RESEARCH REPORT

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON WOMEN TRANSPORT WORKERS IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused mass social and economic disruption across the world. All workers have been affected by the pandemic. But the negative impacts of the crisis are falling disproportionately on women workers. Women workers have suffered a disproportionate loss of livelihoods, whilst also having to bear additional burdens of unpaid caring and domestic responsibilities. The impacts of the pandemic have also increased exposure to violence and harassment for women workers and studies have shown that reports of domestic violence have skyrocketed during the pandemic. This study was undertaken to gather evidence about the impacts of the pandemic on women transport workers.

EMPLOYMENT AND WORKING CONDITIONS

The research confirmed that although most transport workers have been severely impacted by the pandemic, with cuts to jobs, working time, pay and benefits, women have suffered a disproportionate loss of livelihoods and have been forced into even more precarious and unequal working arrangements and conditions. Women's unequal position in the transport workforce means that they have been overrepresented in occupations, sectors and working arrangements that have been hardest hit. Women have also faced negative impacts because of the gendered hierarchy of many transport workplaces, together with sexist attitudes and harmful gender norms, which means that women have been pushed to the top of the list when cuts to pay, working time or jobs have taken place. In the informal transport economy, where women are overrepresented in the most precarious forms of work, the impacts have been heightened. The impacts have the potential to lead to the systemic exclusion of women from decent jobs in the transport sector.

> **"Women were asked not to come. Men were given extra allowances for coming. At one point management were thinking of retrenchments and women were forced to the top of the list because management believed that if men were working, they would care of the lives at home. Men were the breadwinners."**
>
> **Women's Officer and Vice-chair of ITF Nigeria Women's Committee, MWUN, Nigeria**

VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Rising insecurity at work has increased exposure to violence and harassment, mainly affecting women transport workers. As work has become scarce and economic insecurity has risen, women transport workers have faced greater exposure to sexual exploitation at work. Women working in public-facing roles on the frontline of the pandemic have faced increased violence from customers and passengers. Changes to the way work is carried out during the pandemic has contributed to increased psychosocial risks. This has included a shift to 'remote working' which has increased exposure to online violence and harassment. The pandemic has also created new barriers for women when reporting violence and harassment. The research also identified shocking reports of domestic violence. Pressure in the home, increasing economic insecurity and lockdown, quarantine and social isolation measures were all identified as contributing factors to the rise in domestic violence during the pandemic.

> **"Since some women workers are financially constrained… and have very heavy burdens… the woman will be forced to give in involuntarily to some harassment attempts."**
>
> **Woman Merchant Navy worker, SNTMM, Senegal**

GENDER IMPACTS OF THE PANDEMIC ON THE UNION MOVEMENT

The research found that the pandemic created big barriers for union action. Declining union membership, due to job losses and pay cuts, has also contributed to resources gaps and financial difficulties for unions, which has meant that unions have had to cut back on activities and work programmes, which often resulted in work around gender equality and violence and harassment being reduced. With many countries still in lockdown and facing social distancing measures, unions have been unable to hold in-person meetings. As a result, many unions have been forced to move activities online. However, this has created new challenges, particularly for women, because of the digital divide that many women face in accessing technology. It was identified that the challenges that unions have faced during the pandemic have impacted women's activism and participation in the union. This has restricted action around violence and harassment, including in advocating for ratification and implementation of ILO C190.

> **"When C190 came to birth in 2019 and then just after that we went into this pandemic, much education hasn't gone down well with members. Some members don't even know that some actions constitute violence and harassment. We are facing a lot of challenges, and many don't know that something is harassment. When you are facing violence at home in particular, it is difficult to involve employers."**
>
> **Woman public transport worker, GTPCWU, Ghana**

However, despite challenges, unions have continued to play an essential role to secure livelihoods, ensure compliance with health and safety measures and take action to address violence and harassment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The research identified several recommendations for how trade unions can work with governments and employers to address the impacts of the pandemic on women transport workers, and to integrate this into the COVID-19 response and recovery. A summary of these recommendations can be seen below:

01. WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

- Negotiate with employers and lobby governments to identify the gendered impacts on women's employment in transport, and demand amendments and improvements in women's access to transport jobs.

- Lobby governments and negotiate with employers to ensure gender concerns are integrated into formalisation and restructuring processes.

- Demand that governments and employers recognise women's double burden and introduce measures to address it and ensure that the rights of pregnant women are protected.

- Lobby governments and negotiate workplace policies with employers to introduce measures to ensure that new technology benefits women workers, and that women have equal access to technology.

02. VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

- Negotiate with employers to integrate C190 language into workplace policies, collective bargaining agreements, occupational safety and health policies and risk assessments, and other agreements determining conditions in the world of work.

- Lobby governments and negotiate with employers to ensure that psychosocial risks are identified and mitigated.

- Demand that governments and employers recognise domestic violence as a world of work issue and introduce measures to mitigate its impact in the world of work.

- Lobby governments to ratify and effectively implement C190, in line with R206.

03. GENDER EQUALITY IN THE UNION MOVEMENT

- Engage and raise awareness amongst male trade union leaders, members and workers to take a role in the fight against violence and harassment.

- Introduce pro-active measures to ensure women have access to leadership roles.

- Educate union members about the unacceptability of violence and harassment and the need to campaign for an end to violence and harassment.

- Integrate a gender-responsive approach throughout union activities, including by building structures and networks that strengthen the capacity of women trade unionists.

- Ensure all workers – including informal and precarious workers – are properly organised and represented in the union movement.

04. GENDER RESPONSIVE CRISIS MANAGEMENT

- Lobby governments to demand a gender-responsive approach to the pandemic response, in line with ILO Recommendation 205. This means a gender perspective should be integrated in the response to the crisis, gender-inclusive social dialogue should be used, and gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls should be central to recovery.

INTRODUCTION

All transport workers have been affected by the pandemic, but the negative impacts of the pandemic have fallen disproportionately on women transport workers. Women transport workers are overrepresented in transport sectors and occupations that have been hit hardest by the pandemic. Women transport workers have faced job losses, pay cuts and have been forced into even more precarious work, whilst also having to bear additional burdens of unpaid and unequal caring responsibilities. The crisis has also devastated the livelihoods of informal transport workers. Women are overrepresented in the most precarious jobs in the informal transport economy.

During the pandemic, women transport workers have experienced increased exposure to violence and harassment. Workers who face intersectional discrimination have been disproportionately affected. Increased economic insecurity for women has exposed them to sexual coercion at work. Women transport workers are also concentrated on the frontline of the pandemic, exposed to a higher risk of infection and violence and harassment from third parties. The shift to remote working has increased exposure to online violence and harassment. There has been an alarming global surge in reports of domestic violence. The pandemic has also created new challenges for unions, including barriers to union action on gender equality and violence and harassment.

The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated harmful gender inequalities, with the potential to worsen the underrepresentation of women in the transport sector and increase exposure to violence and harassment. However, the response to the COVID-19 pandemic has failed to address the gendered impacts of the crisis.

The adoption of ILO Convention 190 (C190) in 2019, which came into force (became legally binding) on 25 June 2021, is a powerful opportunity to tackle violence and harassment and secure gender equality, at work and in society.

This research study was commissioned by the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF). It aims to explore the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on women transport workers, including in increasing exposure to violence and harassment, and to assess the long-term impact of the crisis on women.

The research set out to gather evidence to build the case about the link between the pandemic and violence and harassment against women transport workers, to provide arguments for unions to secure a gender-responsive pandemic recovery, and to enable unions to use C190 as a tool to build movements to address violence and harassment.

All transport workers have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, but this study focuses on women because women face structural inequalities that increase their exposure to violence and harassment. The pandemic has also exacerbated existing gender inequalities, which has further increased exposure to violence and harassment for women transport workers.[1]

METHODOLOGY

This study draws together research from seven ITF C190 project countries across West and Central Africa: Ghana, Senegal, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Cameroon. These countries were chosen because there were existing union campaigns on gender-based violence and harassment and for the ratification and implementation of C190.

Study participants included women workers, union members and leaders in both the informal and formal transport economy across four different transport sectors: aviation, road (passenger and freight), maritime and rail (passenger and freight).

Data collection was undertaken using focus group discussions, individual interviews, and questionnaires. It took place electronically via Zoom, WhatsApp, and email, led by the consultants, working closely with the ITF Women's Department and Africa Regional Office. The interview guide and questionnaire were designed and amended following consultation with participating union [see appendices]. Following the data collection, thematic analysis of the data was undertaken on which this report is based.

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused vast social and economic disruption. Catastrophic health and economic consequences have stretched social and health services to breaking point, worsened economic insecurity and increased inequality. Transport workers have faced devastating impacts from the crisis. Working on the frontline, many have faced exposure to infection, increased pressure and longer working hours and additional psychosocial risks, as well as collapse of industries, loss of livelihoods and increased precarity at work. During the pandemic there have also been increased reports of violence and harassment against frontline workers, including transport workers.

All workers are being severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. But women are overrepresented in sectors and occupations hardest hit by the pandemic. It is estimated that in all sectors of the global economy the equivalent to 255 million full-time jobs were lost in 2020 because of the pandemic. Women's employment was more at risk than men.[2] Globally, 4.2% of women's employment was destroyed because of the pandemic, compared to 3% of men's employment.[3]

Women transport workers have faced disproportionate impacts at work. In the transport sector, gender-based occupational segregation means that women are overrepresented in public-facing roles. They have been concentrated on the frontlines of the pandemic, with a higher risk of infection and without adequate PPE and health and safety measures. Economic necessity has forced many to continue working despite the risk of infection. Workers who face intersectional discrimination have been disproportionately affected.

The crisis has also devastated the livelihoods of many informal transport workers. The ILO estimates that the first month of the crisis caused a 60% decline in the earnings of informal workers[4]. Women are overrepresented in the most precarious jobs in the informal transport sector. With no access to social protection, many have been forced to work in dangerous conditions, facing violence and harassment, or risk losing their livelihoods.

Increased psychosocial risks because of changes at work, rising economic insecurity and customer anxiety and aggression have left many women facing violence and harassment from the public, increased exposure to sexual exploitation at work and sexual harassment and physical violence on the commute. Job cuts and border closures have left millions of workers isolated and stranded in

their workplace. As work has been shifted online as a social distancing measure, workers are facing exposure to online harassment. Sanitation facilities available to transport workers have been closed due to restrictions. This has increased women transport workers' exposure to health and safety risks, as well as violence and harassment.

With people living in proximity and isolation because of lockdown and quarantine measures, domestic violence reports have skyrocketed. The UN estimates that globally 243 million women and girls aged 15-49 have been subjected to sexual and/or physical violence perpetrated by an intimate partner in the last 12 months.[5]

The pandemic is also creating new challenges and barriers for the union movement. The crisis response has meant that unions have been unable to take action on gender inequality and violence and harassment, as equality initiatives and gender activities have been deprioritised.

The pandemic has exacerbated harmful gender inequalities, with concerns that the challenges arising could set gender equality back decades. The response to the COVID-19 pandemic has also failed to address the gendered impacts of the crisis. This will exacerbate inequality in the transport sector, forcing women into even more precarious work and strengthening the conditions under which violence and harassment can flourish.

ILO VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT CONVENTION 190

In June 2019, the International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted the first ever international standards on violence and harassment in the world of work, in the form of **Convention 190 (C190)** and **Recommendation 206 (R206)**. C190 came into force on 25 June 2021. The adoption of C190 and R206 has created new momentum in the campaign against gender inequality and violence and harassment at work. These are important tools for trade unions representing transport workers to end violence and harassment in the world of work.

C190 provides the first internationally agreed definition of violence and harassment and establishes a clear framework to end violence and harassment in the world of work. The right to a world of work free from violence and harassment is now a universal right voiced in an international treaty.

The tools are inclusive and have a wide scope – they apply to all sectors and workers, including the informal sector, and go beyond the physical workplace. They also identify transport as one of the sectors more exposed to violence and harassment, cover the types of violence and harassment that transport workers frequently face and identify the particular risk factors that expose workers to violence and harassment in the transport sector. They recognise that violence and harassment should be integrated into occupational safety and health (OSH) management.

The pandemic crisis is an opportunity to create a 'gender equal new normal'. In recovering from the crisis, unions, employers and governments must work together to ensure that inequalities are not reproduced, perpetuated or intensified. C190 and R206 are powerful tools to strengthen gender equality and protect workers against violence and harassment, now and in the pandemic recovery[6]:

- To achieve a safe working environment, the pandemic recovery must be inclusive, integrated and gender responsive. C190 provides for measures to address violence and harassment within this comprehensive approach, in consultation with employers, governments and trade unions.

- The pandemic has contributed to increased reports of types of violence and harassment against workers. C190 protects against all forms of violence and harassment in the world of work, protects everyone in the world of work, and offers workplace tools to tackle violence and harassment, including the factors that increase exposure. It also suggests measures for reporting, support services and access to justice to respond to violence and harassment.

- The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated harmful gender stereotypes and norms. Women have faced increased unpaid care work and gender-based violence and harassment, including domestic violence. C190 suggests measures to address gender inequalities and gender-based violence and harassment. It also recognises the link between domestic violence and the world of work and suggests measure to mitigate it.

- COVID-19 has had a devastating effect on those working in the informal economy. C190 extends protection to informal workers.

- COVID-19 has hit groups in situations of vulnerability hardest. C190 provides measure to ensure equality and non-discrimination of those in situations of vulnerability.

- The crisis has shown that data is essential to respond to the crisis. R206 recognises the importance of data and calls for states to collect and publish statistics disaggregated by gender.

Addressing violence and harassment in the world of work is more relevant now than ever. C190 is crucial for protecting workers against violence and harassment, during this crisis and in recovery.

A GENDER EQUAL TRANSPORT INDUSTRY NEEDS:

01. WOMEN ON ALL DECISION-MAKING BODIES

02. INCOME AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

03. ACCESS TO SANITATION AND APPROPROATE PPE

04. SECURE WORK

05. CARE BEFORE PROFIT

06. AND END TO VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT AGAINST WOMEN

07. NEW TECHNOLOGY TO BENEFIT WOMEN WORKERS

08. GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

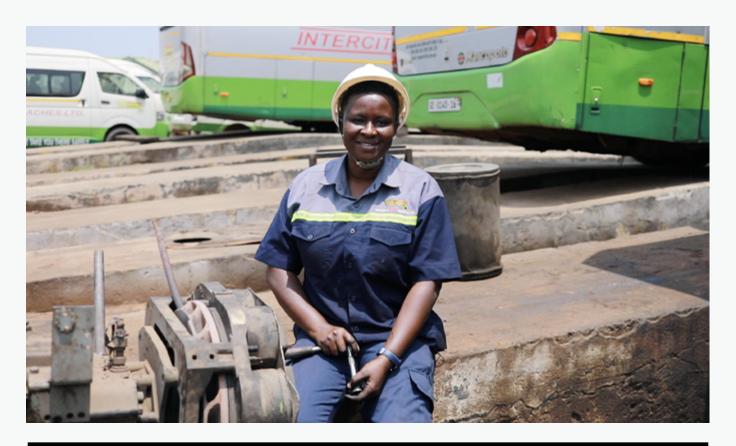**09. GENDER-RESPONSIVE ECONOMIC STIMULUS**

WHAT IMPACT HAS THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAD ON WOMEN TRANSPORT WORKERS?

Thematic analysis of the data identified three main impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Impacts on **employment and working conditions**
- Impacts on **violence and harassment**
- Impacts on **action in the trade union movement**

The following discussion will explore each impact in more detail.

1. EMPLOYMENT AND WORKING CONDITIONS

The COVID-19 pandemic had distinct impacts on different working arrangements, sectors and countries. However, responses suggest that the pandemic has differently and disproportionately affected women's employment and working conditions, with potential long-term impacts on women's position in society and in exposure to violence and harassment.

1.1 Working time, workload and work patterns

Many workers experienced **changes to their working time, working patterns and workload**, but the changes varied depending on sector and occupation.

There were some workers who identified no work stoppages or change to working time. But this was far more common for workers in occupations and sectors considered essential for providing critical services to keep economies moving. This included workers undertaking government operations in aviation, and those working in docks and in road and rail (freight) transport.

However, significant changes were experienced by many of the respondents. Lockdown and social distancing measures contributed to a slowdown of industries, loss of business and revenue, and in some cases a complete grounding of transport sectors. As a result, workers experienced both paid and unpaid compulsory leave.

The most frequently reported reason for contributing to compulsory leave were lockdown measures and border closures. This particularly affected workers in road transport (passenger and freight). Social distancing and lockdown measures meant fewer customers used public transport and fewer transport routes were running. Border closures meant that workers in cross-border transport were unable to work. The drastic decrease in air traffic also forced many aviation workers to take compulsory leave or to have their hours reduced.

> "In the container transport sector, the reduction in exports and imports has led to numerous redundancies among women workers...as well as some women custom declarants who work in the informal sector."
> **– Woman maritime and road transport worker, SNTMM, Senegal**

> "In the public transport industry, our services have really reduced because of COVID-19. We were formerly running frequent services, but now it has changed, and most workers are at home...number of passengers to sit in a bus has changed...there aren't as many passengers, because of observing social distancing...our borders are closed..."
> **– National Women's Coordinator, GTPCWU, Ghana**

For transport workers who continued to work throughout the pandemic, many experienced changes to their working time. In many cases, working time was reduced because of slowdown of industries, reduced numbers of passengers or fewer routes running. Economic downturn caused by the pandemic also contributed to job losses. Some workers reported job losses because of work being stopped. Some workers did not have work contracts renewed due to the negative economic situation.

In Cote d'Ivoire, some transport workers were pushed into voluntary or early retirement because of the impacts of the pandemic. Workers in more precarious situations – where women are overrepresented – were at greatest risk.

Women are underrepresented in the transport industry and are also segregated into different, unequal roles. Many respondents identified that these gendered inequalities contributed to the pandemic having a disproportionate impact on women's employment and working conditions.

Women are clustered into more precarious and insecure jobs (support staff, administrative roles) which were not considered to be 'essential' or 'key' operational roles during the crisis. This meant that women were often the first to be sent on compulsory leave, have their hours reduced, or jobs cut.

In Ghana – as in many countries – the maritime sector is male-dominated. This means that women are overrepresented in more precarious office jobs and are underrepresented in key operational roles. During the pandemic, this occupational segregation meant that more women than men were laid off or were asked to take unpaid leave.

> "In the operational staff, there were a few women who were crane operators who were not so affected, but this is not the case for most women. Women mostly work in the office and run the day-to-day activities. Almost 80% were laid off and they were told that their service was not needed."
> **– Youth and Gender Officer, MDU, Ghana**

The gendered hierarchy in many transport workplaces, where men often work in more senior roles (supervisors, managers), coupled with sexist attitudes, mean that employers and managers often prefer to hire men over women. During the pandemic this meant that men were favoured for work opportunities and women were forced to the top of the list when jobs were cut. In the rail sector in Ghana, salaries were reduced, and workers were given compulsory leave. When transport systems began running again, men came back to work, and women were told to stay at home. Pregnant women also experienced greater discrimination at work during the pandemic. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, women and those with family responsibilities faced greater discrimination and were more exposed to job loss.

> "During the pandemic on a good day, most of them [employers] don't employ women. They prefer men to go and work than women. It is difficult to get women jobs in the face of the pandemic."
> **– Union Account Officer and Assistant Secretary of ITF Nigeria Women's Committee, NMNOWTSSA, Nigeria**

Harmful gender norms mean that there are behaviours, norms and activities considered appropriate for men and women. Women are often considered to be homemakers. During the pandemic, it was reported that this meant that men were given more opportunities and allowances, and women were either laid off or put on leave. Often this was due to that fact that employers and managers assumed that women needed to stay at home to take on caring and domestic responsibilities, and men would go to work and look after them financially. Several women noted the harmful belief that 'men are the head' and 'women are the body'.

However, several women highlighted that this was often not the case. In fact, women are often the breadwinners, or heads of households.

> "Most of the hiring...is being done by men. They presume that women are in the house and taking care of the kids and family due to the pandemic...they only think that as a woman because of COVID you have extra responsibilities like being in the house, and taking care of your kids because schools are closed down, and so a job you expect to do you realise your male colleague has been asked to do it...they take decisions on your behalf..."
> **– Woman public transport worker, GTPCWU, Ghana**

> "Women were asked not to come. Men were given extra allowances for coming. At one point management were thinking of retrenchments and women were forced to the top of the list because management believed that if men were working, they would care of the lives at home. Men were the breadwinners."
> **– Women's Officer and Vice-chair of ITF Nigeria Women's Committee, MWUN, Nigeria**

Women also experienced reduced working hours because of their increased childcare responsibilities as a result of school closures. This was the case for women who were heads of households, or because their husbands went to work, which meant that women often had to take leave from work to look after children, either temporarily or permanently. Some women viewed reduced working hours as a positive opportunity for women to have a break, improving work-life balance and giving women more time for family responsibilities.

> "The compulsory leave system allowed me to rest on the one hand and on the other hand my benefits were reduced."
> **– SOLIDARITE, Democratic Republic of Congo**

Those whose work continued throughout the pandemic frequently experienced an increased workload and increased pressure, with workers having to reconcile daily tasks with additional demands. This was frequently because of changes to shifts and staff rotations because of social distancing measures, and the need to quarantine employees. Work usually done by a group of workers often became the responsibility of just one worker. This meant that workers faced longer working hours, a bigger workload and overtime. Continuing social distancing measures mean that many of these changes are still in place.

Several women also reported that working alone contributed to increased loneliness and isolation for some workers, which affected mental health.

In the aviation industry in Nigeria, social distancing measures and the quarantine of employees meant that longer shifts were introduced, and fewer staff worked on shifts.

> "Aviation standards state that the work rule is that you work 6 hours a day. We used to have shifts either morning, afternoon, or night, and then two days off. The pandemic meant that it changed, we no longer do morning afternoon night, we do two shifts work which is more stressful...you are more exhausted...Everything is to reduce the amount of people coming into the office...we are supposed to be up to three people working, but now there is just one working."
> **– Woman aviation worker, ATTSAN, Nigeria**

Women transport workers were particularly affected by increased workload because of their double burden of having to accommodate increased pressure at work, alongside increased caring and domestic responsibilities at home.

Lockdown and social distancing measures also led to the introduction of remote working and teleworking, which created challenges for transport workers. The effects were particularly felt by women transport workers because they frequently lacked access to and/or knowledge of technology. Several women reported that teleworking increased pressure at work, because they were now unable to take a break from work at home.

The pandemic also contributed to increased automation and digitisation of the transport sector. It was reported that during the pandemic employers started to introduce new technologies (such as automated ticketing) as a health and safety measure, as well as to cut overhead costs. But these changes will have a long-term impact on women's employment in the transport sector. Gender-based occupational segregation means that the jobs women typically do in transport (ticketing, customer service and administration) are often at greatest risk of being automated. They are also undervalued and underpaid, which makes them more vulnerable to automation.

In Ghana, the GTPCWU identified that the COVID-19 pandemic has given rise to changes to the way transport is run, as employers look to use automation to improve the transport experience for passengers and customers. These changes will affect women workers, particularly those working as cashiers or in ticketing, as well as women users of transport. The union highlighted the importance of negotiating policies and guidelines to address the harmful impacts of new technology.

> "Women transport workers are also battling with digitization....Employers are considering redundancies and thinking about digitizing work, such as ticketing. This means that people can go home. Human resources are being downgraded. This has been spurred on by COVID-19."
> **– Industrial Relations Officer, GTPCWU, Ghana**

1.2 Pay and benefits

During the pandemic, transport workers frequently experienced changes to **pay, benefits and promotion.**

Several respondents suggested that the economic pressure facing companies contributed to a reduction in pay. Many unions had to negotiate pay cuts in lieu of job cuts. Some respondents suggested that companies capitalised on the crisis and used the pandemic to advantage themselves and not give workers the income that they were supposed to. The drastic reduction in work opportunities also meant that companies had the power to reduce pay. The impacts on pay varied across sectors and employment situations, but workers in more precarious situations faced bigger impacts. This meant that women were often worst affected by pay cuts. Transport sectors which were heavily reliant on daily turnover from customers – particularly in the informal passenger transport sector – faced drastic cuts to income.

> "COVID-19 has really shaken up the way our business operates. There was a total absence of our customers...which created a big void around us...Work did not stop but there was some fear around working. Earned income but less than usual and contributed to some unemployment."
> **– Marie Elognon, SYNTRAPAL, Togo**

> "In public transport... we had to reduce the number of passengers and our work is such that we work and pay ourselves. We generate the revenue and from this we pay our salaries and statutory reductions...fewer passengers...yet you use the same cost of fuel..."
> **– Woman public transport worker, GTPCWU, Ghana**

> "Workers have faced fewer working hours than usual, and it is more difficult to get jobs. Companies are decreasing income because it is harder to get jobs...companies are trying to stay in operation and so cannot give the fully salary. Pandemic has also given companies the power not to be able to give workers what they are supposed to."
> **– Union Account Officer and Assistant Secretary of ITF Nigeria Women's Committee, NMNOWTSSA, Nigeria**

In transport sectors and occupations where it was identified that women and men generally held an equal position, pay cuts were felt equally. One respondent in Ghana identified that both men and women equally experienced salary cuts between 30-75%.

However, in sectors where clear disparity amongst men and women existed, women were disproportionately affected by pay cuts. This was frequently because women transport workers had their hours cut first and were often overrepresented in the lowest paid jobs, where cuts to pay were felt more. It was also reported that women who were due for promotions were not given them, with employers using the pandemic as an excuse.

Most respondents identified that the biggest impacts that were experienced by transport workers was in reductions to benefits, bonuses and other allowances related to work. Reports suggested performance bonuses and overtime pay were frequently cut and other expenses were completely removed. Some transport workers only experienced a delay in receiving some benefits. Workers are often heavily reliant on these additions to supplement their income.

In Ghana it was identified that cross-border transport workers would usually receive an allowance if they stayed overnight. For many transport workers, this makes up a big part of their income. But with border closures and lockdown measures in place, many workers were not able to travel and so did not receive this.

Rising living expenses because of the economic crisis caused by the pandemic meant that the impacts of the cuts were felt more. Many women transport workers felt that this contributed to increased stress at home because women are often in charge of managing living expenses.

> "We have seen a decline in our revenue which…affected our staff. It came to a time when we had to take half salaries…the normal overtime, because of the restrictions people were not travelling and so you wouldn't get overtime and the normal allowances you would get."
> **– Woman public transport worker, GTPCWU, Ghana**

> "The salary was full but the allowances you were supposed to have were delayed and not approved – like the allowance that they give to married people, for child allowance – which were supposed to be increased this year in my own department."
> **– Woman aviation worker, ATTSAN, Nigeria**

> "Losing the benefits that pushes the salary higher at the end of the month. Members need something to cushion themselves."
> **– Industrial Relations Officer, GTPCWU, Ghana**

1.3 Working conditions

Throughout the pandemic, issues around **occupational safety and health (OSH)** frequently occurred. Reports suggested that many transport workers experienced fear from the risk of catching COVID-19 at work. This was often due to unsafe working conditions or the nature of the job, with workers being in cramped workspaces or in spaces requiring high interaction with members of the public, such as in aviation and passenger transport. Women are concentrated in jobs in public and customer-facing roles and so were disproportionately affected by the fear and risk of catching the virus.

Despite some companies providing personal protective equipment (PPE) for transport workers, it was reported that some companies failed to provide PPE. This was often because of a limited supply. It was reported that although some employers had supplied PPE at the start of the pandemic, this was later replaced by workers having to obtain it themselves, which put financial pressure on them. In the maritime sector, the quarantine and lockdown measures that were introduced meant that workers frequently became stranded in their workplace.

> "During the pandemic...all the ships had to come to the anchorage, but they didn't allow workers to come down because they were afraid they were going to come and spread COVID-19...The union had to fight for their release so they could go and be with their families...It took almost a month before they were able to succeed."
> **– Union Account Officer and Assistant Secretary of ITF Nigeria Women's Committee, NMNOWTSSA, Nigeria**

There is now increased pressure for some workers to get vaccinated or take tests before returning to work. Many respondents identified that this is often difficult for those in low-paying jobs to afford, where women are frequently concentrated in the transport sector.

> "Since then, companies have been afraid of spreading COVID-19 onboard ships... Those employed have to pass through a series of tests to get a job, otherwise you will not be employed. Lots of seamen and seawomen, have to treat themselves before they even go through the company. It is not easy for seafarers to get on board shift and work. Also, the moment they are on board ships, COVID-19 starts to spread, and people get sick. We are still facing that problem in the union, making it difficult to get jobs."
> **– Union Account Officer and Assistant Secretary of ITF Nigeria Women's Committee, NMNOWTSSA, Nigeria**

1.4 Informal workers

Many of the world's transport workers are **informal or working in precarious conditions**. Informal workers faced particularly severe impacts from the pandemic because of a lack of access to social protection and inadequate government support.

In the informal passenger transport sector, lockdown and quarantine measures meant that workers' livelihoods were grounded. In Nigeria, the NURTW reported that restrictions on movement destroyed the livelihoods of informal passenger transport workers. Many of the workers work on a daily basis, but without passengers there was a total shutdown to their income.

Women are overrepresented in the most precarious forms of informal work – work defined by low pay, low status and a lack of power. Women informal transport workers were disproportionately affected by the impacts of the pandemic because of their gender and its intersections with their insecure working conditions and arrangements.

In Senegal, informal women workers in traditional fishing sectors faced drastic reductions in income, and in some cases were hit by complete unemployment due to economic slowdown and reductions in exports as a result of border closures and lockdown measures.

> "We are impacted by COVID-19 in all the women's sectors...as far as traditional fishing is concerned, the impact is greater: first of all the pandemic has led to a reduction in exports, which in turn has led to a reduction in the activities of women in this sector since their activities consisted of selling part of the fish products locally, and also to a reduction in work in the fresh fish factories. This has led to forced unemployment for many fishermen's families."
> **– SNTMM, Senegal**

The impacts also have the potential to affect longer-term job opportunities for women in the informal transport sector. Informal passenger transport workers reported losses to livelihoods and savings which meant that many were unable to sustain paying for vehicles to use for work and ended up in debt. This mean that many were unable to return to work. Existing barriers for women working in the transport sector because of women's unequal position in society and the labour market, as well as gender stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes, mean that the long-term impacts of this will disproportionately affect informal women transport workers.

> "Most of these informal workers work on a daily basis and total lockdown meant a total shutdown to their income. Being in the informal sector means that the livelihoods of members are grounded...Another impact is that many women do not come back to work...They spend all their savings and run into debt. Many women could no long afford to sustain what they were paying on the vehicles, and the owners of the vehicle are not willing to help them out...They see that women are not strong enough and are unable to pay back what they need to pay back. This impacts more on women – most of them do not come back to work...COVID-19 rules meant that those women could not do it. What government gave was not easy."
> **– Head of Women's Affairs, NURTW, Nigeria**

"In the informal sector, the freight forwarders... witnessed their work was decreasing, incomes became increasingly low, which caused discontent and discouragement. Some left the job."
– FESYTRAT, Togo

Some respondents felt that impacts on employment and working conditions were felt equally by men and women. However, this was more often the case where there was strong union representation, or where gender equality was already the norm to some extent.

Most respondents identified that women suffered a disproportionate loss of livelihoods and were forced into even more precarious and unequal working situations, while also having to bear additional burdens of unpaid and unequal care and domestic responsibilities.

The negative impacts of the pandemic on women's employment and working conditions in the transport sector will have long-term negative impacts on gender equality. Women have been first and worst affected by job losses and pay cuts and have been pushed into even more precarious working conditions. Women already face huge barriers to participating in the labour market, and the impacts of the pandemic are exacerbating these barriers, with potential long-term impacts on gender equality. Increased insecurity and exclusion also increase exposure to violence and harassment.

2. VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

During the pandemic, there were increased reports of violence and harassment against transport workers. Reports suggest that this predominantly affected women transport workers, who experienced increased violence from customers and passengers, sexual exploitation at work, and violence and harassment on the commute. Increasing insecurity and inequality for women transport workers, as a result of the disproportionate impacts of the crisis on their employment and working conditions, increased their exposure to violence and harassment. Reports also suggested a shocking rise in domestic violence.

2.1 Sexual harassment and exploitation

During the pandemic, women transport workers reported increased exposure to **sexual harassment at work**. This was more prevalent in more male-dominated transport sectors, where women were underrepresented and more concentrated in gendered and unequal roles.

The impacts of the crisis meant that women became even more concentrated into precarious working arrangements and lower-status roles, with shorter working hours, lower pay and insecure contracts. Increased economic and job insecurity for women transport workers has made them more **exposed to sexual exploitation and sexual coercion at work**.

Women reported being asked for sexual favours in exchange for work. Women frequently faced threats from more senior male staff, managers and employers, who used their relative position of power to exploit women, threatening them that, if they did not submit, they would be laid off, have their working hours cut or not receive work opportunities. The impacts of the economic crisis caused by the pandemic, which affected women worst, meant that women often saw giving in to such advances their only option. The impacts were heightened for informal workers.

> "Since some women workers are financially constrained...and have very heavy burdens...the woman will be forced to give in involuntarily to some harassment attempts."
> **– Woman Merchant Navy worker, SNTMM, Senegal**

> "Some even had to succumb to basic harassment – they were told either you agree, or you will join your other colleagues and be laid off."
> **– Youth and Gender Officer, MDU, Ghana**

> "Women are being harassed but they see it as an opportunity to get a position, or a route."
> **– Head of Women's Affairs, NURTW, Nigeria**

> "When it came back, men came on board and women were told to stay at home. We asked the boss, please allow us to come back, we have to feed our children. But the boss said – no, use what you have to get what you want – sell yourself."
> **– Woman railway worker and Chairperson of ITF Nigeria Women's Committee, NUR, Nigeria 2.2 Violence and Harassment During the Commute**

2.2 Violence and harassment during the commute

Women faced increased exposure to **violence and harassment during travel to and from work**. Examples were given of women workers facing sexual assault and harassment, robbery and kidnapping. Women were more exposed when travelling alone, handling goods or valuables, or traveling from work late at night when roads were empty because of the lockdown.

Women transport workers frequently face violence and harassment on the commute. This is because many transport workers lack access to safe transportation to and from work, leaving them reliant on public transport which can lack adequate safety measures. Where it is provided by employers, transport often lacks proper security measures. The threat of violence and harassment for women on the commute and when using public transport often leaves women forced to choose between an unsafe commute, sleeping in the workplace, or not being able to go to work at all, contributing to the persistent gender-based occupational segregation in the transport workforce.

> "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."
> **– Women's Officer and Vice-chair of ITF Nigeria Women's Committee, MWUN, Nigeria**

> "For petty crime – thieves and robbers. When you are coming, and they see them with the bag...they try to harass...It was all because at that time most of the shuttle buses picking them up from their houses to the work premises were down. But now we have gone in and talked to management and now the shuttle buses are picking up staff to and from work."
> **– Woman public transport worker, GTPCWU, Ghana**

In Ghana, the GTPCWU negotiated with the management of one company to ensure safe transportation to and from work for staff, particularly women workers, during the lockdown.

2.3 Violence and harassment from third parties

Third party violence is violence and harassment committed by perpetrators outside an organisation. For transport workers, this includes customers, passengers, members of the public, authorities and vehicle owners.

During the pandemic, transport workers also faced **violence and harassment from passengers and customers**. Workers on the frontline, for example in passenger transport, faced increased violence and abuse, particularly when passengers were asked to comply with health and safety measures such as social distancing, sanitisation or mask wearing. Several respondents reported that passengers would become angry and frustrated at workers.

Gender-based occupational segregation in the transport sector means that women are concentrated in customer and public-facing roles (customer service, ticketing desks, cabin crew) where violence and harassment perpetrated by third parties was more frequently experienced. Persistent sexist attitudes mean that many women were disproportionately affected by derogatory and sexist comments, and physical and verbal abuse.

> "These passengers when they come on board you ask them to sanitise their hands and put on a mask. They think that you are just ordering them around and so they vent their anger and frustrations on these frontline members. Some have issues from their homes, so when they come to the terminal and when they are asked to follow the protocols, they think you are adding to their issues, so they vent their anger and frustrations. Some even go so far as hitting some of the conductors and the driver."
> **– Woman public transport worker, GTPCWU, Ghana**

> "We face violence and harassment from customers and passengers in Nigeria because of the social distancing measures. They will harass you, slap you, even when the lady just asks to see their ticket. Especially men will just react."
> **– Woman railway worker and Chairperson of ITF Nigeria Women's Committee, NUR, Nigeria**

2.4 Online violence & harassment

Social distancing and lockdown measures meant that many employers moved to remote working and teleworking. The shift to online working came with an increased risk of violence and harassment, **particularly cyber bullying**. In Senegal, it was reported that increased time spent online meant many workers faced online abuse and harassment.

Those with limited digital skills and access, particularly women, have faced a digital divide. This has meant that women transport workers were disproportionately affected.

2.5 Reporting

One of the biggest challenges that unions face in dealing with violence and harassment is **underreporting**. This is often because there is a lot of stigma or shame attached to violence and harassment, particularly for women workers. Unions might not see it as a union issue. Sometimes women are ignored when they report it. Some societies treat survivors as culprits (victim-blaming). Survivors often blame themselves.

During the pandemic, women were even more resistant to report incidents of violence and harassment because of increasing insecurity and precarity at work and fear of job loss, which disproportionately affected them.

Many respondents reported that women would rather keep their jobs and livelihoods than report experiences of violence and harassment at work or for the union to take the issue up. Several respondents highlighted that one of the biggest challenges was that many women didn't even realise that violence and harassment was perpetrated against them.

> "When I try to take the issue up, they tell me that they don't want to lose their jobs and so don't want it to go anywhere. They find it very difficult to handle..."
> **– Youth and Gender Officer, MDU, Ghana**

> "We have women that were harassed but they couldn't come out to say anything... We visited them, told them not to be afraid. But their big concerns are expenses, school fees of children, taking care of the home."
> **– Woman railway worker and Chairperson of ITF Nigeria Women's Committee, NUR, Nigeria**

In some cases, women reported experiencing inaction or a lack of support for dealing with cases of violence and harassment, from the union, government, or the employer.

But inadequate action contributes to the perpetuation of the cycle of violence and harassment. This means that women continue to suffer in silence, and violence and harassment persists.

2.6 Domestic violence

During the pandemic, there was an alarming surge in reports of domestic violence globally. This trend was also identified in the study, with many respondents identifying **shocking reports of domestic violence** during the pandemic. All the reports identified that it was women, not men, who were affected by domestic violence.

Pressure in the home and increasing economic insecurity causing stress were identified as contributing factors to the rise in domestic violence.

Inequalities in the distribution of work at home meant that women often faced the double burden of increased pressure at work, with increased pressure of domestic responsibilities (cleaning, cooking, childcare and other caring responsibilities) in the home. This often contributed to increased stress, fatigue and mental health issues. This was a particularly difficult situation for women transport workers who were heads of households.

> "It wasn't easy at all combining work with taking care of the kids because schools were closed for one year and it is very expensive getting a nanny…We have to rely on neighbours to help with the kids, but we can't do that because it means adding another workload to them."
> **– Woman public transport worker, GTPCWU, Ghana**

> "There is also stress on women having to combine working at home and children also being at home. Some women – by virtue of the work they do – have to work from home and this with the children there was very stressful."
> **– Industrial Relations Officer, GTPCWU, Ghana**

> "With confinement we don't get what we want, and cleaning doesn't rhyme with work, just managing the children makes us tired and slows down our work and we don't have a favourable place to work."
> **– SNTMM, Senegal**

Increasing economic insecurity was also a contributing factor. Loss of employment, reduced incomes, rising prices for necessities, and the need to invest in health and safety measures (sanitiser, masks, vaccinations) contributed to economic stress.

> "The disease has increased the burden on the family. The cost of living has changed considerably, food has increased in the markets. Transport has increased and schooling for children has increased. However, the monthly income has decreased and must be used to meet all our needs."
> **– SOLIDARITE, DRC**

Several respondents identified that men were no longer taking on responsibility and women were facing increasing uncertainty about how they would feed their families. Several examples were also given of women being ejected from their homes by landlords, either due to unpaid bills, or because they contracted COVID-19 and landlords were fearful of the disease. Many workers also experienced psychological stress out of fear of contracting the virus.

In Ghana, the GTPCWU reported that one woman worker was ejected from her house because she was feeling ill and showing signs of COVID-19.

> "We have experienced the death of some of our colleagues/comrades. This loss has created a financial gap in their family, especially if it is the only source of income for the family."
> **– SYNTRAPAL, Togo**

> "Sometimes stress…turns into violence in certain homes. When COVID stopped people going to work it put a strain on finances which sometimes leads to violence… On social media you see women complaining about the abuse…"
> **– Industrial Relations Officer, GTPCWU, Ghana**

Lockdown and isolation measures which were introduced by governments to control the pandemic contributed to increased prevalence of domestic violence. Several respondents identified that this left many women isolated in their home with (male) abusers.

The shift to teleworking, loss of jobs and compulsory leave – which affected women disproportionately – meant that women spent more time at home and were unable to escape violence even temporarily. For many women, work was previously an escape from domestic

violence at home. Isolation measures also meant that women no longer had their support networks and were unable to meet up in person, which also hindered reporting of cases of domestic violence.

> "People are running from getting COVID-19 and don't go outside due to restrictions. This means violence increases...Domestic violence...being confined in an apartment... When people go out to work, you only see each other at night...during the pandemic you cannot avoid the other person. Men have lost their jobs and there is no food on the table. There will be violence and fights. COVID-19 has increased violence and harassment in the home...Women report it to the police station before we get to know of it. Pandemic has not allowed information to come out."
> **– Union Account Officer and Assistant Secretary of ITF Nigeria Women's Committee, NMNOWTSSA, Nigeria**

> "When we work, we can leave the house and go to work. Now because of COVID we are all at home...Man sees the woman to be the only source of enjoyment that he can get...woman may not have interest."
> **– National Women's Coordinator, GTPCWU, Ghana**

It was reported that many women were experiencing domestic violence but did not identify it as such and so did not report it. Another reason that women did not report it was due to financial insecurities and concerns that they would not be able to survive on their own without their husband. As a result, it was difficult for unions to engage with employers about domestic violence issues.

> "Because women are locked up in the house holed up with their spouses, often women experience abuse from them. When I talk to women in the maritime sector, they tell you that they want an escape route. They want to leave home and come to work. Forcing people to go home on leave and future redundancies is really going to mean violence and harassment is really on the rise. COVID-19 has increased the number of hours spent with husbands."
> **– Youth and Gender Officer, MDU, Ghana**

3. GENDER-RELATED IMPACTS OF THE PANDEMIC ON UNIONS

Women transport workers faced disproportionate impacts from the pandemic, at work and at home. The pandemic has also created new challenges for union action and campaigning in the fight for gender equality and to address violence and harassment in the workplace and in the home. The impacts of the crisis meant that work around gender equality was deprioritised.

3.1 Challenges for union action

Many unions faced **resource gaps and financial difficulties.** In some cases, the pandemic was a catalyst for workers to join the union. However, some respondents identified a decline in union membership because of workers losing jobs, and reductions in salaries. This meant that many unions had to cut back on activities and work programmes, which often resulted in work around gender equality and violence and harassment being reduced.

> "Finance is affecting all of us – at the local level, organizing a programme is difficult... women are not aware of the convention... Almost everyone doesn't have knowledge about the convention. The big challenge is we need finance to run these programmes – support to push it to our locals.."
> **– National Women's Coordinator, GTPCWU, Ghana**

Without financial resources, many unions were unable to consistently undertake training and awareness raising around violence and harassment and C190, which was identified as a key barrier to sensitisation. It was also identified as a reason for women's continued lack of awareness around violence and harassment, including domestic violence. Efforts to campaign for ratification and implementation of C190 have also been halted by unions due to resource issues.

In Ghana, the GTPCWU reported that the campaign for ratification and implementation of C190 has been halted because of a lack of resources.

> "This means that most of our activities are stalled – we can't even hold meetings... even issues that we have to address – working with women's organizations to see members, is a challenge, it becomes very difficult to carry out planned activities.."
> **– Woman public transport worker, GTPCWU, Ghana**

> "We are very much still at sensitization stage, trying our best but it is difficult to provide enough finance for programmes, becoming increasingly difficult due to loss of members which has impacted our dues and funding for sensitization activities. We need contact with women at enterprise level, becoming very difficult to do – personal contacts, and also because sensitization."
> **– Youth and Gender Officer, MDU, Ghana**

Several unions reported **declining union membership.** Reports highlighted that several unions lost membership amongst women workers. Women, who are already underrepresented in the trade union movement, faced job losses, were unable to pay union dues, or did not see the union as representative of their needs during the crisis. Loss of union membership amongst women has potential long-term negative impacts on working conditions, particularly for women. Effective

action to end violence and harassment against women requires stronger and more inclusive unions. But without strong bargaining power and representative structures, trade unions won't be able to effectively address the issues that women face at work, including violence and harassment.

Companies became more resistant to engaging with unions during the crisis, using the pandemic and the subsequent economic crisis as an excuse not to engage in negotiations. This meant that unions were unable to make big achievements for workers during the pandemic, which contributed to many transport workers not seeing the value in joining or engaging with the union.

> "Most companies are very cautious in making decisions that will cause them additional expenses. Companies are not ready to employ workers...This has made most companies downsize...A lot of people are jobless because of the pandemic. The economic situation is so bad that people are just trying to survive... the salaries have been reduced, the working conditions come and go and lots of benefits have been deprived from workers."
> **– Union Account Officer and Assistant Secretary of ITF Nigeria Women's Committee, NMNOWTSSA, Nigeria**

> "The union was unable to negotiate on a collective agreement because of the challenge of COVID.... Some organizations used COVID to their advantage for this reason, which meant that the union couldn't negotiate for a salary increase for members – this was a key challenge."
> **– National Women's Coordinator, GTPCWU, Ghana**

> "Potential members are dissatisfied , unions taking a long time to sign the CBA. In the unions itself everything is lagging behind."
> **– Woman public transport worker, GTPCWU, Ghana**

Increasing job insecurity and **fear of job loss** meant that many workers would not talk to or join the union. Negative impacts to employment and working conditions affected women disproportionately, which meant that women were most resistant to engage with the union and many women did not report incidences of violence and harassment.

> "Those working will not talk because they worry that they will be laid off. They do not want to join the union because of the risk of being fired. There is worry that the company will lay off in case they want to reduce their work force. People are not willing to join the union because of the possible adverse effects."
> **– Union Account Officer and Assistant Secretary of ITF Nigeria Women's Committee, NMNOWTSSA, Nigeria**

With many countries in **lockdown and facing social distancing measures**, and workers being afraid of catching COVID-19, unions have been unable to organise in-person workshops and trainings. Where they have been held, they have not been well attended. This has proved to be a barrier for action on violence and harassment, with gender equality activities and workshops being put on hold.

Engaging women workers in training around violence and harassment has also proved difficult because most workers would rather **earn money and secure their livelihoods than attend training.**

"Even getting workers to attend union workshops or programmes... Work around gender and with women is not meeting expectations. As the National Women's Coordinator, I was in a region to organise a workshop on C190, but the participants didn't show up... they also want to secure their employment...they just have to do what they can."
– Woman public transport worker, GTPCWU, Ghana

"We have made a plea to the government, i.e. to different ministries, and we have been received by certain officials. The great difficulty remains the limited means we have to implement a real campaign (covid, media, travel, etc.). The great difficulty remains the silence of the government authorities in the face of our requests"
– SNTTAAC, Cameroon

In response to these challenges unions have **migrated many activities online.** However, this has created more challenges because of **the digital divide** that many women experience. Many women do not have technological knowledge or capacity, or cannot afford the internet connection or the means (phone, tablet, computer) to join online meetings.

The move to remote working for many workers has increased work-related communications. It is estimated that isolation and quarantine measures have increased internet usage by up to 70%, particularly as people increasingly use it for work.[7] The shift to online working comes with an increased risk of violence and harassment, particularly cyber bullying. Those with limited digital skills and access have also faced a digital divide. Women face greater inequality online due to their educational disadvantage, as well as biases in digital systems. Women also frequently face accessibility issues, often because the control of women's access to online tools (phones, computers, tablets) are frequently used by abusers as an isolation and control measure.

"Most of our women in transport sectors are not so much technologically inclined... and so getting even a meeting on zoom, WhatsApp, it's very difficult. So, these are the challenges – in person meetings it not possible and use of technology also isn't working."
– Woman public transport worker, GTPCWU, Ghana

"They want to digitalise most of our operations, but our people don't have educational capacity to also migrate to this too fast. We need to train in person. Digitalisation has particularly affected women...We need to solve the challenges that women are facing in the industry. Using the internet means we need to train them."
– Youth and Gender Officer, MDU, Ghana

These challenges have impacted **women's activism and participation in the union**, and **restricted action around violence and harassment as other union activities have been prioritised**. This has coincided with a slowdown of government action around violence and harassment, as resources and attention have been diverted towards the pandemic response.

The pandemic began shortly after the adoption of C190 in 2019. Many respondents felt that the pandemic had halted efforts around C190 and meant that unions have been unable to educate union members sufficiently.

"When C190 came to birth in 2019 and then just after that we went into this pandemic, much education hasn't gone down well with members. Some members don't even know that some actions constitute violence and harassment. We are facing a lot of challenges, and many don't know that something is harassment. When you are facing violence at home in particular, it is difficult to involve employers....just when we were about launching the campaign. Then COVID-19 came in then. We had to hold on and wait."
– Woman public transport worker, GTPCWU, Ghana

The largely gender-blind and generic response to the COVID-19 pandemic has failed to address the gendered impacts of the crisis, has limited women's access to support and services and has diverted resources away from essential equality initiatives.

The COVID-19 pandemic will have far-reaching and long-term consequences for women's equality, with concerns that it could set gender equality back decades. The experiences reported in this study only evidence the need to recognise the different ways that crises affect women and men, and effectively address them.

3.2 Union power during the pandemic

Despite huge barriers to union action caused by the impacts of the pandemic, throughout the pandemic unions continued to play an essential role to secure livelihoods and decent work, strengthen health and safety measures and ensure effective implementation. Many have also continued to campaigns for an end to violence and harassment at work.

Several respondents highlighted that despite barriers, unions continued to **campaign against workers' rights violations**. Several examples were given where the efforts of the union stopped the retrenchments of women transport workers.

In Nigeria, the MWUN reported that the management of one company tried to cut jobs. Women were forced to the top of the list. The management told the union that if they could not cut jobs, they were going to reduce the salary of the women workers. But the union was able to negotiate with the company to stop the cutbacks and secure the livelihoods of the women transport workers.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, SOLIDARITE undertook online awareness raising campaigns, using social media and building social networks to denounce violations of workers' rights; campaigned to stop job losses; and lobbied employers to stop them from using the pandemic as an excuse to attack trade union freedom.

In Ghana, even before the government had intervened to provide funding and support for companies, the GTPCWU negotiated with the management of one company to stop them laying off workers. Instead, the union negotiated for salaries to be reduced to enable workers to keep their jobs.

Unions also engaged in **occupational safety and health decision-making processes.** This included the sensitisation of workers; being involved in decision-making processes alongside management to ensure compliance with OSH and protective measures, including systematic temperature controls at the entrance of the company; respect of protective measures, distribution of PPE and masks; and provision of washing and sanitising devices.

In Togo, the ITF Togo Women's Network carried out an awareness raising campaign about COVID-19 and the need to comply with protective measures. It also distributed health kits to transport unions.

During the pandemic, unions have also been actively **campaigning around violence and harassment**. Across many countries, unions found creative ways to campaign, moving actions online and utilising social media to strengthen solidarity amongst women workers.

In Ghana, in the maritime sector, the MDU held regional and district workshops in collaboration with civil society partners, including ActionAid Ghana, to explore the impact of the pandemic on women transport workers, including around increased exposure to violence and harassment, and to ensure the impact of the pandemic was integrated to policy and decision-making at the national level.

In Togo, unions organised educational talks, established a national network, and took part in a national popularisation and awareness raising workshop on violence and harassment organised by ITUC Africa for the country's women trade unionists. The Togo Women's Network also established a listening unit to tackle the underreporting of violence and harassment.

In Cameroon, unions undertook awareness raising campaigns, organised educational talks with workers and employers and started to engage with government departments and ministries around the need to implement C190 at the national level.

In Ghana, in collaboration with the TUC, the GTPCWU continued to campaign for the ratification and implementation of C190. The union has also submitted a draft proposal to the Department of Labour to push for ratification.

In Nigeria, the NURTW has been meeting with the Department of Women Affairs to lobby for ratification of C190. The union has also been undertaking awareness raising activities to sensitise male union members about the problem of violence and harassment in the workplace. Training on C190 is being included in all staff meetings and training to ensure that it is integrated throughout the union. The union has also collaborated with the Solidarity Centre to undertake a survey of women workers to document the impacts of the pandemic on women transport workers.

In Nigeria, the President General of the MWUN organised a meeting of all women workers in maritime, rail, engineers and dockworkers to listen to the challenges that women transport workers were facing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The next step is for the concerns and issues raised to be prioritised in the union.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Evidence from the seven countries included within this study suggests that women transport workers have faced disproportionate impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic – at work, at home and in the union.

Although most transport workers have been severely impacted by the pandemic, through cuts to jobs, working time, pay and benefits, women have suffered a disproportionate loss of livelihoods and increased insecurity at work. As economic insecurity has risen, women transport workers have faced greater exposure to sexual exploitation at work. Increased psychosocial risks have also exposed women to violence and harassment on the commute, from third parties, and online. Economic and social pressures have also contributed to a shocking rise in reports of domestic violence. Violence and harassment are a barrier to women's equality and is a contributing factor to the continued gender-based occupational segregation in the transport sector.

The pandemic created big barriers for union action. It impacted women's activism and participation in the union, and also restricted action around violence and harassment, including in advocating for ratification and implementation of ILO C190.

In 2019, the ILO adopted the first ever international labour standards on violence and harassment in the world of work – **Convention 190 and Recommendation 206**. C190 and R206 offer opportunities for strengthening women's employment in the transport sector and addressing violence and harassment against women transport workers.

> "The lack of means to act means that we are increasingly seeing worse forms of violence in the workplace. This C190 tool will provide a means for victims to seek redress and compensation for the harm they have caused. Many victims do not dare to speak out because of the lack of structures to take care of them. Once this tool is ratified it will be up to employers to comply, to create a safe working environment..."
> **– SYNRAPAL, Togo**

"ILO Convention 190 is a tool to protect all workers men and women in all sectors from violence and harassment in the workplace. This tool can be used to build an internal movement within the union through awareness campaigns, information meetings, conferences, seminars, training...this tool can contribute to the fight against violence and harassment. through popularisation - ratification by states, commitment by government and employers, confederations, policies."
– SNTTAAC, Cameroon

These tools can help to strengthen action to end violence and harassment at work. Workers and their unions have an important role to play to make sure the Convention is ratified and becomes part of national laws, and that the language of the Convention – including language relevant for transport workers – is incorporated into national laws.

C190 also provides a foundation for unions to address violence and harassment in the world of work. Unions can negotiate with employers, and other organisations that have influence over livelihoods and working conditions to integrate C190 language into workplace policies, collective bargaining agreements, OSH planning and other agreements.

The following conclusions and recommendations can be useful for unions to use when lobbying governments and when negotiating policies and measures with employers.

1. WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

All transport workers faced negative impacts as a result of the pandemic. Lockdown and social distancing measures and the subsequent economic pressures contributed to the slowdown of industries, and in some cases completely grounded transport sectors, forcing transport workers into compulsory leave, resulting in pay cuts and in some cases job losses.

But **the transport sector is male dominated**. Women are underrepresented in the workforce and are overrepresented in the most precarious and low paid forms of work across the transport workforce. Sexist attitudes also prevail in the sector. As a result, during the pandemic women experienced disproportionate impacts on their working time, pay and benefits. Women were first to lose their jobs or have their working hours reduced and were the last to return to work.

This has long term implications for gender-based occupational segregation in the transport sector. Jobs in the transport industry are already highly gendered and unequal. The pandemic has pushed women into even more precarious work, pushed many women out of the transport industry and has created new barriers and workplace issues for women's employment in transport, including increasing exposure to violence and harassment.

"The men that are causing this violence and harassment. They are in a higher position, they are the boss, they are the ones giving orders in the company or workplace. Most of them – they are part of management, or they are the most senior. At the end of the day, it is not easy to think that violence and harassment would come to an end."
– Union Account Officer and Assistant Secretary of ITF Nigeria Women's Committee, NMNOWTSSA, Nigeria

C190 references the link between violence and harassment and gender-based occupational segregation. It also identifies that violence and harassment threatens equal opportunities and decent work for women workers, and it promotes women's empowerment as central to tackling violence and harassment.[8] This means removing barriers to jobs for women. C190 also protects all individuals in the world of work, irrespective of contractual status, including those whose employment has been terminated.[9]

RECOMMENDATIONS

Unions, with proper representation of women, should negotiate with employers and lobby governments to identify the gendered impacts on women's employment in transport, and demand amendments and improvements in women's access to transport jobs.

Demands could include:

- Improving recruitment and training opportunities, securing decent work and incomes, and strengthening social protection.
- Gender equality measures to be introduced in the workplace to take action on gender-based occupational segregation, which could include affirmative action employment policies, non-discriminatory recruitment policies, technical and skills training for women, and equal pay for work of equal value.
- Gendered public policies and laws that target the root causes of sex discrimination and ensure women's equal right to paid work, safety, dignity and respect.
- Safe access to decent gender-responsive sanitation facilities, including at workplaces and on routes in public spaces, and for regular scheduled toilet breaks.
- Women to be involved in developing and implementing gender-responsive preventative health and safety measures, including gender-responsive PPE and uniforms.

Informal transport workers have been particularly hard hit during the pandemic. Their lack of access to social protection and inadequate government support meant many informal workers completely lost their livelihoods during the crisis.

The overrepresentation of women in the most precarious forms of informal work means that women transport workers have faced heightened vulnerability to the impacts of the pandemic. Without the safety net of social protection, many women have been pushed out the industry. **Informal transport workers and transport workers in non-standard forms of employment** have also faced increased exposure to violence and harassment.

C190 includes informal work and informal workplaces and gives public authorities responsibility for regulating informal workplaces and addressing violence and harassment against informal workers. It also covers all workers, irrespective of their contractual status, including workers in non-standard forms of employment. R206 also encourages governments to help tackle violence and harassment in facilitating formalisation.[10]

RECOMMENDATIONS

Unions, with proper representation of women, should lobby governments and negotiate with employers to ensure that gender concerns are integrated into formalisation and restructuring processes.

Demands could include:

- Secure conditions of employment and stronger protections for women working in informal and precarious work.
- Facilitate the transition to formalisation of work in line with ILO Recommendation 204[11] and ILO Convention 190, and for workers associations and unions – with representation of women – to be able to engage in the formalisation process.
- Ensure universal access to social protection, including income protection, unemployment benefits, healthcare benefits and leave, including for sickness, pregnancy, and caring responsibilities, that cover informal workers and those in non-standard forms of employment.
- Reskilling opportunities for women into new secure and formal occupations in the transport industry.

The pandemic has exacerbated women's unequal **double burden** of increased pressure at work, alongside increased unpaid caring and domestic responsibilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Unions, with proper representation of women, should demand that governments and employers recognise women's double burden and introduce measures to address it, and ensure that the rights of pregnant women are protected.

Measures might include:

- Legislating for income protection measures and paid parental and sick leave, and protections for pregnant women and those who have given birth, including during times of crisis.
- Working hours and shift patterns that accommodate family responsibilities, improved parental leave, and protection of terms and conditions for women returning to work after maternity leave.

The shift to remote working is creating new challenges for women's participation at work. Women face a digital divide in technology usage, ownership and capacity compared to men. The digital divide has also created barriers for union action around gender equality.

The pandemic has **sped up the shift towards automation and digitisation** in the transport sector. This has potential negative impacts on women's employment in the sector, as women are often first to be affected by automation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Unions, with proper representation of women, should lobby governments and negotiate workplace policies with employers to introduce measures to ensure that new technology benefits women workers, and that women have equal access to technology.

Demands could include:

- Women workers to be involved in decision-making around new technology.
- Training opportunities for women.
- Use of gender impact assessments to recognise and address gender inequalities in technology.
- Unions to be included as key stakeholders in consultations on all new technological developments in transport.

2. VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT AGAINST WOMEN WORKERS

The challenges arising from the pandemic have increased economic insecurity for women workers and **exacerbated harmful gender inequalities**, including **harmful gender stereotypes**. This has increased exposure to violence and harassment for women transport workers and has put them at greater risk of sexual exploitation. Those in positions of power at work (managers, supervisors, employers) have been taking advantage of the crisis and asking for sexual favours in return for advantages at work.

Reports suggest that while there was increased violence and harassment against all transport workers, this predominantly affected women transport workers. As a result, recommendations mainly focus on addressing the increased exposure of violence and harassment against women transport workers.

C190 takes a gender-responsive approach and recognises that women workers are disproportionately affected by violence and harassment because transport is a male-dominated sector. It also recognises that governments and employers should take appropriate measures to protect workers from violence and harassment.[12]

RECOMMENDATIONS

Unions should negotiate with employers to integrate C190 language into workplace policies, collective bargaining agreements, occupational safety and health policies and risk assessments, and other agreements determining conditions in the world of work.

- Unions should develop measures to enable women to report incidences of violence and harassment, and negotiate safe, fair, and effective reporting and investigation procedures with employers
- Unions should build lobbying campaigns to demand that governments ratify and implement C190 and put it into national law.

Women transport workers have faced increased **psychosocial risks** because of the pandemic. There have been increased reports of violence and harassment from **workers in public and customer-facing roles**. Women transport workers have also faced increased exposure to violence and harassment on the **commute to and from work. The shift to online working** also increased exposure to online violence and harassment.

C190 covers the world of work – this includes the commute to and from work, employer-provided accommodation, sanitation and work-related communications – and gives employers and governments responsibilities to tackle violence and harassment beyond the physical workplace[13]. C190 also states that employers and governments must address working arrangements and risk factors that increase violence and harassment, including violence and harassment from third parties. C190 also recognises that addressing violence and harassment requires governments, employers, and unions to address psychosocial risks as OSH risks.[14]

RECOMMENDATIONS

Unions, with proper representation of women, should lobby governments and negotiate with employers to ensure that psychosocial risks are identified and mitigated.

This might include:

- Using measures in C190 and R206 to negotiate workplace measures to protect workers from psychosocial risks that increase exposure to violence and harassment, including workplace responses and preventative measures.
- Negotiating for C190 to be integrated into OSH planning and policies by identifying and assessing risks and taking prevention and control measures. This could include safe commuting measures for workers, and reporting protocols.
- Demanding that workers have safe spaces to participate when working online.
- Introduction of safe commuting measures.

The pandemic has contributed to a rise in reports of **domestic violence**, mainly experienced by women transport workers.

C190 recognises domestic violence as a world of work issue and encourages employers and governments to take measures to mitigate its impact in the world of work. R206 gives more detailed guidance on how to mitigate the impact of domestic violence at work.[15]

RECOMMENDATIONS

Unions, with proper representation of women, should demand that governments and employers recognise domestic violence as a world of work issue, and mitigate its impact in the world of work.

Measures might include:

- Policies and programmes to provide support for women experiencing domestic violence, including legislating for financial support to shelters, hotlines and counselling services, paid domestic violence leave and flexible work arrangements and protections.
- Workplace measures to support workers affected by domestic violence, including paid leave, flexible work arrangements, workplace safety strategies and risk assessments.
- Unions should also raise awareness internally to ensure unions recognise domestic violence as a workplace and union issue.

One of the biggest barriers to addressing violence and harassment is the gap in legal protection at the national level, and lacking support mechanisms and services for survivors of violence and harassment.

C190 states that governments should prohibit violence and harassment in law, introduce enforcement mechanisms and access to remedies and support to respond to and prevent cases of violence and harassment, and ensure cases of violence and harassment can be effectively inspected and investigated.[16]

> "The great difficulty remains the silence of the government authorities in the face of our requests. We need to carry out a communication and awareness-raising campaign with employers and in public institutions."
> **– SNTTAAC, Cameroon**

RECOMMENDATIONS

Unions should lobby governments to ratify and effectively implement C190, in line with R206. This should include relevant national policy and programmes to support the effective implementation of C190, including in times of crisis.

This might include:

- Declaring gender-based, violence-related services as essential services, and providing information about support services.
- Safety measures and reporting protocols for workers and passengers.
- Ensuring coordinated responses between health authorities, police, courts and social services.
- Awareness raising campaigns to address gender-based violence, including myths, stigma, and underreporting.
- Implementing accessible systems to alert authorities and protect survivors.

3. ACTION FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN THE UNION MOVEMENT

The pandemic has created new barriers for union action and has hindered union campaigning for the ratification and implementation of C190. The pandemic has also meant that resources were diverted away from gender equality activities. It has also created additional challenges for women when reporting experiences of violence and harassment.

Unions cannot effectively address violence and harassment in the world of work without strengthening equality and inclusivity within the union. Violence and harassment can also happen in the union itself. As employers, C190 also applies to trade unions, and unions should take steps to ensure that they are free from violence and harassment.

Violence and harassment against women are caused by inequality between men and women. As the majority of members and leaders in the union, **men have an important role to play in speaking out against violence and harassment.**

"Need men to stop the act of violence, environment that is free of in the workplace, home, society...people will not speak of it so they will not lose their jobs, and that is why we are clambering on getting our men to address it and to sensitise them."
– Union Account Officer and Assistant Secretary of ITF Nigeria Women's Committee, NMNOWTSSA, Nigeria

"It would be good to involve more of our presidents and general secretaries, some of them are gender champions but sometimes the information (by the time it comes out) serves as a reminder...It carries more weight coming from the leaders – workers / management tend to sit more upright when it hits the shop floor down the ladder... Leaders need a kind of sensitisation, we still need them to support us..."
– Head of Women's Affairs, NURTW, Nigeria

"Our President, he loves bringing more women into the union. The constitution has recently been amended to add women into the national district. It encourages women to speak out."
– Woman railway worker and Chairperson of ITF Nigeria Women's Committee, NUR, Nigeria

RECOMMENDATIONS

Unions need to engage and raise awareness amongst male trade union leaders, members and workers to take a role in the fight against violence and harassment.

Unions could also introduce proactive measures to ensure that women have access to leadership roles. This should include action to ensure women have increasing access to traditionally male-dominated union roles. Any measures should include a holistic approach to change perceptions and attitudes.

Other actions that unions could take include:

- Measures to build a supportive and empowering environment for women leaders and prioritisation of internal leadership discussions – led by women C190 champions – to reflect on the union's current and potential role and opportunities.
- Male union leaders should raise awareness and challenge harmful gender inequalities that lead to violence and harassment and highlight the unacceptability of violence and harassment. This will create a safer space within the union and will encourage more women to speak out about violence and harassment.

One of the biggest barriers to tackling violence and harassment is the **lack of awareness.** This also proved a barrier to reporting during the pandemic. Violence and harassment is often not prioritised by the union because of lack of understanding, awareness or lack of support. However, inaction or inadequate action by the union can perpetuate the cycle of violence, silence the survivor, and can actually increase violence and harassment. This makes women afraid to report it and enables violence and harassment to flourish.

Taking action on violence and harassment requires a good understanding of the issues for women transport workers. This also means that unions must **raise awareness and strengthen gender equality internally to ensure understanding about the risks and negative impacts and to strengthen support within the union.**

"Some practices that go on, some workers don't even know that it is harassment. We need to do more education for members to understand C190 and get them on board. Lots goes on that they don't know how to deal with, or even that it is an issue that needs to be dealt with. We need more education from the grassroots."
– National Women's Coordinator, GTPCWU, Ghana

"It cannot be a training that we do once and let go, it needs to be frequent and train as many women as possible…"
– Youth and Gender Officer, MDU, Ghana

"Most women, because of the trauma that they have to pass through – they don't come out and say it because of the shame and stigma attached to this situation. We have a lot of women that have been violated and we need to solve the stigma and the consequence of being known as a victim, stopping women from speaking up."
– Head of Women's Affairs, NURTW, Nigeria

"Education has to still play an important part. As a union, the women's committee leadership planned and discussed with the general secretary that in every union and activity meeting a slot is given for…sensitization on C190…"
– Woman public transport worker, GTPCWU, Ghana

In Ghana, the GTPCWU has an agreement that in every union meeting the women's coordinator is given the opportunity to sensitise union members on ILO C190. In doing so, the union hopes to strengthen understanding. The union is also looking to develop clauses on violence and harassment to include in collective agreements, to develop workplace policies that address the impacts of crises and changes in the world of work and is also looking to advocate for nurseries and breastfeeding rooms to be introduced in workplaces.

In Nigeria, the NMNOWTSSA has created a space in all union workshops and seminars for a discussion on ILO C190. The union is also planning to survey workers, members and union leaders to measure the understanding of violence and harassment, and organise seminars to address the knowledge gaps.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Unions should educate union members about the unacceptability of violence and harassment and the need to campaign for an end to violence and harassment.

This might also include:

- Training on violence and harassment and the provisions of C190, and awareness raising campaigns about violence and harassment myths, stigma, and underreporting.

Unions should ensure that a gender-responsive approach is integrated throughout union activities.

This might involve:

- Building structures and networks that strengthen the capacity of women trade unionists
- to become more active in the union movement.
- Establishing women's networks or other listening structures for women to safely report violence and harassment.
- Developing language and collecting evidence on violence and harassment and C190 to strengthen negotiations with employers and government.

Unions should also ensure that all workers – including informal and precarious workers – are properly organised and represented in the union movement.[17]

4. GENDER-RESPONSIVE CRISIS MANAGEMENT

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic has not adequately addressed the gendered impacts of the crisis. The pandemic has shown that there is a need to recognise how crises differently affect women and men and address the challenges with gender-responsive interventions. Women are also underrepresented in decision-making bodies in response to the pandemic.

Response and recovery plans must be **inclusive, integrated and gender responsive**.

C190 provides for specific measures to address violence and harassment within this approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Unions should lobby governments to demand a gender-responsive approach to the pandemic response, in line with ILO Recommendation 205. This means a gender perspective should be integrated in response to the crisis, gender-inclusive social dialogue should be used, and gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls should be central to recovery.

Demands could include:

- Women to be included in all decision-making bodies and negotiation teams to ensure that specific issues for women are addressed and to negotiate stronger COVID-19 response policies.
- Gender parity in all decision-making related to monitoring and collecting information and feeding back into policy advice processes.
- Gender-impact assessments to identify how COVID-19 is differently affecting women and men.
- Gender-responsive research to be carried out into the economic and social impacts of COVID-19, including gender-disaggregated data to ensure the policies, strategies and measures introduced are evidence based.
- Gender-responsive economic stimulus and support services, which should include financial support for gender-based violence services, including for domestic violence services, and strengthening gender responsive social protection.
- Strengthened social protection to achieve secure and decent work and equal access to jobs.

For more information about this see the ITF C190 Transport Workers' Toolkit.

ENDNOTES

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