



WOMEN BUS WORKERS DRIVING TO EQUALITY

a best practice guide for road transport unions





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This new guide has been produced by the ITF inland transport sections and is the result of collaborative team work with active women transport workers. It is a new guide with a wealth of practical examples that the ITF believes will be a real resource for workers and unions in the industry. The guide is also a good example of the way the ITF wants to go forward by engaging with our unions more and more in developing capacity and tools to make unions stronger.

The bus industry plays a vital role in many different aspects of life; in the economy and in society. Whether they are called drivers or operators, bus workers are an essential part of that industry. They are also often the public face for the industry and so a point of interaction for passengers. Sometimes they are supported by bus conductors on their journeys.

Driving tends to be a male-dominated occupation in the road transport industry. However increasing numbers of women are working in operational transport jobs that were formerly seen as 'men's work' and increasing numbers of women are getting jobs as drivers.

There are higher levels of women drivers in urban passenger transport as compared to freight – in particular in specific sub-sectors of the industry such as school bus and accessible door-to-door transit services. Levels of union organisation of women also tend to be higher in the passenger sector.

While more and more women are becoming bus drivers, the number still remains low.

This is also true for union organisation; and even where there are high numbers of women in the union, women members may be visible but as a rule they are not active.

Activities for women workers are therefore essential to build strong unions, as well as to improve industry standards and opportunities for women workers.

We do this not just because it will build strong unions but also because it is the social obligation of unions to promote fairness in the workplace as enshrined in the core conventions of the ILO.

This booklet – which shares best practice strategies to promote women as bus drivers, union campaigns to address workplace issues for women in the bus industry, and union initiatives to organise and mobilise women bus workers – aims to encourage unions to take up this challenge.

Stephen Cotton
Acting general secretary



How it started

In 2009, a small team of women committee members in the ITF road transport workers' section was set up to look at issues for women road transport workers and to develop strategies in order to support, develop and build activities for women.

During 2010-2012, this team carried out research and mapping of the urban bus industry to look at the numbers of women drivers and conductors in the industry, their workplace issues, as well as union membership levels and organising strategies by unions.

The work included general overview information of the bus industry in certain countries, levels of unionisation in the sector and union organising experiences. Unions also carried out short interviews with bus drivers and conductors (men and women).

Unions in the following countries participated in the project: Australia, Barbados, Bermuda, Canada, Ghana, Great Britain, India, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Sweden, Thailand and the US.

This booklet includes information collated as part of the project. Additional information and examples from existing ITF publications and resources have also been included.

"Buses are vital to all modern societies, so are the hundreds of thousands of men and women bus workers worldwide. This ITF best practice guide is to support all unions representing the growing number of women bus drivers and women in the industry. No woman in the bus industry should face unequal pay, be told to wear a uniform designed for a man when she is pregnant, risk her health because of inadequate toilet facilities, or her dignity and safety through sexual harassment or violence. This guide shows how trade unions in the bus industry are at the forefront of the struggle – tackling discrimination, ensuring respect, safety and high standards for workers and the travelling public."

Diana Holland – chair of the ITF women's committee, and assistant general secretary transport - equalities - food, Unite the Union, Great Britain

"Integrating and supporting women in the road transport sector not only demonstrates adherence to principles of equity and equality, but also a commitment to the enhancement of the sector through the participation of women. This guide is the vehicle by which the sector and unions can achieve this."

Wilma Clement – ITF road transport workers' section women's representative, and assistant general secretary/tutor, Barbados Workers' Union



1. EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN THE BUS SECTOR

"We're very proud of what we do and we work very hard at taking care of our children because they are our most precious cargo."

Woman school bus driver, USA

Although the overall number of women employed in the bus industry has risen and more women are taking on the technical and operational roles that were formerly seen as male jobs, the proportion who are bus drivers still remains low. For example, according to the ITF women bus drivers and conductors research (2010-12), 10 percent of bus drivers in Australia and 4 percent of bus drivers in Barbados are women.

In some specific sub-sectors of the bus industry there are higher numbers of women employed as bus drivers – for example, trolleybus, school bus and local community or accessible door-to-door transit services that transport elderly or disabled passengers who cannot use the usual transit system.

Main reasons given by women bus drivers and conductors for how and why they became a driver or conductor:

- a family connection (where a family member – including a partner, parent, or sibling – was already working in the same position or was working at the company);
- a recommendation from friends;
- being attracted to this type of work (eg liking to drive, working with people, and believing that the job will have good benefits and security);
- already having experience as a driver in a different sector (eg trucking, school bus);
- a transfer within the company from, for example, bus conductor to driver (and vice versa);
- returning to the occupation after a period away;
- applying for the position in response to an advert.

ITF women bus drivers and conductors research, 2010-2012

Obstacles for women

Barriers still exist preventing employment of women in the bus industry – these can be management-led, but often they can be 'hidden' barriers arising from gender stereotyping, cultural attitudes from male colleagues, lack of awareness of available job or career opportunities, lack of opportunities to develop the appropriate skills to become a bus driver, and attempting to balance work life and family responsibilities.

The public perception of the role and work can also deter women from applying for the job.

Some comments from the ITF women bus drivers and conductors research (2010-12):

"Though this profession for women [bus conductors] is not looked upon with respect in the small towns and villages ..., the young girls are determined to make it a dignified career and are being supported by the union in this endeavour."

India

"It is the public perception that transit drivers work alone without any protection that deters more women from applying for this job, especially in conventional transit."

Canada

A WOMAN'S JOB?

Most of the men and women bus drivers and conductors who were interviewed felt that women were treated the same as their male colleagues.

Nevertheless, a few women did qualify their response by stating, for example, *"but we can't talk in meetings", "it depends on who your supervisor is", "but male drivers always have better opportunity in job promotion"*.

In general, men felt 'neutral' or they had a positive perception of women bus drivers and conductors. Some examples of comments are:

"I see our women operators as very professional, there are some exceptions but very few."

"They perform the same duties as males, however management makes no allowances for 'female issues' when building shifts."

"They are good drivers – the Transport Board needs more."

Some, however, did have a negative opinion. These perceptions seemed to revolve around stereotypes about women and their ability to do the job. Some examples of comments:

"They need to be taught how not to be scared."

"They need more training to make them better drivers and confident drivers."

"Women are weaker than men, but they have to take a risk working in these positions. They have to separate and miss their families."

"Women drivers do not have the sharp decision, so they cannot drive effectively."

"Whenever I have to work with a woman driver, I always feel that I have to work more carefully and will end up finishing work later than usual."

ITF women bus drivers and conductors research, 2010-2012

Unions need to fight against these negative perceptions, which can be held by fellow colleagues and sometimes the public, because the perception that driving is a man's job impacts directly on working conditions (see chapter 2) as well as on women wanting to become drivers.

Positive initiatives to promote women as bus drivers

In many countries there is no specific legislation to promote women into driving positions; however there are incidences of companies taking positive action to induct more women into mobile and non-mobile positions in the bus industry. In some cases, this is as a result of joint union and company initiatives and in others it is as a result of company education and awareness activities. Sometimes, women can be moved into driving positions as a consequence of restructuring within the company.

BUS DRIVER TRAINING IN GHANA IS A BREAKTHROUGH FOR WOMEN

In 2010, the ITF was informed of an initiative in Ghana that puts equal opportunities firmly on the agenda in the road transport sector. A driver training programme for women, jointly run by the General Transport, Petroleum and Chemical Workers' Union (GTPCWU) and transport company Metro Mass Transit, aims to train women bus conductors to become bus drivers, thus challenging the occupational segregation in the industry.

The six-month bus driver training programme took place in Accra in Ghana, and Abidjan in the Ivory Coast. The first group of twenty-four women successfully completed the course in June 2010 and all the women began working as bus drivers. Since then more groups of women drivers have been trained. In 2012, the number of women bus drivers had increased from 24 to 75 as a result of the programme. The union said: *"We gave the women encouragement and we supported Metro Mass Transit. The women's male counterparts dominate bus driving. We are trying to promote equality. The company employs a lot of women in ticketing and as bus conductors; we realised that their skills should be developed to the next level – handling a bus."*

Tactics used to improve women's access to the industry and encourage women to become drivers include women-only recruitment open days to address misconceptions around the profession, partnerships with employment agencies and programmes that target women returning to the labour market, taster events before committing to the job, and positive promotion of the industry and the important role of the driver in society.

LONDON BUSES: ACTION PLAN FOR WOMEN DRIVERS

By 2003, there were over 1,200 women bus drivers in London (about 6 percent of the workforce). A working group of Transport for London, the bus employers and the union Unite was set up the following year to bring more women into the industry. According to Transport for London: *"Modern buses are no more physically demanding than cars. So gone are the days when you had to be the world's strongest man to drive one. Or a man at all, for that matter."*

Women-only recruitment days have been held at bus garages, where women looking for a job could speak to women who are already driving. Though not in large numbers, more women have been taken on, and there are "women mentors" in the depots to support them. There are also some limited tax breaks and vouchers to help with childcare costs, as well as women's facilities provided.

"Women in the Bus Industry" action plan for London buses, July 2004, can be found at:

www.itfglobal.org/files/seealsodocs/5822/Women%20in%20the%20bus%20industry%20working%20group.pdf

Other considerations

Improving women's access to jobs in the bus industry is important as part of ridding the sector of its male image. Positive strategies by companies and/or governments to actively recruit women as bus drivers have made some impact, but there are still not large numbers of women bus drivers and conductors. It is therefore important to also address other obstacles preventing women from becoming bus drivers such as issues linked to working conditions.

In the longer-term, it is also vital to address issues linked to retention of workers in the industry so that newly-recruited women are not only satisfied in their role, but also have access to career opportunities.

Bus companies need to ensure men and women have access to the necessary support structures such as career development training, being open to flexible working patterns and ensuring support from managers and colleagues. Awareness through different channels on equality and diversity – for bus drivers, other workers in the garages who come into contact with bus drivers, managers and supervisors – also plays a role. Unions need to be involved in this process.

Furthermore, unions must also consider the gender aspects of restructuring. Women tend to be affected differently by restructuring. Usually women are very often the first to lose jobs. The areas they work in can often be abolished or outsourced as part of restructuring processes. Increased modernisation of ticketing systems on buses also impacts on the number of bus conductors in the industry (where, according to findings from the ITF women bus drivers and conductors research and mapping, there appears to be a more equal split between men and women in this role). Sometimes restructuring can result in workers acquiring new jobs as they are transferred from one role to another. Unions need to be involved in the different restructuring processes to ensure they are carried out properly and fairly.

The fact that different sectors of the bus industry may be state-owned and/or privately-owned means that there can be several companies and agencies involved. This impacts on the bargaining structures, employer policies and opportunities for women in the industry. Unions need to be mindful of this when considering their strategies.

CHECKLIST FOR UNIONS

- Does your union participate in joint approaches with governmental, educational and/or industrial bodies to promote the bus sector as a career for women?
- Can your union lobby the bus companies to adopt “best practice guidelines” in relation to recruitment, training and retention of women bus drivers? Can they be developed jointly between the company and union?
- Are selection processes non-discriminatory and fair to women (eg job descriptions are neutral, do not reinforce stereotypes and recognise transferable skills)?
- Can mentoring systems be introduced at bus garages?
- Is there dialogue on development of company policy or training courses to raise awareness on equality and diversity?
- Are these different strategies monitored regularly and updated as appropriate? Is the union included in this process?



2. ADDRESSING WORKPLACE ISSUES THROUGH UNION CAMPAIGNS AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

There are a number of workplace issues faced by women bus drivers and conductors. While many of the issues are common to both men and women, there are some issues that have a specific impact on women workers and can hinder their ability to work in the bus industry generally, but also in the specific role of bus driver.

Important topics for consideration include: working time and shift work, sexual harassment and violence at work, health at work, leave and pay, training and retraining at work, and ergonomics that can include the layout, design and mechanics of the cab.

Addressing issues relating to working conditions will help encourage women to enter the bus industry. Some ITF unions have taken up these issues by bargaining for improvements in collective agreements at workplace and industry levels. Other unions have undertaken public campaigns to address the issues.

Whatever the method of challenging the workplace issues, it is important that women are involved in the process and actively participate.

Recognising the issues that are important to women and including the needs and concerns of women transport workers in collective bargaining can help union organisers galvanise women members and recruit new female members as they see that their issues are being taken seriously.

Furthermore, where ITF unions negotiate for gender equality they find that the whole membership benefits. Taking up issues relating to working conditions will benefit the working lives of men as well as women, and this joint action can only strengthen the union movement in each location and across the world.

WORKING TOGETHER FOR RESULTS IN INDIA

Women members of the Indian road passenger transport union, Maharashtra State Transport Kamgar Shanghatna (MSTKS), have been encouraged to become more active in the struggle to improve their working conditions at their employer, the bus company Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRC). They were facing a lack of facilities, including toilets, and were frequently the target of sexual harassment by passengers as well as male colleagues. However, following an education programme aimed at women that sought to raise awareness of women's rights, violence and harassment, health and safety, legal rights and HIV/AIDS, women became more vocal. Through the union, they demanded that management look into their problems.

After four years of lobbying, the managing director and president of the corporation agreed to establish a state level committee of women road transport workers in 2008. The committee – made up of women from different categories of workers and women company officers – visited various depots, workshops and offices, where it has been dealing with the practical problems faced by the women workers; both those who are mobile and non-mobile. The union said: *"Women workers came to know that MSTKS stands up and fights for women's issues and the women are confident of getting justice upon joining the union. The union has organised a number of programmes covering various trade union issues under the banner of the ITF and they have been made aware not only about their basic rights but also about their duties and responsibilities."*

Working time and shift work

In the ITF survey of women road transport workers on health and safety at work (2006-07) over half reported they work more than eight hours a day. In Brazil, 36 percent of women bus workers reported they only get a break of half an hour or less during such a long working day.

Added to this is the reliance on shift work in the bus industry. Long working hours and shift work have an effect on workers' health and safety. But working patterns can also be problematic as awkward shift patterns raise challenges in relation to caring responsibilities. Options for part-time work can still be limited. Many employers do not want to take account of the fact that their workers – men and women – have families, children and elders, to care for; or that they have any life outside work.

WOMEN DRIVERS' NEEDS ADDRESSED

Over the past nine or more years, the Department of Transportation in Bermuda has been trying to have an external private company produce a new bus schedule. Their latest proposal of schedules in 2012 had a few runs with one minute turnaround times and other concerning issues. The operators rejected these runs, as not enough time was allotted to use the bathroom, which can be especially relevant for the female operators who need sufficient time for a hygienic bathroom break. The Bermuda Industrial Union is waiting for management to produce a revised set of scheduled rosters. Once these are completed they will be looked at by the union Perusal Committee which will review them for any further errors or omissions prior to the members ratifying them.

Some companies want women to work on night shifts as well but haven't put in place the appropriate facilities to support this – for example, accommodation for women bus workers to stay overnight at the end of a shift, the provision of rest rooms en route, and provision of safety measures such as radios, mobiles, alert buttons.

Pregnancy protection, maternity leave and childcare

Many women transport workers have reported to the ITF that basic maternity rights are not respected by employers.

For example, some women are not entitled to maternity leave with cash benefits. Others have restrictions imposed on their jobs after returning from maternity leave. Becoming pregnant can be a frequent cause of dismissal and discrimination for women workers around the globe. Some women can be subject to invasive practices to prove they are not pregnant as a condition of employment when applying for a job. In addition, some companies have no provisions for childcare.

Unfortunately, these issues are happening in the bus industry:

"[The] job does not pay enough to pay for day care. The company policy is no children under one year old ... our children can only come on [the] bus if there is enough room."

Canada

"I lost my seniority due to medical and maternal leave and my pay rate was lowered, too."

School bus driver, USA

In some countries there are legal provisions and protections relating to maternity and paternity. Many transport unions addressing the issue have negotiated maternity related provisions and other family related rights such as paternity and parental leave in collective agreements which often go beyond the legal minimum. For example, FNV Bondgenoten in the Netherlands has negotiated provisions in their collective agreements where workers can change their shifts if they are required to look after a dependant.

Childcare is one of the priorities for transport unions because the industry's historical focus on male workers has perpetuated job segregation in the industry, which is detrimental to women's career prospects.

For women bus drivers and conductors there can also be specific health and safety concerns during pregnancy. For example, in India, the road passenger transport union MSTKS has raised the issue of pregnant women conductors and their helpers. Due to bumpy and jerky roads, a large number of women conductors who were pregnant have suffered miscarriages.

Bus design and uniform

Given the transport industry is so male-dominated, employers have paid little attention to the needs of its women workers in terms of uniforms and the ergonomics of the vehicle they are expected to drive or work in. Women still have to deal with uniforms that are designed only with men's bodies in mind.

Some comments from the ITF Survey Equality Testing in Transport (2007-08):

"New trial uniform shirt: buttons open towards cab window, sleeve tapered to elbow, restricting. Issue skirt impractical trying to drive bus."

Bus driver, Great Britain

"Skirts are far too tight/short to be able to drive safely and have no pockets in which to put notes in the way men have in their trousers ... The uniform also bears no relation to the human body. We always have a male to do our measurements. Uniform points are never displayed for female uniform. I always order male trousers."

Bus driver, Great Britain

This problem also extends to vehicles and other equipment. A comment from the ITF women bus drivers and conductors research (2010-12):

"The buses are not designed for women. The model used is based on a male 5'10"-6'. Personal protective devices are ill fitting (made for men)."

Canada

Unions are responding to these challenges in different ways to ensure the needs of women workers are included. In some cases, there are joint company and union committees in order to test uniforms and make input to their design.

On cab ergonomics, the union Unite in Great Britain reports that its women bus drivers have used body mapping to assess the cab. There have been cases where the union has been directly involved at the procurement stage with the manufacturers to ensure that the most suitable and adjustable seat is provided.

Toilet facilities

In the ITF survey of women road transport workers on health and safety at work (2006-07), 63 percent said that there were no women's toilets for them to use. Where toilets and washrooms do exist, women repeatedly complain about how dirty and unhealthy they are. A comment from the ITF survey in 2006-07:

"Toilet facilities are an on-going problem for both male and female drivers, but more so for females as we cannot, at some times of the month, pop behind bushes!!"

Bus driver, Great Britain

Some employers are using the argument that there are not many women bus drivers to back up their case that they do not need to provide facilities for women.

Inadequate or a complete lack of toilet facilities takes away a worker's dignity at work. Not having access to toilet facilities can cause a range of health problems.

FREE TO PEE

The Unite union in Great Britain has a “Free to Pee” campaign to improve toilet facilities for drivers (bus and truck drivers). The campaign got going after an ITF women’s meeting in 2005 highlighted the lack of women’s toilets as an example of discrimination. During the ITF action week that year women members of the union used the week to launch a campaign to improve toilet facilities for drivers and in particular to provide toilet access on bus routes. The “Free to Pee” campaign continues across the country. In London, the union meets regularly with Transport for London and the bus companies to improve facilities along bus routes.

A lack of toilet breaks and in particular regular scheduled breaks, which can be particularly important for women workers, compounds this problem.

It is therefore important that suitable and sufficient toilet facilities are provided for bus drivers – men and women – at garages but also en route, for example at bus stands. Facilities should be clean, accessible (eg during a change in shift), secure and not open to the public. Separate facilities should be provided for women bus drivers. Regular scheduled toilet breaks should also be incorporated.

“THE DRIVER’S SEAT OF THE FUTURE”

In 1999, the Swedish municipal workers’ union Kommunal organised a 13-day strike in the bus sector in response to health and safety concerns relating to delays, long shifts without breaks and a lack of toilets. Fifteen thousand bus drivers participated in the strike, which won a pay rise and regular scheduled toilet breaks. The strike was part of an 11-year campaign by the union between 1992 and 2003. The union reported that the inclusion of the toilet breaks has resulted in numerous advantages, including: prevention of repetitive strain injuries, better rest facilities, improved standard of toilets and facilities in more places, and less stress. The situation, especially for women drivers, has improved when they are guaranteed a toilet visit within a reasonable time frame.

Sexual harassment and violence at work

Passenger transport workers are vulnerable to physical and non-physical violence because of the jobs they do. Both women and men suffer from these factors, nevertheless women are more vulnerable in different ways.

A comment from the ITF survey of women road transport workers on health and safety at work (2006-07):

“Four of our routes are in rural areas . . . Our radio system is so inadequate that they do not work in certain areas for lengthy periods of time. As a female driver it is unnerving to be in the middle of nowhere with no radio contact. I feel that, because there has been no rape assault or major accident, the company doesn’t feel it is necessary to put the money into an upgraded system. I feel this is much more important to our safety than my male bosses do!”

Bus driver, Canada

Bus drivers, conductors and ticket agents speak of bus stations where the security cameras don’t work, and of bus cabs where they are not protected from thieves after cash. Working alone at night, as well as a lack of safe transport to and from work at night, can mean many women are in danger from robberies and sexually-motivated attacks.

Unfortunately, some of these risks come from within the workforce and need specific targeting by unions.

“Whilst driving I had my breasts groped, a passenger threaten to rape me, a passenger threaten to shoot me and other incidents too numerous to mention. I had my bottom slapped in front of witnesses by a senior manager. I have endured insults from day one (only lesbians want to drive buses). I accept that where I am now, I am one of only three women in staff and some innuendo is inevitable.”

ITF Inland Transport Survey on Workplace Sexual Harassment and Violence for Women Transport Workers in Rail and Road, 2009

WOMEN’S ADVOCATE PROGRAMME

CAW in Canada has established a Women’s Advocate programme to combat violence against women. A Woman’s Advocate helps women who may have been sexually assaulted, sexually harassed, who are in violent relationships, or who may be suicidal, by referring them to community resources. In the workplace, the programme is negotiated with the employer and jointly run with a trained female management support person. Together they join forces to reduce violence in the workplace. Advocates can also assist workplace committees with other issues that are being faced by women workers.

www.caw.ca/en/3596.htm

According to feedback from the ITF Inland Transport Survey on Workplace Sexual Harassment and Violence for Women Transport Workers in Rail and Road (2009), while about half of respondents who had experienced an incident said they had reported it, many of the outcomes from reporting an incident appeared to be negative.

For example, one woman shared her experience of how she had reported an incident of assault from a drunken passenger who tried to grab the steering wheel but when she refused to carry the same passenger the following week, her supervisor, despite her clear explanation as to why she had taken this action, took the decision to remove her from the bus. She felt that she had no backing and that the reaction would be the same in any further instances.

Furthermore, almost half of respondents reported that there was no employer policy or they did not know whether one existed. Worryingly, a significant number said they were not aware of union activity on the issue.

UNION CAMPAIGN AGAINST SEXUAL HARASSMENT

In 2006, women transport workers in Thailand campaigned to put an end to sexual harassment in the workplace. The workers, represented by several Thai ITF-affiliated unions spanning civil aviation, rail and road transport, organised a series of activities over two months, designed to highlight the issue of sexual harassment. Campaign activities included a women’s seminar in Bangkok, the distribution of leaflets and T-shirts to raise awareness, and presentations to union board meetings, during which case study examples of harassment were shared.

Breaking the silence and speaking out about violence against women is the first step in recognising and raising awareness about the issue. What needs to follow is strategic and coordinated union action. This will help ensure that union demands are heard when unions enter into negotiations to put preventive measures into practice. Taking action to address these issues will mean better protection for all – for women and men transport workers as well as for the safety of the travelling public.

UNITED WE STAND!

On 25 November 2009, the Federation of Transport Trade Unions in Bulgaria (FTTUB) initiated a campaign marking the tenth anniversary of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. The campaign started with a roundtable discussion with the Mayor of Sofia where agreement was reached for joint action on the prevention of work-related harassment and violence against women in the urban public transport companies of Sofia.

The FTTUB then commissioned a survey of all urban public transport companies in Sofia about the violence women face every day at work.

Following FTTUB recommendations, a database on violence against women in the workplace was created. The conclusions of the report were published on the FTTUB website and a special newsletter was distributed among workers. The campaign was widely reported in the media. The data that was obtained helped the union develop policies and strategies to tackle this problem, and pushed the social partners to conclude an innovative collective agreement on the prevention of workplace violence. The Mayor of Sofia initiated a self-defence course for women.

The union's women's committee meeting in January 2011 demanded that the campaign should be spread all over the country to all transport sectors. The initial campaign has transformed into one of the most important policies of FTTUB.

HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS is of particular concern to transport workers in some countries. Mobility and long absences from home make road transport workers vulnerable. While predominantly affecting the truck industry, HIV/AIDS can be an issue for long-distance bus drivers who can also spend periods away on the road.

Over the past few years the ITF's projects on HIV/AIDS have included very good examples of education work with women in unions, women in transport workers' communities and with those sex workers who congregate around transport stops.

SEXUAL HEALTH IN SÃO PAULO

In 2006-07, the CNTTT union in Brazil developed and supported a series of HIV/AIDS awareness-raising and prevention activities in São Paulo, in partnership with the São Paulo State Federation of Road Transport Workers (FTTRESP), the Nova Central Sindical de Trabalhadores Workers' Confederation and the Resgate de Cidadania ("Recovery of Citizenship") Institute.

The work began during a week of activities for women road transport workers in March 2006, as part of the CNTTT's women's project, and became an integral part of all projects organised by the CNTTT women's coordinating committee. The union also used the ITF action week in 2006 and International Women's Day in 2007 to organise activities, including talks by medical staff at bus and lorry stops and distribution of condoms to drivers.

Contacts with the São Paulo municipal government led to the development of a training course on sexuality, drug use and HIV/AIDS. Participants were trained to raise these issues with men and women transport workers based at the capital's 27 bus garages.

COLOMBIA BUS AGREEMENT CONTAINS HIV/AIDS CLAUSES

In 2013, the SNTT union in Colombia negotiated and signed a collective bargaining agreement with the Ibaguè Express bus company which contains a clause related to HIV/AIDS. It guarantees job security for workers who receive a positive HIV test result and commits the company to support a union organising campaign on HIV/AIDS prevention.

Training and re-training

Training is important as part of improving women's access to the bus industry so that they have the appropriate vocational skills to undertake the role of bus driver or conductor, but also to progress within the sector, for example, into management positions.

Mentoring or "buddy" systems can be useful tools to complement formal training and re-training processes. Part-time programmes should also be included.

CHECKLIST FOR UNIONS

Collective bargaining:

- Are women's issues identified prior to bargaining and included in the bargaining agenda?
- Are women included as members in negotiating and bargaining teams?
- Do women get pay and conditions equal to their male counterparts?
- Are there specific provisions for women bus drivers and conductors in your collective agreement, for example, separate washrooms with sanitary facilities, sleeping and other rest areas?
- Are there flexible work options such as shift work and part-time work?
- Is there a sexual harassment policy?
- Are there appropriate uniforms available for women and for pregnant women in particular?
- Are issues for women relating to the ergonomics of the cab addressed?

National and legislative considerations:

- Does your state have laws asserting the right of equity in pay and conditions between men and women?
- Do you have state-set maternity and parental paid leave provisions?
- Do you have national laws against sexual harassment and violence against women?
- Are there national occupational health and safety laws?
- Does your state have anti-discrimination laws for women?
- Are there opportunities to raise women's issues as part of dialogue with local, national and international government representatives and as part of tripartite discussions?

Cont. overleaf

Campaigning:

- Do you have a union campaign on workplace issues such as working time, childcare, bus design, toilet facilities, violence at work?
- Are women members aware of union campaigns and fully involved in the preparation and implementation of the campaign?
- Can your union organise activities to support other international transport worker action campaigns such as the ITF action week (October), International Women's Day (8 March), UN Day for Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November) and World Day for Decent Work (7 October)?
- Are there opportunities to campaign around ILO conventions, in particular No 111 on discrimination (employment and occupation), No 183 on maternity protection and No 156 on family responsibilities?
- Can your union establish links with NGOs, community and user groups?



3. ORGANISE TO BUILD UNION POWER!

"The union is only as strong as you make it. You need to stick together as a group and make things possible."

Woman school bus driver, USA

Women are working in the transport industry – including as bus drivers – in increasing numbers, but its unions, as well as the industry, remain male-dominated. For example, according to ITF membership figures for September 2013, women make up about 9 percent of the membership in the ITF road transport workers' section.

While the levels of union organisation of women tends to be higher in passenger road transport compared to freight, generally, the percentage of women bus drivers that are organised is still quite low.

Reasons why women join a union:

"When I have a problem or am mistreated or bullied, the union can help"

"Recommended by a friend. Union has helped us in many issues in our work"

"I want to be protected by labour law"

"The union can help us to have better lives and better quality of living"

"I joined for representation and to show solidarity with our members. Also for the benefits of membership eg educational seminars"

"On joining the staff someone told me I would have to join and I did. I have no regrets"

"To help protect my licence and job"

... and reasons why not:

"Not yet, nobody introduced me"

"I used to apply to be a union member long time ago, but my union dues have never been deducted from my salary"

"My husband does not want me to join the union"

"I don't like the union"

"I don't think the union can help"

ITF women bus drivers and conductors research, 2010-2012

Unions need women and men among their ranks in order to build trade union power and implement strategic campaigns. Union organising campaigns are fundamental for trade unions in order to develop collective bargaining strategies, creating solidarity among women and men workers and bringing new rights at work. To organise and keep women members, ITF unions need to tackle the issues that are important to women through both collective bargaining and organising campaigns. Understanding women's changing role in society, the distinctive features of their lives at home and at work, and women's central role in the community are important prerequisites to a successful organising campaign.

Union organising campaigns in the bus sector

Unions are undertaking different organising activities within the bus industry. These activities have included traditional methods such as induction sessions and workplace visits and more

“creative” initiatives, including “peer” organising and active organising by volunteer organisers from the industry. Social events have also been used by unions, however while these events can be successful in raising the visibility and improving the image of the union, some unions reported that they have not necessarily resulted in concrete organising gains.

In some cases international solidarity and coordination with sister unions has assisted union organising campaigns in particular to challenge union busting tactics that some bus companies seek to employ.

Having just one organising strategy will not necessarily work. Instead a number of different innovative approaches and tactics need to be considered as part of union organising campaigns.

DRIVING UP STANDARDS

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) represents more than 50,000 bus workers – men and women – in hundreds of yards across the US and Canada. In these yards, the Teamsters have worked in partnership with members to negotiate contracts, address workplace issues and promote fairness and respect for workers.

The Teamsters’ “Drive Up Standards” campaign is a national movement of school bus workers aimed at raising standards in the school bus industry. Since 2006, more than 35,000 school bus drivers, monitors, attendants, aides and mechanics have joined the Teamsters. One result has been a national Master Agreement with First Student, the largest US school bus contractor. At its School Bus Workers’ Congress held in Chicago in 2012, Teamster school bus workers ratified a School Bus Workers’ Bill of Rights. Among those rights are the right to good faith collective bargaining, freedom of association, due process to resolve workplace issues, dignity and respect on the job, freedom of speech, a safe workplace, fair and honest treatment and protection from discrimination. <http://driveupstandards.org/>

Challenges also exist for union organising activities. Deregulation, privatisation and liberalisation of the bus industry has resulted in massive changes to workers’ conditions. With the change from one employer to multiple operators and hundreds of small companies, many unions are now having to negotiate an increased number of collective bargaining agreements. There may be insufficient information about where workers are located.

In some countries, private sector and public sector workers are covered by different legislation which impacts on the ability of unions to organise workers in each sector. Union rights are also under attack with the formation of anti-union legislation which, for example, sets a high legal requirement for union representation, thus affecting union ability to organise.

In other cases, a lack of knowledge by workers about the union and benefits of being a member can hamper union organising attempts. A lack of skilled organisers can add to this.

Union organising strategies should be inclusive of both men and women workers. Sometimes specific strategies may be needed in order to target women transport workers.

Activities by unions to broaden their base of women members can take many forms, for example days of action on a specific topic of interest or concern to women transport workers such as violence, maternity or HIV/AIDS awareness, targeted recruitment drives in workplaces, union meetings for women workers, and women-led strategic campaigns.

The use of promotional materials and ITF campaigns has also helped union activities.

REACHING OUT TO BUS WORKERS

In 2012, the Bangkok Mass Transit Authority (BMTA) had a total of 14,000 workers (bus drivers and conductors). Thirteen thousand, five hundred are entitled to join the union and 8,300 are organised (both men and women). Over the past few years, the BMTA-SWU union, under the ITF/SASK education project, has regularly conducted basic trade union awareness seminars for members to educate them about the union, their rights and their working conditions. Moreover, the union used the internal branch structure to assist in recruiting unorganised workers into the union. The women's wing in the union has organised a campaign against sexual harassment and violence against women in the workplace. The union also uses its monthly journal, leaflets and Facebook to communicate with members in order to publicise the union's work and activities as well as its achievements. All these have helped the union to increase its membership.

Involving women in these organising processes is key – whether they are the leaders developing the strategies, organisers carrying out the recruitment campaigns on the ground, or activists and educators supporting the organising work. By doing so it will help to attract women to join the union but also maintain and build women's participation in the union going forward.

“There's no doubt that women make a difference. When you have women now almost on equal participation rates to men, almost 50 percent of the workforce, then having women in unions, having women organising in their workplaces actually builds the numeric base of unions but it builds the strength of unions.”

Sharan Burrow, general secretary – International Trade Union Confederation ITUC

CHECKLIST FOR UNIONS

- Does your union know how many potential women members there are in workplaces?
- Does your union have targeted organising campaigns in the bus sector? Are strategies for women bus workers included?
- Does your union have women organisers?
- Does your union have a network of women activists to support the campaigns?
- Are they trained in organising?
- Do you have a communications strategy to keep in contact with members and potential members?
- Do the workers know who to contact in the union?
- Are there structures for women members in your union?
- Is your union engaging with other unions – to ensure support and to avoid damaging competition?



4. STRONG UNIONS NEED WOMEN!

Organising is not just about recruitment or increasing membership numbers. Rather, the focus needs to be on building stronger unions or unionism, and educating members to become activists, negotiators, organisers, leaders. Trade unions are running the organising campaigns, not the ITF.

Women can find it difficult to participate in trade unions. The mainly male culture of unions in some countries, the disproportionate family and home life responsibilities of many women, stereotyped expectations about their roles, social stigma which prevents women from raising their voice against discrimination and other issues, cultural and religious beliefs can all restrict women's participation. A lack of issues for women workers on the bargaining agenda may also lead women workers to question the benefits of being in a union in the first place.

Including women in union activity and taking up key concerns for women transport workers will make unions stronger.

Unions need to be relevant for women at all levels – from the workplace to branch level and through to national level.

Mechanisms to ensure space for women's voices to be heard in the union will increase the likelihood of the collective bargaining agenda reflecting women members' concerns and issues.

Unions that have effective structures to represent women and encourage the active involvement of women members are also the unions that have strong campaigns on women's issues. Furthermore, these unions also have women in leadership positions.

Transport unions have approached the representation of their women members through a variety of mechanisms. These range from formal structures within their constitutions, such as women's committees, to representation on union policy-making bodies, collective agreement negotiation teams and national union committees for the sector, or the establishment of women's schools, as well as less formal arrangements such as networks and women's activities. Many unions have appointed women's officers to ensure that gender equality and the specific needs of their women members are addressed.

Some unions have adopted positive action measures to encourage women's representation at national or local leadership levels. This is important because it strengthens unions.

"More women than men are inclined to join a union now. The key to attracting women to union membership is in those who organise and those who lead. Organisers and leaders should themselves be women workers who are able to relate to the people they want to organise."

Alison McGarry, ITF women transport workers' coordinator

WE CAN DO IT!

In Lithuania, the percentage of women union members in the trolleybus depots is high. In 2010, the chair of the Vilnius trolleybus depot trade union was a woman and there are also many women union council members. Women are included on collective agreement negotiation teams at all levels.

Women's workplace representatives can offer advice and support on sensitive issues, and act as a bridge between the union and women workers.

Women's committees have a double function – a focus for women's concerns as well as a place where women take action and gain valuable experience within the union. They can be bodies

within the central organisation of the union at national level or they can be at divisional or local/regional level.

Some ITF unions have appointed **women's officers** at national level to work specifically on the promotion and participation of women members, including organising women transport workers and developing the gender aspects of the collective bargaining agenda.

BRINGING A WOMAN'S INFLUENCE

When union members of the national bus company of Barbados, the Transport Board, went to the polls in May 2013 to elect a new executive and set of shop stewards to represent the interests of the workers, the name of a woman appeared among the large number of males vying for office.

Historically, the face of the Barbados Workers' Union (BWU) at the Transport Board has been predominantly male, even though several females have served as shop stewards and committee members throughout the years. This year, there was a strong signal that women wanted to serve.

Having spent over six years at the Transport Board, this woman bus operator decided that although the odds were against her she would offer herself to serve her fellow workers. She determined that she could assist in finding out where the bottlenecks were, and in ensuring that workers' issues were dealt with. She was also concerned about the scheduling of women bus operators and their risk of falling victim to all forms of violence; but she was quick to note as well the male operator's vulnerabilities, though they were not as great as the women's ones

Elections were held and she was not elected to office, however this operator remained steadfast in her belief that in some positive way she could influence the public's attitude towards bus operators and in some way she could assist the newly elected executive in its task of worker representation. She urged all women employed in the road transport industry to show more interest, participate, and let their voices be heard.

Communication with union members is essential but can be difficult when members are on the move. Bus drivers and conductors are mobile workers and can often be required to work long hours with short periods off work, which can make it very difficult to gather them for union activities. Unions that communicate regularly with their women members (and potential members) can focus on the work the union does for women, as well as identify the issues that are important for different groups of women in the union. Many unions have promoted the role of women through their membership magazines and other publicity. This has helped to focus on women's issues, even where women make up a small proportion of the membership. Regular union meetings for women members can help to encourage the participation of women in the union and ensure that the gender perspective of an issue is picked up by the union.

Networks are proving to be an increasingly effective way for women union members to keep in touch with each other and can assist with the exchange of information and the development of proactive rather than reactive campaigns. Networks can provide informal contact in the absence of formal union structures. But even where unions have women's committees and officers, many women members enjoy the benefits of informal contact and online social networks – an increasingly important way of keeping in touch with national and global campaigns – alongside more formal participation in union activities. Access to union and ITF women's networks can help reduce women's sense of isolation and promote worker solidarity.

Education is vital in promoting awareness and understanding of the role that unions play in the workplace and in society and building union power through membership activism. Training

programmes, often designed specifically for women, help develop women members and build union organisation and campaigns. Education and training can also enable women members to take up union posts or play an active role within the union.

UNION ACTIVITIES TARGET WOMEN BUS WORKERS IN INDIA

80 percent of the women workers at the MSRC (India) are members of the MSTKS union, however they are not active in the union. Until 2011, women's involvement in union affairs was not encouraged and women did not participate in trade union activities. Only male members represented women's issues at the central executive committee and joint committee forum. They did not properly represent the views of women members. When the women workers noticed all these facts they decided to make their own space in the union. After a lot of hard work, the union leadership agreed to form a women's committee at divisional level. Forming a women's committee in 36 divisions was not an easy job. For this purpose the union's women organiser acted as a contact person between the union and women workers, and visited the various divisions, conducted awareness programmes and formed women's committees there. In 2012, the union dedicated its education programmes for strengthening women's participation in trade unions. The aim was to encourage women to join trade unions and also to create awareness, increase women's participation and build their confidence. The union launched the campaign "Strong Unions Need Women". The union has organised rallies, demonstrations, regional and state level meetings for women, and group discussions at division and depot level in order to educate women at grassroots level.

Sometimes it is necessary to look to **informal activities** to engage with women and overcome the obstacles that prevent their participation in unions. Often this can mean approaching women outside their workplaces and sometimes on a personal level. For example, this could be at festival times or during community and religious events. Some unions have organised entertainment programmes, group activities and sports events where women can come together and discuss basic rights and trade union activities.

ITF campaigns can assist union organising campaigns. The ITF Action Week has been a useful tool in creating visibility for such campaigns. It is also a perfect opportunity for unions to demonstrate that women transport workers are not isolated and in fact play an integral role in the road transport industry and within the union. Specific campaigns for women such as International Women's Day, and the UN Day for Elimination of Violence against Women can also assist unions to highlight specific workplace issues for women members and improve women's participation in union activities.

Many road transport unions have already used the Action Week campaign to organise women's activities. Leaflets handed out to drivers in France by CGT Transports in 2007 included the demand for respect for women and men workers through "equal work, equal pay". In 2009, the Communication & Transport Workers' Union of Tanzania – COTWU (T) held a meeting for women transport workers. More than 150 participants including many young transport workers, attended the event, which discussed harassment at work, maternity leave and wages. In 2010, the Tamil Nadu Road Transport Workers' HMS Federation organised a rally as part of its activities for the Action Week in south Tamil Nadu. Seven hundred workers – mainly women and young people – participated, demanding respect for workers' rights and better work conditions generally. In 2011, the Motor Transport and Road Workers' Union of Russia highlighted their demand to the administration of transport enterprises and local authorities to improve the working conditions of women conductors and trolleybus/tram drivers.

It will not always be easy to implement women's structures in the union and results will not necessarily be seen at once. But ultimately engagement with women members and the development of union activities with women members and the development of activities that are led by women will support women's participation.

Structures and activities for women members must not be in isolation from central union activities; it is important that they are integrated. It is also important that men as well as women are involved in the work of promoting gender equality at work and in the union.

CHECKLIST FOR UNIONS

- Does your union have a women's officer or someone responsible for women's work?
- Does your union have an active union women's network?
- Does your union have an elected women's committee?
- Does your union have women in elected or paid official positions?
- Are women represented in the union's decision-making bodies and negotiation teams?
- Do women participate in your formal and informal union development and education programmes?
- Does your union participate in ITF women's activities?
- Do you have women representatives nominated on the appropriate ITF and section networks (women specific and others)?
- Does your union provide childcare facilities for members attending meetings and courses?
- Does your union run specific women's campaigns?
- Does your union run activities to mark International Women's Day and the UN Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women?
- Can your union use the ITF Action Week to highlight and campaign around issues for women transport workers?
- Can your union organise an event involving women transport workers to raise awareness among women workers of their rights and of the role of unions?

Keep in touch!

The ITF inland transport sections would like to thank unions for the information that they have shared. We hope this best practice guide will inspire road transport unions in their campaigns.

Please keep in touch with your union so that they can report experiences and campaigns for women bus drivers and conductors to the ITF.

By sharing best practice, the ITF and its unions will continue to grow stronger.

ITF RESOURCES

Women transport workers

Making unions stronger

This ITF resource pack and film contain many ideas for how transport trade unions can and are organising to bring more women in, so strengthening their activities and role in defending all workers. www.itfglobal.org/infocentre/pubs.cfm/detail/21275

Developing women leaders

The ITF women's department has been running a series of events on leadership for women unionists. More information about the ITF programme on building women's leadership is available from the ITF women webpages. www.itfglobal.org/women/Developing-Leadership.cfm

Film: **Making a difference – women transport workers in the ITF**
www.youtube.com/watch?v=3QKz7RJnllk

Film: **Women leaders make the difference** – www.youtube.com/watch?v=0348lvGxeU

Health and safety at work

Women on the road to ... a safe and healthy working environment

A guide for road transport trade unionists on health and safety issues for women road transport workers to encourage and promote women's participation and membership. www.itfglobal.org/infocentre/pubs.cfm/detail/7402

Unions say no to violence!

This activist pack produced by the inland transport sections includes a booklet to support union activists and union educators to identify the issues relating to violence and help identify solutions. It includes a leaflet, film and a set of handouts with case study examples. www.itfglobal.org/urban-transport/notoviolence.cfm

HIV/AIDS

The ITF, in cooperation with the ILO (International Labour Organization) and the IRU (International Road Transport Union), have produced a new multimedia toolkit on HIV/AIDS for the road transport sector. www.itfglobal.org/HIV-Aids/toolkit.cfm and www.ilo.org/aids/Publications/WCMS_115464/lang--en/index.htm

Film: **It's part of our job but it shouldn't be!**
www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=CXTxQ2gvGzs

Organising and campaigning

ITF organising manual

This booklet contains information to support the development and implementation of union organising campaigns as well as lessons learnt from many different parts of the world. www.itfglobal.org/education/organising-manual.cfm

ITF strategic campaigns manual

This manual is designed to help unions plan and implement specific campaigns, which target either employers or government. www.itfglobal.org/education/strategicmanualhome.cfm

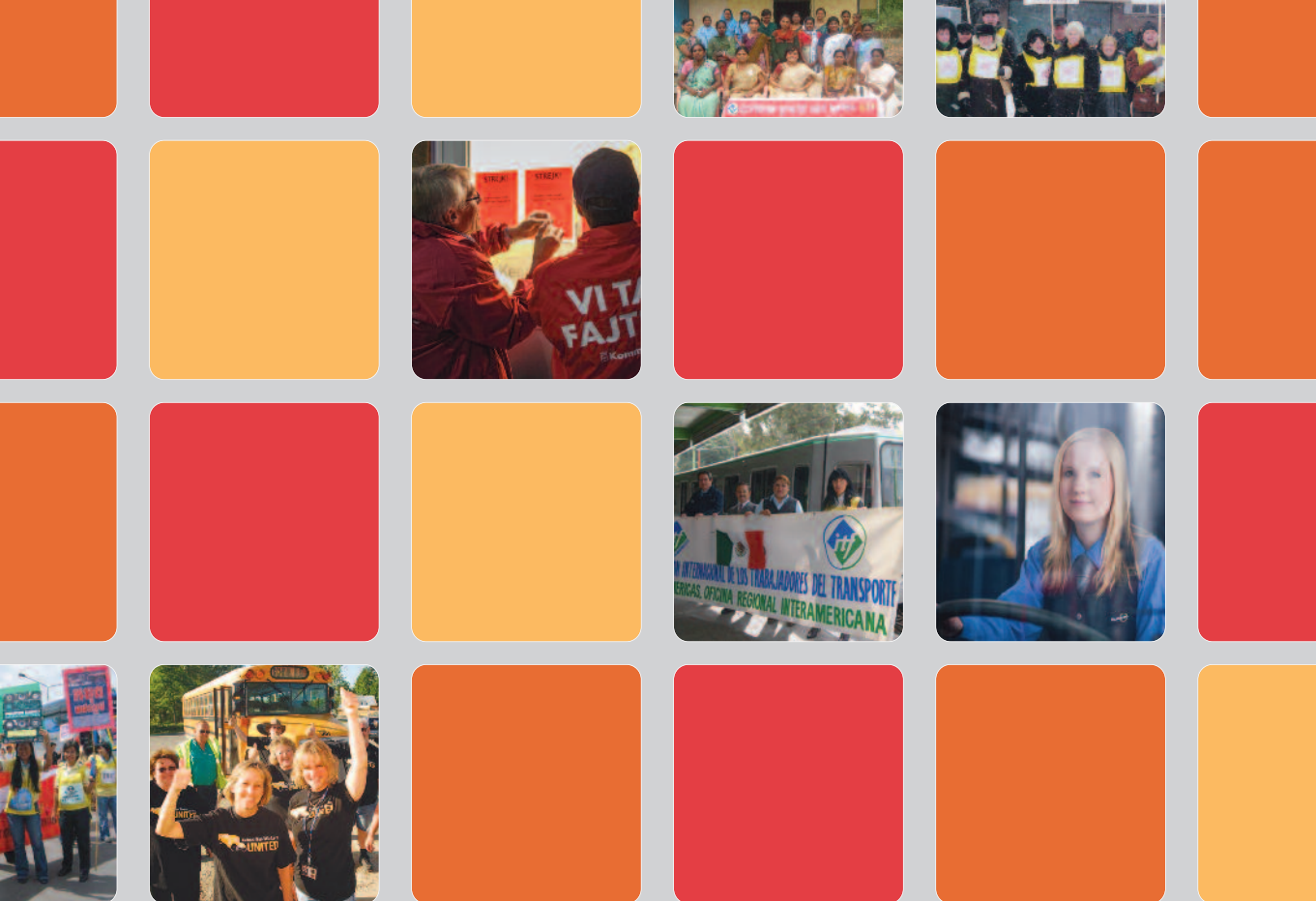
Film: **Road to a common cause – ITF Action Week**
www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMUCak8eavM&feature=player_embedded

Weblinks

www.itfglobal.org/road-transport
www.itfglobal.org/urban-transport
www.itfglobal.org/women

Email

ITF inland transport sections: inlandtransport@itf.org.uk
ITF women's department: women@itf.org.uk



INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT WORKERS' FEDERATION
ITF House, 49-60 Borough Road, London SE1 1DR



Tel: +44 20 7403 2733
Fax: +44 20 7357 7871

Email: inlandtransport@itf.org.uk
Web: www.itfglobal.org/road-transport



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