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European Transport Workers' Federation
Fédération Européenne des Travailleurs des Transports
Europäische Transportarbeiter-Föderation
Federación Europea de los Trabajadores del Transporte

To the attention of
Ms Vera Jourova
Commissioner for Justice, Consumers
and Gender Equality

Ms Violeta Bulc
Commissioner for Transport

Ms Marianne Thyssen
Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs,
Skills and Labour Mobility

Brussels, 5 June 2019

Dear Commissioners,

RE: ETF supports an effective ILO Convention on violence and harassment in the world of work

On behalf of the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF)ⁱ, I am writing to urge the European Commission to support the development of an effective ILO Convention on violence and harassment in the world of work at the centenary ILO Conference commencing next week in Geneva.

There is a need for a specific international legal instrument focusing on violence and harassment, including gender-based violence, in the world of work, as no such instrument currently exists. Whilst some existing ILO instruments refer to violence and/ or harassment, these instruments do not define what is understood by violence or harassment, do not provide guidance on how to address its various forms and do not cover all workers.

Addressing violence and harassment through this new international standard is also key to the objectives of achieving decent and fair work for all and women's rights and equality in the workplace. However, only an ILO Convention and Recommendation will adequately address the issue of violence and harassment in the world of work.

Gender-based violence – the situation in the European Union

Violence against women in the EU is a problem of epidemic proportions. One-third of women have experienced sexual and/or physical violence and more than 50% experienced sexual harassment.ⁱⁱ Whilst both women and men experience violence and harassment in the world of work, unequal status and power relations in society and at work often result in women being far more exposed to violence and harassment. According to a report by European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights is "violence against women, and specifically gender-based violence that disproportionately affects women, an extensive human rights abuse that the EU cannot afford to overlook"ⁱⁱⁱ.



President Frank Moreels

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Vice Presidents Alexander Kirchner
Ekaterina Yordanova

Acting General Secretary Livia Spera



In addition to the human rights argument, the economic costs of violence and harassment against women are indicated by the European Commission at a staggering 225 billion Euro per year.^{iv} Creating an international mechanism to help identify and prevent violence and harassment in the world of work will help to reduce these economic effects.

Violence against women at work in transport in the European Union

The transport sector is still a male dominated industry. Only about 20% of all workers are women. This percentage is increasing, and women are becoming an important part of the workforce in transport. However, women predominate work in service-related and administrative jobs and often in more flexible work arrangements and in part time jobs. Whereas men mainly work in jobs such as drivers, pilots, technicians or in occupations involving physical work and a heavy workload.

In 2017, the ETF did a survey of more than 1400 women transport workers from across Europe, asking them about their experience of workplace violence.^v The study revealed alarming incidents of violence against women transport workers by colleagues, managers and customers:

- **63% of the respondents** did experience at least one recent act of violence.
- **25% of the respondents** said that violence and harassment is a regular occurrence in the transport sector.
- **26% of the respondents** considered violence and harassment to be ‘part of the job’ in transport.
- **Many respondents reported** about the devastating effects on their health and well-being and their diminished motivation to remain in their jobs.

Many women respondents to the survey spoke of a pervasive culture of sexual harassment and sexual intimidation. This takes the form of repeated, hostile and offensive verbal, non-verbal and physical forms of violence, including sexual harassment. These acts of violence are part of a culture where male colleagues, supervisors and managers believe they have an entitlement to abuse women, and if women “can’t cope they should get out”. This culture has resulted in many women being silenced and very isolated at work.

“A few years ago, when I worked as a flight attendant I was a subject to constant sexist jokes and invitations with sexual subtext, considering it part of the job. Although dealt with the situation successfully, I did not like it at all.” — Civil aviation worker

The second form of violence at work reported on in the survey is violence and harassment from customers (‘third-party violence’). The survey revealed alarming incidents of violence against women transport workers by customers. Risks of violence increase when a woman works alone and when they face customers, for example, in ticket checking, driving buses and trams, or working in ticket offices.

“All staff suffer abuse from customers but the abuse women have to put up with is more sexual and revolting.” — Railway worker

Violence against women workers in transport has damaging physical and psychological impacts. Many respondents spoke of a loss of confidence and self-worth as a result of violence at work. This has also a major impact on retention of workers. Several women stated that they wanted to leave their jobs but were unable to do so as they were concerned about not finding another job; others felt that they had to get on with the job or leave the job.

“Seriously depressed, 11 months off work, felt stressed and very nervous anxious... I had to leave the Merchant Navy after 17 years.” — Seafarer

The ETF survey shows clearly, if women do not feel safe in their workplace they do not stay in their jobs. An ILO Convention and Recommendation would give a push to effectively address the phenomenon and make a real difference in the workplace.



We believe that the European Commission can play an important role in establishing a new set of ILO standards, relevant to today's world of work. That's why we would urge the European Commission to support our positions on the following issues in particular:

The definition of violence and harassment

The ETF strongly believes that a single definition of violence and harassment is crucial to avoid uncertainty and gaps in protection. Such a definition would not prevent governments from applying separate definitions to acts of violence and harassment (e.g. bullying, stalking, sexual harassment) at national level. For this reason, we broadly support the definition in the draft Convention contained in the Blue Report V(2B), including the clarification proposed by the Office in a new Article 1(2).

The definition of worker

The ETF believes that everyone should be protected from violence and harassment, regardless of whether they have a contract of employment or a similar contract for services, work in the formal or informal economy, or are seeking work or performing a traineeship, apprenticeship or internship. We appreciate the Office proposal, which clarifies this within the scope of the draft Convention, rather than creating a definition of worker.

The scope of the world of work

The ETF broadly supports the scope of the world of work as set out in draft Article 3. We note that this article provides important clarity concerning what is to be understood by the world of work. We also note that Article 3 does not form part of the operational provisions and does not attribute any particular responsibilities to the different actors in the world of work.

The listing of specific categories of persons who may be particularly exposed to violence and harassment in the world of work

As concerns a specific new provision of the Recommendation aimed at supplementing Article 7 of the draft Convention, The ETF is mindful that re-opening the discussion on a list could again risk a polarising and inconclusive discussion, which we would prefer to avoid. The ETF cannot support a list that would not include LGBTI+ workers. The ETF, however, can accept compromise language that would not list specific categories of workers.

We thank you in advance for taking into account our views. We remain at your disposal for further questions and clarification.

Yours sincerely,



Livia Spera
ETF Acting General Secretary

ⁱ The ETF represents more than 5 million transport workers from more than 230 transport unions and 41 European countries, in the following sectors: railways, road transport and logistics, maritime transport, inland waterways, civil aviation, ports & docks, tourism and fisheries.

ⁱⁱ European Commission: <http://ec.europa.eu/justice/saynostopvaw/about.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ FRA (2014): Violence against women: an EU-wide survey, https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-vaw-survey-at-a-glance-oct14_en.pdf

^{iv} European Commission: <http://ec.europa.eu/justice/saynostopvaw/about.html>

^v ETF (2017): Violence against women at work in transport: <https://www.etf-europe.org/violence-against-women-transport-workers-etf-study-reveals-the-facts/>

