

World Toilet Day 2020

Women Transport Workers tell it like it is

Today marks World Toilet Day, a United Nations Observance that celebrates toilets and raises awareness of the 4.2 billion people living without access to safely managed sanitation.

In the transport sector, many workers find themselves in difficult situations when they have to 'go' due to lack of safe, dignified and accessible toilets. This especially rings true for women transport workers. Part of providing a safe and adequate work environment for them is having and providing access to decent sanitary facilities. However, when we interviewed around 3,000 women in transport, it emerged that access to toilets is a serious issue affecting their health and safety at work.

One-fourth of the respondents identified sanitary issues, including the availability of accessible and clean toilets, as one of the major problems in the workplace.

One-third of the respondents indicated that they were not satisfied with the sanitary conditions at their workplaces.

We reached out to women workers for recent testimonials and they told us like it is. The full testimonials are available [here](#).

“As a woman I’m very worried about the new lockdown law, with the closure of restaurants bars, if I need the toilet it is a big problem I cannot find one! I have to face these new bad working conditions every day during lockdown. We are considered (in empty words) essential workers but we are not treated as essential workers by our companies.”

“Please leave the sanitary facilities as you found them! Then there will be no more locked toilets on the trains!”

The ETF, on behalf of all transport workers, finds such situations intolerable. Every transport worker has the right to access a toilet. The above testimonials as well as replies to our large-scale ETF survey on how to make transport fit for women to work in reveal that this is an issue that is widely and deeply felt by women transport workers and goes as far as to harm their participation in the industry.

How do we ensure that a lack of decent sanitary facilities becomes a problem of the past:

- Address the barrier to achieving effective policies on occupational health and safety: Women's physical concerns need to be taken into consideration in occupational health and safety policies; currently, this is very rarely the case and the implicit and explicit hazards for women are either unknown or underestimated.
- Take full account of women transport workers' needs and the particular hazards they are exposed to, in occupational health and safety policies, as well as to adapt workplaces to meet those needs.

- Ensure safe and secure access to decent washing and sanitation facilities when they are needed during the working day, without loss of pay or fear of other penalties.
- Implement strict and regular cleaning procedures, taking into account the specific needs of women workers, such as menstruation, pregnancy or menopause.

Moreover, COVID-19 has accelerated the urgency of this issue. Many public sanitation facilities often used by transport workers have been shut down due to lockdowns enforced by many European governments. This is exacerbated by some employers being slow to implement hygiene and protective measures at the workplace, such as social distancing, or the lack of adequate and appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

To make the transport sector genuinely fit for women to work in, the ETF calls on the transport industry, including companies and policies makers at national and European level, to integrating a gender-responsive approach to legislation, policies, and guidelines with particular attention to women transport workers' hygiene and the provisions of sanitary and washing facilities at work.

Now, more than ever, we need to ensure that we do not regress but emerge stronger from the crisis, moving towards a sector that guarantees equal, violence-free and healthy workplaces for all workers.