed the lack of safer commute options, parking spaces that were not well-lit, and parking spaces being located too far away from the workplace. The lack of safety is specifically a problem for female flight attendants whose uniforms often include tight skirts and/or high heels. They also often carry luggage. These factors restrict their mobility and their ability to flee quickly if needed. An interview participant reported knowing several female flight attendants who have been assaulted on their way to work.

Travelling at night presents a particular concern. Even in Senegal, where the transportation policy is widely recognized as valuable, workers on night shifts still face challenges walking to and from pickup/ drop off points. In Senegal, unions are working to advocate for a system for door-to-door transport for night shift workers. This same concern applies to other regions and should be considered.

And if you're walking through dark terrain or parking lots with suitcase and crew luggage, you may be feeling very insecure. Your aim will be to access the office building as quickly as possible. For this reason, we tried hard to ensure that crew members could park their cars at parking lots that were better lit and closer to the office building. Regrettably, the airline was unable to effect this change because parking lots were in the jurisdiction of the airport authorities. This is very disappointing. There needs to be a rule that obliges employers to ensure the safety of their employees during their commute, irrespective of who owns the building.

Such instances warrant the need for enhanced measures to support the workers.

As noted earlier, ILO Convention C190 addresses safe commuting in its broad framework of protecting workers from violence and harassment in the world of work. According to C190, violence and harassment are not limited to traditional workplaces; they also encompass situations that occur in the course of, linked with, or arising out of work. This includes *commuting to and from work*.

This means that employers and governments have a responsibility to ensure that workers are safe not only while at work but also during their commute, which is considered part of their work environment. Therefore, measures should be taken to address risks of violence and harassment that could occur during travel to and from the workplace (EU OSHA, 2023; Pillinger, 2023).

By including commuting in its scope, C190 encourages countries to adapt their national legislation and workplace policies to protect workers from potential threats during their commute, promoting a safer and more secure working environment overall.

PART 3: SAFE SANITATION

What do we know?

Access to adequate, good quality, fit for-purpose toilets and sanitation systems should be a right for every worker. In ITF's Transport Workers' Sanitation Charter (2019) they specify that, "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, and ventilated, with lockable cubicles, appropriate hygiene (washing) facilities with clean water, with affordable and appropriate menstrual hygiene products provided. 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."

With these minimum requirements defined, the research examined the extent to which the aviation sector has taken measures to ensure access to safe sanitation.

What did we find?

Survey respondents were asked if workers had access to sanitation facilities. For most, access to safe sanitation was not a major concern, with almost three-quarters of respondents indicating that the workers they represent have access to safe sanitation facilities. Still, this leaves a full quarter of workers in conditions that are concerning and potentially unsafe.

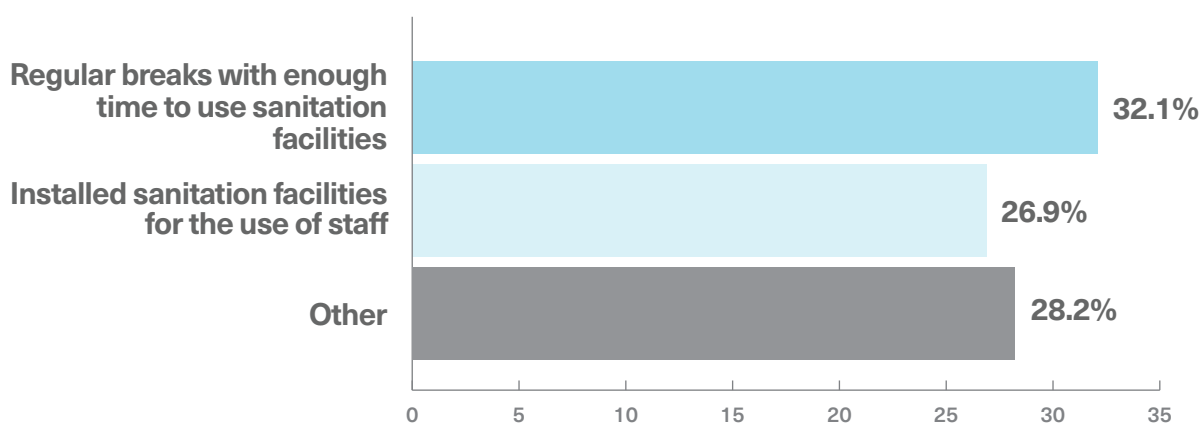
Survey respondents highlighted efforts to implement or ensure access to safe sanitation facilities. A significant 87.2% of respondents identified at least one measure related to the provision of sanitation facilities, with the most common being scheduled breaks with sufficient time to use sanitation facilities and separate sanitation facilities dedicated to staff use.

What can be improved?

While some participants acknowledged positive steps being taken to ensure access to safe sanitation facilities, several interview participants raised concerns about this access. Although these concerns, were mentioned less frequently, they remain important to consider and address.

The first area of concern was the lack of access to gender-specific washrooms leading to discomfort, especially among female workers. Interview participants shared experiences where they raised concerns about this issue with their employers but received little support or response. This lack of separate facilities is especially problematic for women in male-dominated sectors of the industry. Gender-specific washrooms are especially important for women to manage menstrual hygiene, and the absence of these facilities can reinforce stigmas associated with menstruation, perpetuating broader gender inequality.

Figure 5: Measures Related to Improved Access to Safe Sanitation



Respondents reported that difficulty accessing gender-specific sanitation facilities were exacerbated when there were disruptions to work such as construction. During these disrupted times employees of all genders may have to share one or two toilets, causing discomfort and a feeling of lack of safety. Problems of access were also present in specific work areas, such as engineering and baggage handling, where there are fewer women employees and limited or no access to gender-specific facilities. These concerns together can create a cycle where the under-representation of women employees in certain job roles results in less focus on their sanitation needs which in turn makes those work environments less attractive to female workers.

Our concern is about toilets. So, we have a bathroom in the office that we share with men. So, it's the same toilets that the men use. It's a little hard. You know, when you go in, there's urine on the toilet seat and all of that. So, it's hard.

Other concerns expressed by interviewees were around an absence of separate washrooms for employees and public/customers. Lack of separate washrooms can leave aviation workers waiting in line with the customers to use the washroom, which may mean that they do not have time to access toilets during their breaks. Interviewees noted that aviation workers are often told/expected to ask customers to allow them access without waiting in line, which can be awkward and uncomfortable for staff and can increase risk of experiencing third-party harassment and violence.

Sometimes we encounter difficulties accessing sanitary facilities during the flight, since there is no designated Toilet just for crew. Sometimes the queues for the toilet are very long, and the crew must suppress their urge for a very long time. This may result in urinary tract infection.

Finally, interviewees discussed long delays in accessing sanitation facilities associated with waiting for someone else to cover their role/ shift. Having to “hold it” for long periods of time while waiting to be relieved from one’s work duties can have significant consequences on the health of individuals and can lead to situations that compromise workers dignity (ITF, 2019).

So even if we have a pressing need, oh, even if you have to go to the washroom, you have to wait until somebody replaces you before you can leave your spot. So that could be an hour wait before somebody comes to replace you so that you can go to the bathroom.

Bangkok airport security workers have faced severe challenges regarding access to sanitation, particularly following contractual changes that worsened working conditions. After the outsourcing of airport security services to AVSEC in April 2020, workers were subjected to long shifts without toilet or lunch breaks. This lack of access led to several humiliating incidents where workers, especially women, were forced to soil themselves or hold it in, which resulted in health issues such as urinary tract infections.

Despite promises from management and Thailand’s Labour Minister to address these conditions, little progress was made. Workers continued to protest these abuses, emphasizing the violation of basic human rights and dignity. The International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF) supported these efforts, pushing for improvements such as regular toilet and lunch breaks and better working conditions for these security staff.

This struggle underscores the ongoing battle for basic worker rights at Bangkok Airport, where workers demand access to essential facilities while carrying out their duties (ITF Global).

It would be misguided to assume that access

to sanitation is only a problem for developing countries. Very recently, workers in Canada have faced this struggle. Unifor workers in the aviation sector have faced significant struggles regarding access to sanitation facilities, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath. One major issue has been the denial of access to bathroom breaks and water during work shifts, which Unifor members have protested. For instance, at Calgary International

Airport, security workers represented by Unifor Local 2002 rallied in 2024 against Paladin Security for restricting bathroom and water breaks, highlighting the critical health and safety implications of these restrictions. Workers were sometimes even threatened with disciplinary actions for attempting to take necessary breaks, which Unifor has framed as both a human rights and workplace safety issue (Unifor).

CONCLUSION

The present study included a survey addressing issues related to third-party violence, commuting and sanitation with responses gathered from representatives of aviation workers from 32 countries. Respondents provided insights into the actions their workplaces have taken to mitigate these problems, along with the outcomes of those efforts. This report highlights several best practices, including the case of Bologna where measures to combat third party violence were implemented, and the case of Dakar where measures to improve commuting were introduced.

Despite the implementation of various provisions and measures, workers still face significant challenges, including unacceptable levels of violence and harassment from third parties, such as customers; the lack of gender-responsive and staff-only washrooms; and the need for safer commuting options. The ILO Convention C190 has advocated for legislative

frameworks that strengthen policies addressing third-party violence and harassment, but we are still in the early stages of that process. Many countries have yet to ratify C190, while those that have are only beginning to review and amend their legislation to ensure alignment with the Convention.

This report aims to support ongoing union efforts to share strategies for addressing these challenges and improving the working conditions of aviation workers. The research clearly demonstrates that these challenges are not confined to any particular employer or region; they are shared globally by workers and unions alike. Similarly, the strategies presented here are universally applicable, regardless of location. Fundamental tools such as collective bargaining, the right to strike, and engaging in social dialogue with employers, governments, and other relevant institutions can be effectively used to tackle the outlined challenges and enhance workers' well-being.

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ANNEX – METHODOLOGY

What did we do?

A mixed methods approach was used to understand and document best practices in reducing third-party violence and providing adequate access to safe commutes and sanitation facilities. This work included a global survey of union members representing aviation workers, followed by interviews to provide in depth information about best practice.

In the survey, participants were asked to report on level of concern about issues related to third-party violence, sanitation, and commutes. They were further asked about measures and initiatives taken to mitigate the problems they face, and to reflect on the success of these efforts.

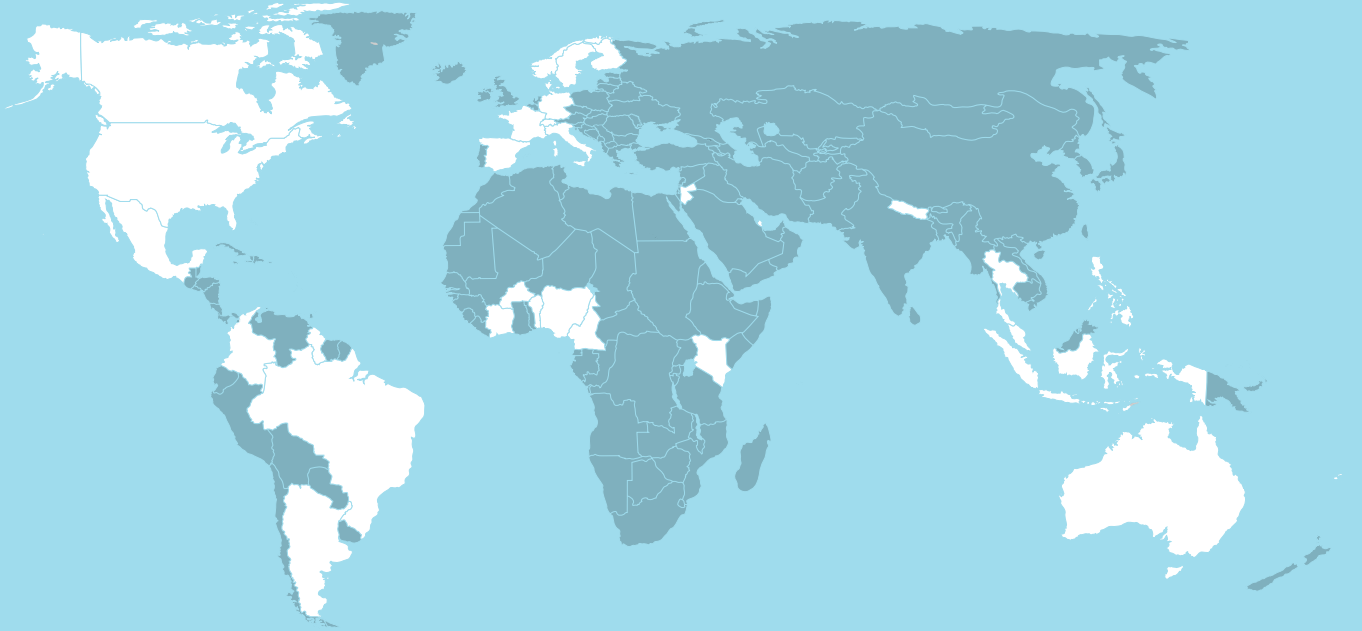
A sub-sample of participants agreed to be interviewed to share more detail about initiatives pursued by their union and/or workplace. These interviews aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the best practices and measures related to mitigating the risk of third-party violence and providing access to adequate sanitation facilities and safe commutes.

Who took part?

A survey link was sent through ITF to aviation union members who represent employees working in the civil aviation sector in different capacities in May of 2024. Responses were received from 221 respondents from 32 countries.

We also conducted formal interviews with eight survey participants and had more informal discussions with several others who shared additional information about their experiences of these issues and work done by their unions to promote change. These informants were from many different countries and represented different workforce including security personnel, customer service roles, cabin crew members, and many more.

Survey responses by country



ARGENTINA
AUSTRALIA
BAHRAIN
BENIN
BRAZIL
BURKINA FASO
CAMEROON
CANADA

CABO VERDE
COLOMBIA
CÔTE D'IVOIRE
DENMARK
FIJI
FINLAND
FRANCE
GERMANY

GUYANA
INDONESIA
ITALY
JORDAN
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