

# YOUNG TRANSPORT WORKERS AND COVID-19

## OUR MEMBERS, THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE OF THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

Young workers are at the sharp end of the devastating economic consequences brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic is affecting all aspects of people's lives: hundreds of thousands of people have died, millions have lost their jobs and entire sectors of the global economy have ground to a halt. The pandemic's impact on workers has been severe but unequal. While older people have been more vulnerable to the worst of the disease itself, younger people have been more acutely impacted by the devastating economic impacts.

**One in ten workers under the age of 30 has become unemployed in the last months. Over 70% of young workers have worked fewer hours and earned less compared to older workers since the pandemic.**

Under current circumstances, this is not expected to improve in the near future. Most young workers believe that it is very likely they will lose their jobs by August this year. Lack of networks and experience can make it more difficult for them to find other, decent, jobs and they can be pushed into work with less social and legal protection.

Young workers across the transport sector are particularly vulnerable to job losses and reduced work. They are often disadvantaged due to the relatively short length of their tenure and therefore have relatively weaker protections. Many young workers in the aviation industry lost their jobs and cost-reduction strategies implemented by airlines and airports will continue to have a negative impact on working conditions, in particular on youth employment. Similarly, hundreds of young workers in ports around the world have lost their jobs due to their contractual status.



Young people are more at risk than any other age group from automation and digitalisation. A recent ILO study shows that the kind of jobs they hold are more likely to be automatable, in whole or part.

Young workers are also overrepresented in some of the most marginalised worker categories, **77% of the global youth workforce are in informal employment** exacerbating their vulnerability during this crisis. Informally employed young transport workers in many cases have found their employment dry up almost overnight or are working in unsafe conditions.

The expanding non-standard forms of employment, the gig economy, particularly in urban areas, workers in food delivery and ride sharing continue to work across many of the world's cities during the pandemic. However, despite their role in providing key services, they continue to be employed precariously, low paid with irregular hours, poor job security, weaker or no health and safety protections, no provisions for paid sick leave and little or no social protections. Due to lockdowns, gig economy workers have seen their income fall and companies take no responsibility, continuing to hide behind fake self-employment relationships. This employment relationship also means these workers are excluded from government wage subsidy and support programmes.

The growing informal economy in the global north also has an increasing number of young migrant workers. **Over 70% of all international migrants are young.** In 2019, over 38 million international migrants were under the age of 20.

Global inequalities mean the possibility of employment, even with exploitative conditions, leads young workers to migrate. Young migrants therefore usually live in overcrowded areas with low access to water and poor sanitation facilities. They also often have little access to information because of language and cultural barriers.

Due to their migrant status they usually cannot freely access local health care services and they need to pay for testing, care and treatment. All these conditions increase their vulnerability to the virus and lockdown measures. Across the world migrants are being stigmatised as 'virus carriers' and are victims of xenophobic and racist attacks. They are also locked out social security networks, including wage support and housing. Because of lockdown measures, young migrants are now jobless and stranded in places far from their homes. For international migrants, the loss of their job often means they lose their right to stay in the country, while Covid-19 related travel restrictions prevent them from returning to their country of origin.

In time of this unprecedented crisis, **many young workers are requested to continue to work and provide essential services and goods.** For instance, **young seafarers continue to operate** while travel restrictions are disrupting crew changes and repatriation, extending their service period and working hours, keeping them separated from their families for longer than planned. Too often though young workers in other key sectors such as **public transport, warehousing and logistics that keep the supply chain moving**, are not provided adequate personal protective equipment and they often operate in workplaces that are not adequately equipped with sanitation facilities, facing serious risks of contracting COVID-19 and limited or no access to protection schemes. Due to these unsafe working conditions, many young workers have fallen sick and lost their lives to the coronavirus.

Job losses, unsafe working conditions, precarious livelihoods, and disruption of social relationships have made young people more susceptible to mental health crises. They have and could continue to experience emotional and psychological breakdowns which could lead to self-harming behaviour or even suicide.

Young workers must not pay the price of this crisis. They are both the present and the future of the transport industry and must be central to the recovery. In line with the ITF's demands for workers across the various transport sectors, young workers must also be protected by:

1. **Extending employment, income and health and safety provisions to all workers regardless of their employment relationship, duration of tenure or citizenship status**
2. **Giving all migrants, regardless of their status, temporary residence to facilitate their ability to access health, financial and welfare measures**

COVID19 is highlighting the critical vulnerabilities of the youth workforce, increasingly engaged in underpaid and under-protected jobs. Both COVID19 and post-COVID19 economic, social and political choices and priorities have to address the root causes of young workers' vulnerability and promote youth employment such as: precarious employment relationships, hazardous working and living conditions, health and safety of workplaces, lack of equal rights for migrant workers, discrimination and informal jobs.

## Young transport workers call for COVID19 interventions to:

- Guarantee that all working and contract relationships ensure all young transport workers decent working conditions that fully protect and guarantee their fundamental rights at work, eradicating precarious work as well as all forms of forced and hazardous labour.
- Promote youth employment supporting the transition from school to work, offering job orientation and placement services, incentivising quality apprenticeships and ensuring entry level and youth friendly jobs, designing a set of policies "to promote full, productive and freely chosen employment" in line with the ILO Convention N122 and SDG 8.5.
- New employment policies are required to address the impact of new technologies on the labour market (ILO N122), to secure the transition of youth to jobs at lower risk of automation that match young workers interests and skills.
- Invest in youth training and upskilling to prepare young workers to respond to new working arrangements and occupation shifts increasingly relying on digital tools and new technologies and enable them to acquire new technological skills part of an effective lifelong learning system.
- Support and campaign to build union membership, demand decent regulation, and develop new models to end gig exploitation and build fair platforms as per the ITF Platform Principles framework
- Support young informal workers in transitioning to formal, decent and safe work while providing income security and ensuring fundamental human and workers' rights (ILO R204)
- Youth employment, skills development and stimulus packages should promote the integration of decent work and "green jobs" principles. This can be achieved by effectively pursuing environmental sustainability objectives, supporting a low carbon emission transport model and effectively contributing to the struggle for a just transition in response to climate change.
- Promote safe and secure working conditions to all workers including migrant workers, enforce their labour rights (SDG 8.8) and improve functioning of work permit and visa schemes.
- Stop discrimination and stigma. Covid19 does not justify racism and xenophobia and the spread of racist stereotypes can be even faster than the pandemic. Governments, institutions and companies have a fundamental role in ensuring that their policies and interventions do not have any discriminatory connotations based on migration status, race and nationalities.

It is critical to **ensure young workers' active participation in decision making processes** concerning both COVID19 and post COVID19 interventions. They are often under-represented in these processes while their participation and effective engagement is crucial to tackle the problems affecting their employment and working conditions. Young workers' rights and voice needs to be included in all policy demands and responses not only to build COVID19 related interventions but mostly to contribute to rebuild a more resilient, fair and equal economic, productive and social system.

As ITF young transport workers, we will fight to make these changes happen, continuing to firmly advocate for workers' rights and for a systemic change. At the same time, we will continue building power through organising campaigns and solidarity globally, crossing borders and together overcoming this unsettling time, making sure that all these demands are heard, acted upon and fully met. These are **our basic rights and the sustainability of our trade union movement**, which we will not give up on.

**OUR JOBS,  
OUR RIGHTS,  
OUR FUTURE**

