

International Transport Workers' Federation Women's Development Programme

Increasing activism among women transport workers

Stage 1

Component	Title	Timing
One	Barriers to recruiting women	60 minutes
Two	Barriers to activism	45 minutes
Three	Increasing women's participation	30 minutes
Four	Gender discrimination in transport	30 minutes
Five	Activating women transport workers	45 minutes
Six	Identifying women workers' issues	20 minutes
Seven	Testing issues	45 minutes
Eight	Developing women activists	40 minutes

Facilitator notes

Audience

Women and men transport workers who are new to union activity and are looking to understand more about gender issues in transport workplaces and trade unions.

Participants should have access to the ITF materials:

- ITF women transport workers making a difference
- Winning a better deal for women - Maritime women's best practice guide
- ITF 42nd Congress proceedings Mexico City
- ITF strategic campaign manual
- ITF women's handbook
- ITF organising manual

Facilitator role

The programme is divided into three sections:

- Barriers/challenges for women in activity
- Root causes of discrimination/underlying gender politics
- First steps towards women's activism

The facilitator's role is first to explore participants' understanding of the range of barriers that women face in getting involved in union activity. The next step is to develop greater awareness of gender politics and its impact on organising women transport workers. And finally, through discussion and activity to motivate and assist participants to imagine overcoming some of those barriers, with the aim of motivating them to influence change by encouraging more women transport workers to become actively involved in their unions.

Outcomes

- Understanding barriers women face
- Understanding gender issues
- Motivation to tackle problems
- Prioritisation techniques
- Ideas of how to take first steps to encourage women's activism

Component 1: barriers to recruiting women

The objective of this activity is to encourage participants to consider the barriers that only affect women when joining a union. The facilitator should split the plenary into five small groups and give each group one activity from **Activity 1**. Allocate sufficient time for each group to discuss and answer the question. Ask them to nominate someone to report back to the plenary group. Ask the plenary group to offer further ideas/suggestions in order to compile an extensive list.

Some of the answers to be considered should include the following:

- Workplace barriers: personal relationships, access to employment/promotion, direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and fear
- Home/family barriers: caring pressures, time, pressure from partner/spouse/children, religious pressures and cultural expectations
- Cultural/custom barriers: religious aspects, cultural barriers, historical practices and expectations, inability to change historical practices, duties and responsibilities
- Industry-wide/political/legal barriers: traditional employment practices, industry culture, employment practices, number of women employed, legislation affecting workers, political opinions affecting women and equality
- Internal trade union barriers: internal union structures restricting women's activism, union facilities, timing location of meetings, macho culture, long hours, male representation

Give **handout 1** to participants.

Handout 1

Why do women find it difficult to participate in trade unions?

Women transport workers who are union members are often in a minority – both in their workplaces and in their unions.

The first barrier that women encounter can be the style of meetings. Therefore, meeting participants should avoid using sexist language, meetings should not be confrontational or aggressive and heckling or derisive comments should not be tolerated.

We understand that women and men have been taught to communicate in different ways. Men often tend to dominate conversations with women or to interrupt, and women participants struggle to make their voices heard.

Women also face practical barriers to activity. When meetings are scheduled outside working hours, particularly at night, it discourages women's participation.

In most cases, transport is not provided and there are no childcare arrangements. Women workers may go to a meeting but find it is not relevant to their needs and problems. Equality, maternity issues, and childcare are seen as 'women's issues' and are seldom addressed. This effectively discourages women from attending future meetings.

It's not just about meetings, though. Union activism is much more than simply participating in a meeting.

When deciding and implementing campaigning activity, it is important to ensure that every possible effort is made to support women to participate.

These activities could include speaking with colleagues, drawing up campaign materials, contacting the media or mapping work areas.

Similarly, collective bargaining tends to be dominated by male transport workers. This means that important issues for women workers are often not included in the bargaining agenda. This might lead women workers to question the benefit of being in a union at all.

Women also face barriers that restrict their access to leadership positions. These include the predominantly male culture of unions, the disproportionate family responsibilities of many women, the stereotyped expectations about their roles and the lack of confidence that women often have in their own abilities.



Component 2: barriers to activism

The first component covered barriers to women joining a trade union. The next one aims to use the barriers identified to help participants explore the connection between recruiting new union members and activating union members.

Keep participants in the same groups and ask them to undertake **Activity 2**. Ask them to nominate someone to report back to the plenary group. Discuss the answers with the plenary group encouraging them to add further ideas/suggestions. The relevant answers should include:

1. The first steps should consist of one of the following; talk to a colleague, give out a leaflet, sign a petition, put up a poster, come to a meeting, etc – all should be relatively simple tasks
2. The barriers identified should be very similar to those in the previous component. They should enable the facilitator to draw parallels between recruitment and activism. The key message is that if we can overcome these barriers sufficiently for a woman worker to join the union, then we can also motivate them to be active and participate

Component 3: increasing women's participation

Ask participants to answer the 10 questions in [Activity 3](#). If they come from one union, you may wish to discuss this in a plenary session. If they come from different unions, you may split them into groups related to their union backgrounds. Then return them to the plenary to share best practice and brainstorm possibilities of how to improve this area of their individual unions.

Component 4: gender discrimination in transport

Split participants into small groups and ask them to discuss areas where gender discrimination takes place in the transport industry. Ask them to work together and appoint someone to report back to the plenary.

During feedback, group their answers under headings to fit in with the answer below. Lead a discussion with the group on these headings.

Answer: The ITF women's department carried out a survey of affiliated unions. Women reported many different forms of discrimination in all ITF sections

- **Recruitment** – 22 percent reported tests relating to women's appearance, which mostly did not apply to men
- **Pay and promotion** – 30 percent said that women were discriminated against when applying for promotion and 25 percent stated that there were gender inequalities in pay
- **Maternity** – 16 percent were not entitled to maternity leave with cash benefits. 30 percent stated that pregnant employees did not have the right to guaranteed job transfers without loss of earnings. 14 percent had restrictions imposed upon them after returning from maternity leave
- **Marriage** – 54 percent were obliged to disclose their marital status when applying for a job
- **Company advertising** – 50 percent said that in advertising, transport companies promote women as friendly providers of services, rather than as professionals

Component 5: activating women transport workers

The facilitator should reflect on previous discussions of how and why women transport workers get involved in union activity and ask the group why it is important that women become actively involved in the union.

The outcome should be that the motivations are similar:

- To improve their pay, treatment and conditions
- To campaign on issues important to women transport workers
- To change the union
- To overcome cultural barriers and customs that may negatively affect women
- To change the industry

This session aims to get them to think about supporting women union members continuously rather than on their recruitment alone.

The facilitator should explain that there is a journey to be made by each person and their motivations to take those journeys may be different. If we imagine this journey as a bus trip, the full length of the journey would look like this:

- Stop 1** From non-member to member
- Stop 2** From member to active member
- Stop 3** From active member to activist
- Stop 4** From activist to steward
- Stop 5** From steward to executive committee member/union president

Not everyone is expected to make the full journey but our responsibility is to support and encourage each worker to stay on the bus as long as possible.

An active member is someone who does something to help build the union, eg comes to a meeting, signs a petition or talks to a colleague. An activist is someone who does more than one thing, such as regularly coming to meetings, giving out leaflets, recruiting colleagues or passing round a petition.

It is important that we actively and consciously develop active members to support the delivery of union campaigns in every workplace where we organise. The more active women members we have, the greater our chances of success. It should be the major priority for us when organising to find, train and support more active women members and women local leaders.

There are three ways to do this.

1. We talk to women transport workers and listen constructively to their opinions
2. We educate women transport members about the union and the need for them to be active
3. We ask women transport members to undertake small tasks to build confidence and support them to succeed to test commitment

Working in pairs, participants should be asked to work through **Activity 4** on the qualities needed in an active union member. Ask them to report back and lead a discussion on the findings. The correct answers are that points 2, 7 and 10 are not essential. An active member does not need to have experience but does need to be able to listen, learn and lead.

Point for the facilitator: It's important to consider that the existing characteristics for an active union member are often set by men and fit certain stereotypes. In order to change unions, we need to re-assess those skill sets and redefine what characteristics are important to make meaningful change.

Component 6: identifying women workers' issues

Give participants Post-it notes. Ask them to write down three problems that women transport workers face at work – things they would like to change/improve. Guide them to focus upon collective issues rather than individual ones and stick the notes on a flipchart and explain them briefly to the group. Some of these issues may include low pay, discrimination, poor facilities, violence, access to work/promotion, temporary contracts, part-time or precarious work, harassment or inadequate maternity provisions.

Component 7: testing issues

Discuss the handouts in [Activity 5](#) on organising around issues rather than problems with the plenary group.

Split the participants into 3 groups and use the widely/deeply/winnable/visible questions in the resources pack to test some of the problems identified on the Post-it notes in the previous component. The facilitator should ask each group to choose one Post-it note and go through the testing process. Ask them to report back to the plenary.

After analysing some of the issues, ask the participants to identify one issue that is widely and deeply felt, winnable and could involve clear union visibility. Discuss and agree the findings as a group.

Component 8: developing women activists

Distribute and discuss **handout 2**. Split participants into small groups and ask them to discuss the following:

- How can different education methods be used to develop and strengthen women transport activists?

Ask them to work together to answer the question, as well as appoint someone to report back to the plenary.

The points to bring out here include:

1. We should help women transport union members understand that the success of any campaign – and the strength of the union – will depend upon how many women join and get involved. If we want something to be changed, we cannot rely on someone else to do it for us – we must do it ourselves. Unions provide the basis for women workers to organise themselves, but real success relies upon women standing up and fighting for improvements. In addition, campaigning on important workplace/community issues will help motivate women workers to get involved and as the campaign progresses, they will learn from experiences
2. Focus on the journey referred to in the previous component. Women members could be asked to talk to a colleague, put up a poster, come to a meeting, circulate a petition or give out a leaflet. The importance of maintaining regular contact and following up after assignments should be stressed

Handout 2

Three key topics for developing women transport workers:

- The organising plan
- The union, including the union's history and vision
- The company, the industry and the economy

Training can be done in a variety of ways. It does not need to be in a classroom or at a meeting. Songs, quizzes, games, poems and even just interesting questions that help start conversations can be good educational tools.

Different methods of training:

- **One-to-one, person-to-person** – This is how most people learn. It builds honesty and trust. Workers do not usually become involved in a union based on written materials. Participants may need to talk away from the workplace, in workers' homes, cafés or other safe locations
- **Small groups** – Education in small groups can strengthen our networks. Meetings can take place in workers' homes, cafés or other safe locations. They should be fun and build a collective feeling. The small groups can either be informal and social or be run with an agenda (as in a study circle)
- **Mentoring** – Enables knowledge and experience to be shared deeply. Both participants should be willing to meet regularly, challenge habits and assumptions and be open to new ideas. Provide support and give clear, direct and honest feedback with kindness
- **Industry or educational events** – May be held away from the union office and without a union "label" Possible venues could be; a radio station, industry training centre, hotel or conference room, community facility, college or university. Possible topics could be; industry law, comparison of conditions, injuries and how to prevent them
- **Surveys** – Ask participants if any of them have experience of using surveys to train and organise workers Consider who is the survey from: A social/Facebook group, NGO, industry academy or training organisation, ITF or union? What could the possible topics be: specific issues, eg frequency of back injuries, knowledge of industry regulations, social events, childcare needs, etc? Provide the final results to each worker participating in the survey
- **Social events** – Sports, nightlife, dinner, parties, fundraisers, shopping, etc. The event should be well organised and fun. You could create your own events, eg group relating to children or parenting, group transportation organised for shopping or tap into others' social events. Maximise opportunities for one-to-one, person-to-person contact. Make sure to follow up systematically with the new contacts that you make
- **Union events** – You could make an announcement at a union event asking if anyone knows anyone else at the unorganised company or set up a union workshop to develop organising skills and plans, or work on a particular issue

End of components. Signpost to [Stage 2](#).