

Making the Transport Sector Fit for Women to Work in

Findings from an ETF survey of women transport workers



A large-scale survey among women working in transport in Europe reveals an urgent need for substantial changes to make the sector genuinely fit for women workers.

More than 2,770 women transport workers from across Europe responded to a survey by the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF). Launched in October 2019, the survey probed into working conditions, workplace safety and access to facilities for women transport workers. The aim? To delve deep into the real reasons for the low female employment rate in transport, and to develop recommendations on what needs to be done to promote fair and violence-free workplaces.

The main challenges uncovered by the ETF survey include masculine culture in the workplace, equal pay, workplace safety, access to sanitary facilities and women's health.

Masculine culture in the workplace

Masculine culture at work exhausts workers and harms everyone's performance. Workers may suffer from depression, a lack of psychological security, a poor work-life balance, gender discrimination, and sexual harassment. "Masculine culture hurts everyone".¹ The survey identified masculine culture in the transport sector as one of the biggest problems that women workers face. It blocks women's progress in their careers and cements negative attitudes towards women managers.

"Masculine culture makes it harder for women to progress professionally."

— Docker

"My manager was very into promoting male colleagues and called them his brothers. Only one female was in a managerial position."

— Logistics worker

Equal pay for equal work

In Europe, women workers earn, on average, 16% less than their male colleagues. The transport sector is no exception to this.

"My male co-workers are on a higher wage than I and my female co-workers. The males who carry out the same job role also receive a night rate and night premium. This has been known to my boss for years but he refuses to acknowledge it."

— Civil aviation worker

KEY FINDINGS

- **50%** of the respondents feel that their job does not provide them with good opportunities for promotion and development.
- **35%** of the respondents are unhappy with the degree to which employers or managers fail to treat employees equally, and **23%** are dissatisfied with the gender imbalance in the sector.
- **25%** of the respondents think being a woman has a negative impact on their wages.
- **Close to 1/3** of the respondents do not feel that their working environment supports them in doing their job well.
- **49%** of the respondents think that their workplace does not prioritise a safe and adequate work environment for women. These concerns were expressed by **1/3** of women under 40 years of age; and more than half (**53%**) of older women workers.
- **23%** of the respondents identified sanitary issues as one of the major problems in the workplace.
- The survey uncovered previously invisible forms of workplace discrimination that specifically affected women's physical health.

The need for women's safety at the workplace

One of the barriers to careers for women in transport is workplace violence and harassment². Women working in the sector are often subject to repeated, hostile and offensive verbal, non-verbal and physical forms of violence, including sexual harassment by colleagues, managers and third parties.³

“When we are alone as women on a ship with only men, they are not nice. They think they can say and do everything! Like sending text message with pictures and wanting to...”

— Maritime worker

Access to sanitary facilities

The unavailability of sanitary facilities, toilet breaks, and cleanliness can be challenging for women working in transport. In particular, temporary facilities are often unisex, and may be badly maintained, left dirty by co-workers, or overused.

“Toilet breaks are hard to get when we are short staffed during peak season. [In my case it] resulted in severe kidney infection [and] actually passing urine with blood.”

— Tourism worker

Particular threats to women's health

Women's issues are often absent from occupational health and safety policies; the hazards involved are either unknown or underestimated. This is a barrier to effective policies on occupational health and equal opportunities.⁴ Previously invisible forms

of workplace discrimination that specifically affect women's physical health have been brought to light.

“Menopause-related illness is subject to disciplinary action.”

— Railway worker

“I was not able to extract milk after returning to work after maternity.”

— Bus driver

WHAT IS MOST NEEDED IN THE TRANSPORT SECTOR?

There is an urgent need to eliminate the entrenched male culture, and to provide safe workplaces where women are not exposed to violence and harassment, have full access to proper sanitary facilities, and can achieve a good work-life balance. In the words of women in transport, the necessary changes would bring – along with many other benefits:

“A clean driving cab; time between trains to go to the loo (not on the train); flexible working hours; more than 6 weeks' maternity pay (if you're sick you get 16 weeks); privacy policy where your personal file isn't openly discussed with your colleagues. A zero tolerance policy towards bullying and sexual harassment, and a less toxic work culture would be appreciated.”

— Railway worker

NOTES

- 1 Harvard Business Review, November 2019.
- 2 https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---sector/documents/briefingnote/wcms_234882.pdf
- 3 <https://www.etf-europe.org/violence-against-women-transport-workers-etf-study-reveals-the-facts/>
- 4 <https://www.etui.org/Topics/Health-Safety-working-conditions/Gender-health-and-work>

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The ETF survey was analysed by Dr Barbara Helfferich, *Independent Consultant*, and Dr Paula Franklin, *Honorary Researcher, Newcastle University, UK*.

A full report of the ETF survey, 'Make Transport Fit for Women to Work In', will be published online by ETF in summer 2020. For further details, follow us through the social media or web links below.



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