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Driving Gender Equality: Empowering Women and Transforming Transport

KEY FINDINGS

- Transport systems play a vital role in enabling access to education, employment, health care and social participation. Yet historically, they have been planned and designed without considering the diverse needs and experiences of women, resulting in widespread gender inequities in the sector.
- Women, who rely disproportionately on walking, cycling, and public transport, face multiple challenges such as personal safety, fear of sexual harassment, gender-based violence, socio-cultural restrictions, limited and unaffordable transport options, inadequate transport infrastructure, and poor service quality that ignores the specific needs of women.
- As climate change intensifies and the frequency of extreme weather events such as flooding and heat waves rises, this exacerbates gender disparities in urban mobility, especially for women using low-carbon transport modes.
- The challenges are compounded by institutional barriers such as a lack of gender-disaggregated data on how, why, when, and where women travel, and the under-representation of women in transport planning and leadership.
- As transport systems undergo rapid shifts due to climate pressures and technological transitions, there is a critical opportunity to embed gender equity in future planning and design and to build inclusive transport systems that serve everyone.

Sustainability and climate trends

- Socio-economic barriers often compel women to rely more on low-carbon transport modes such as walking and public transport, with women accounting for 66% of public transport users globally. Although this dependence places women at the heart of sustainable mobility efforts, it also makes them more susceptible to the limitations of poorly designed public transport systems.
- Whereas men make more direct, point-to-point trips, women's travel patterns are more complex, as they are influenced by socio-cultural norms and gendered expectations.
- Through so-called mobility of care, women travel with dependents, manage errands, and carry heavy loads, all of which shape their travel behaviour and needs. Globally, women perform nearly 76% of all care work.
- As women shoulder a greater share of care and household tasks, they are more likely to engage in trip chaining – combining multiple purposes such as work, caregiving and errands within a single journey.
- Traditionally, transport systems have often been designed by and for able-bodied male commuters. Both infrastructure and

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vehicle design typically prioritise men as the default users, neglecting women's different physical and safety needs.

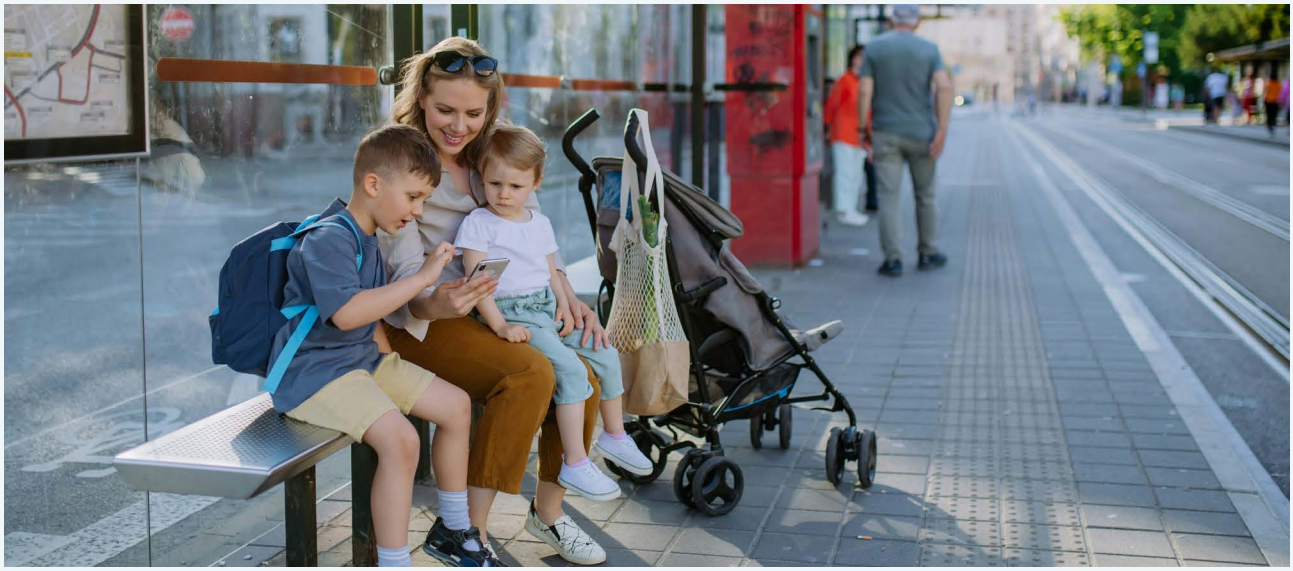
- This design bias is a symptom of a larger structural exclusion. When women are left out of transport planning and decision making, the resulting infrastructure fails to reflect their lived realities.
- Inadequate public transport systems often leave women with no choice but to rely on informal transport options, which are flexible but tend to be more expensive.
- Sexual harassment and gender-based violence are the most pervasive barriers to women's mobility, as women face sexual harassment on public transport and in public spaces.
- As incomes rise, some women shift from public to private transport in response to safety and convenience concerns.
- When transport systems are not designed with women's needs in mind, the consequences extend far beyond mobility and include time poverty, constrained economic opportunities, and diminished access to social and civic life.
- Globally, the lack of safe and accessible transport has been identified as the single greatest barrier preventing women from entering the workforce.
- Women remain greatly under-represented across the transport sector – particularly in leadership roles – and their voices are not heard in decisions about transport.
- On average, women made up 15.6% of the global workforce in transport and storage (and 23% in senior leadership roles) in 2023, with only 5% women's representation in the land transport workforce.
- The transport sector is often perceived to be an unfriendly workplace for women due to the lack of basic facilities.
- Despite immense opportunities for expanding women's employment in the freight and logistics sectors, ongoing barriers have continued to limit participation.
- These workplace challenges are part of a broader ecosystem of systemic barriers that exclude women from transport careers at every level.
- Climate-induced disruptions such as flooding and heat stress, as well as issues such as air pollution, threaten to widen already precarious mobility gaps between men and women.
- Safety and the perception of safety are also impacted by climate-related disruptions.

Policy and investment developments

- Integrating gender-transformative planning with climate-resilient infrastructure, technological innovations, and inclusive policy design is critical to building transport systems that not only withstand climate disruptions, but also enable inclusive growth, equitable access and sustainability.
- In recent years, the focus of gender-responsive mobility has shifted from a protectionist approach to a more pro-active and enabling one. Gender-responsive mobility has increasingly been linked to broader goals such as climate change mitigation, resilience and sustainable development.
- In 2015, the Paris Agreement formally recognised the intersection between gender and climate action. This was followed by some countries adopting frameworks to address gender disparities across sectors such as transport, education and health care.
- The enhanced five-year Lima Work Programme on Gender (LWPG) and its Gender Action Plan were adopted in 2019 at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Madrid (Spain) (COP 25), underscoring the need for gender-responsive policies, including in transport decarbonisation.
- Focusing on transport infrastructure is a powerful lever to advance Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality, by improving women's access to jobs, education, health care, and essential services and thereby supporting their economic empowerment and social inclusion.
- Policy makers increasingly recognise the need to move beyond stand-alone gender and transport policies and to institutionalise gender inclusion across wider visions, objectives and governance structures. This requires gender budgeting, fiscal and non-fiscal incentives, cross-sectoral co-ordination mechanisms, and the appointment of gender experts within transport authorities to ensure that inclusion is intentional and consistent across modes.

KEY FINDINGS

- Capacity building plays a crucial role in operationalising gender-responsive mobility, and policy makers and planners must be equipped to apply a gender lens when designing policies and infrastructure.
- Policies aimed at improving the safety and affordability of transport have become more targeted to address the needs of women and other vulnerable users.
- Digital and climate-smart tools that incorporate gender-responsive perspectives can help prevent the reinforcement of existing inequalities in transport.
- Digital solutions and public campaigns can reinforce safe mobility by helping to raise awareness about different forms of harassment and how to intervene or seek help. However, addressing the gender digital divide requires policies that promote the equitable use of technologies, especially by lower-income women who are frequently excluded from such innovations.
- Such interventions, combined with systemic policy change, address gender-based violence as a structural barrier to mobility, balancing short-term interventions that provide immediate relief (such as women-only transport services) with longer-term strategies that transform the system itself.
- The evolving landscape of work, characterised by the rise of the gig economy and increased female workforce participation, calls for a fundamental rethinking of mobility systems. Increasing women's participation in management, service and operational roles in transport is crucial for sustainable and inclusive mobility.
- Efforts have been made to increase women's participation in the transport workforce, recognising their key role in accelerating the transition to a low-carbon transport sector. Women's inclusion in leadership positions can strengthen decision making by enhancing consideration of social and environmental impacts, which in turn drives greener and more sustainable choices.
- The transition to the fast-growing e-mobility sector offers not only significant decarbonisation benefits but also opportunities to address gender inequities in transport, including for first- and last-mile connectivity.
- Although significant progress has been made in developing gender-responsive mobility systems, implementation remains inconsistent. Evidence-based planning has been hampered by a lack of data capturing the diverse and inter-sectional needs and travel patterns of women.
- In addition to gender-disaggregated data, inclusive transport planning requires active community engagement and a focus on safety, accessibility and reliability.
- Policies that focus on short-term and visible "quick fix" solutions – such as women-only transit services – provide temporary relief yet fail to tackle the more systemic social, cultural and infrastructural barriers that women face in accessing safe and equitable transport.
- Reversing the trend of women shifting to private transport as their incomes rise requires urgent investment in gender-inclusive public transport, to maintain demand for this viable, attractive and low-emission option.
- The Avoid-Shift-Improve framework offers a way to help women continue to choose sustainable transport because it meets their safety, accessibility needs, even as their economic status improves.



Context, challenges and opportunities

Transport systems play a vital role in enabling access to education, employment, health care and social participation. Yet historically, they have been planned and designed without considering the diverse needs and experiences of women, resulting in widespread gender inequities in the sector.[1] These inequities are also shaped by inter-sectionality, with mobility challenges often higher for low-income women, elderly women, women with disabilities, and those in rural or peri-urban areas.

Women, who rely disproportionately on walking, cycling, and public transport, face multiple challenges such as personal safety, fear of sexual harassment, gender-based violence, socio-cultural restrictions, limited and unaffordable transport options, inadequate transport infrastructure and poor service quality that ignores the specific needs of women (Box 1)**.**[2] These barriers not only restrict their mobility but also limit their access to opportunities and participation in the workforce.[3]

As climate change intensifies and the frequency of extreme weather events such as flooding and heat waves rises, this exacerbates gender disparities in urban mobility, especially for women using low-carbon transport modes. Flooded streets and heat exposure can make essential trips more dangerous and time-consuming, especially if public transport services are affected. Adapting to such disruptions often requires preparation, adjustment, and coping strategies, responsibilities that disproportionately fall on women, further affecting their daily mobility.[4]

The challenges are compounded by institutional barriers such as a lack of gender-disaggregated data on how, why, when, and where women travel, and the under-representation of women in transport planning and leadership, perpetuating policies, financial mechanisms and transport systems that fully fail to serve half the population. Addressing these issues requires systemic-level reform: inclusive and participatory planning processes, inter-sectional approaches that reflect diverse identities and experiences, and institutional reforms that challenge entrenched gender norms.

As transport systems undergo rapid shifts due to climate pressures and technological transitions, there is a critical opportunity to embed gender equity in future planning and design and to build inclusive transport systems that serve everyone. Moving towards gender-responsive and climate-conscious transport planning through better infrastructure, inclusive design and active engagement of women is essential for building mobility systems that support both gender justice and environmental resilience.

Box 1. Factors contributing to gender inequities in the transport sector

- **Care responsibilities.** Much of women's travel behaviour is linked to care responsibilities and thus involves trip chaining, shorter distances, and reliance on walking, cycling and public transport. These travel patterns are not inherent to women but are a direct outcome of unequal gender roles and responsibilities.
- **Socio-cultural norms.** Socio-cultural norms greatly influence women's travel needs and transport choices. In conservative societies, more restrictive norms can result in forced mobility and immobility.
- **Personal safety.** Sexual harassment and gender-based violence in public transport and spaces reduce women's sense of safety and restrict their mobility across certain areas and at certain times of the day. An underlying culture of misogyny and entrenched patriarchal norms can exacerbate this issue.
- **Transport design.** Most transport infrastructure and vehicles are designed with male users in mind, making features such as seating, step heights, and grab handles difficult to access, especially for women travelling with children or elderly dependents.
- **Policy and data gaps.** Women remain under-represented in transport decision making, and gender-disaggregated data are rarely collected or used, resulting in gender-blind planning and infrastructure.
- **Economic and access inequities.** High transport costs, lack of reliable services and inadequate last-mile connectivity hinder women's access to jobs, education and essential services, especially among low-income groups.
- **Systemic failures of public transport.** As incomes rise, many women turn to private transport to avoid unsafe and unreliable public systems. Most public transport systems are not designed to accommodate women's travel patterns (e.g., single-fare systems can make it disproportionately expensive for women).
- **Infrastructure development.** Major transport projects often displace low-income communities, with women bearing the brunt of social and economic disruption, further limiting their mobility and access to opportunity.
- **Climate vulnerabilities.** Climate-related disruptions such as extreme heat and flooding disproportionately affect women, reducing the safety, comfort and reliability of modes they rely on most.

Source: See endnote 2 for this section.

Sustainability and climate trends

Transport systems profoundly shape how people move and access opportunities. Yet they have long overlooked women's needs and experiences, leading to significant gender inequities. When women face barriers to safe, reliable, and affordable mobility, their workforce participation and access to education, health care, leisure and other essential services become restricted. This not only limits individual opportunity and well-being but also weakens social and economic resilience at a national and global scale.

Climate change is deepening mobility gaps, and technological innovations are reshaping transport systems at an unprecedented pace. It is essential that these advances do not reinforce existing inequalities in transport planning and design, but instead serve as opportunities for building gender-just and resilient systems.

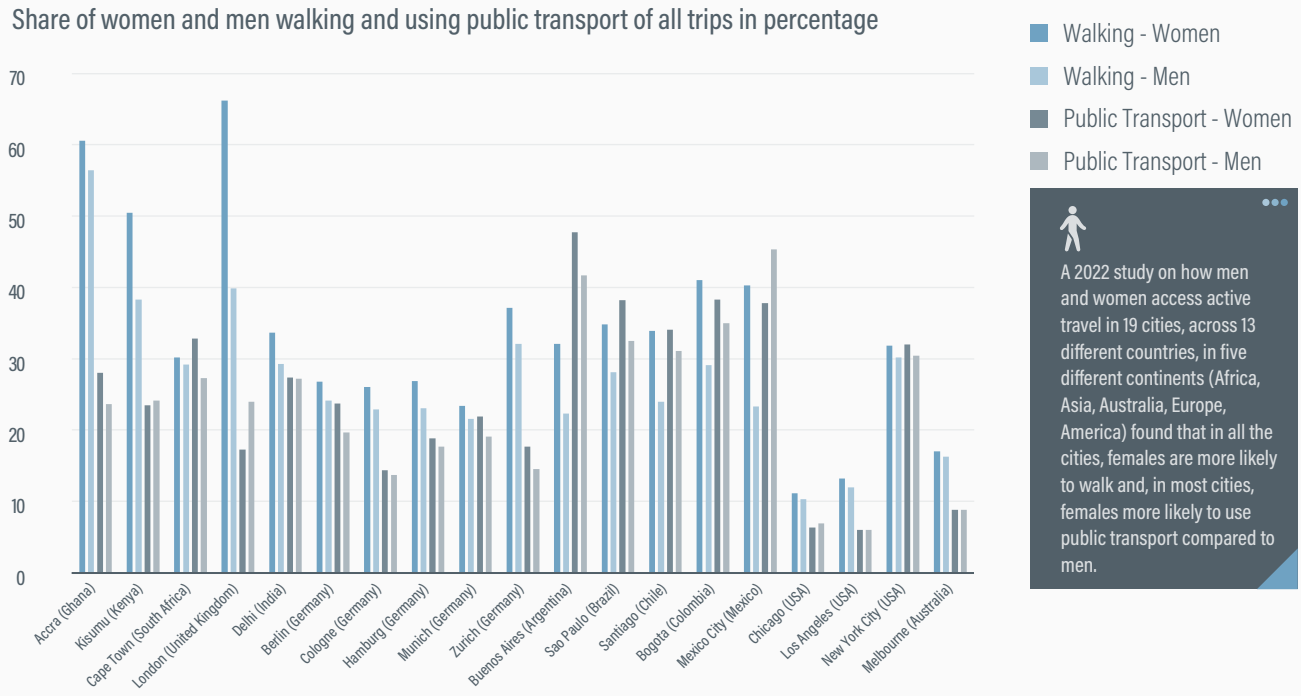
Socio-economic barriers often compel women to rely more on low-carbon transport modes such as walking and public transport, with women accounting for 66% of public transport users globally.[5] Although this dependence places women at the heart of sustainable mobility efforts, it also makes them more susceptible to the limitations of poorly designed public transport systems.

- A 2022 study on how men and women access active travel in 19 cities, across 13 countries on 6 continents (Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, and Oceania) found that in all the cities, women are more likely to walk than men, and in most cities they are more likely to use public transport (Figure 1).[6]
- Women tend to use buses more frequently than rail, although this varies by region and context.[7]
- Women are often less likely to cycle than men, except in high-cycling cities where both genders are equally likely to cycle.[8]

Whereas men make more direct, point-to-point trips, women's travel patterns are more complex, as they are influenced by socio-cultural norms and gendered expectations. Through so-called mobility of care, women travel with dependents, manage errands, and carry heavy loads, all of which shape their travel behaviour and needs.[9] Globally, women perform nearly 76% of all care work.[10] The unequal burden of unpaid care work, such as child and elder care and housework, limits women's participation in public life and access to opportunities, creating significant time poverty.

As women shoulder a greater share of care and household tasks, they are more likely to engage in trip chaining – combining multiple purposes such as work, caregiving and errands within a single journey. Women tend to travel

FIGURE 1. Share of women and men walking and using public transport in selected cities, 2022 study results



Source: See endnote 6 for this section.

shorter distances than men and have limited access to private vehicles.[11] In many contexts, women are forced to adapt their job choices to remain available for care and domestic responsibilities, often working closer to home, opting for home-based employment and taking up part-time work.

Traditionally, transport systems have often been designed by and for able-bodied male commuters. Both infrastructure and vehicle design typically prioritise men as the default users, neglecting women's different physical and safety needs. For example, bus grab handles are often too high for the average woman, nor is there space for strollers or accessible boarding. In cars, the design of standard seatbelts (fitted for male body proportions) increases women's risk of serious injury in crashes by 73%.[12]

This design bias is a symptom of a larger structural exclusion. When women are left out of transport planning and decision making, the resulting infrastructure fails to reflect their lived realities. This not only undermines equity but also limits the overall effectiveness and sustainability of transport systems. Integrating women's perspectives is essential, not just for inclusive access, but also for advancing environmental, economic and social outcomes.

Inadequate public transport systems often leave women with no choice but to rely on informal transport options, which are flexible but tend to be more expensive. Women living in the outskirts of cities are often forced to walk long distances, depend on public transport systems that may be inefficient and unreliable, or use more expensive informal transport – all of which strain their financial resources and impact their daily mobility.[13] In Bogotá (Colombia), low-income women spent 16% more time commuting than low-income men in 2020, highlighting how mobility challenges are amplified by gender and income.[14]

Sexual harassment and gender-based violence are the most pervasive barriers to women's mobility, as women face sexual harassment on public transport and in public spaces. As incomes rise, some women shift from public to private transport in response to safety and convenience concerns.[15]

- A 2020 survey in Indonesia found that four out of five women had experienced sexual harassment in public spaces, including on public transport.[16]
- In Latin America, in 2020, 84% of women in Bogotá (Colombia) reported having experienced sexual harassment, and in Santiago (Chile) and Buenos Aires (Argentina) the share was 89%.[17]

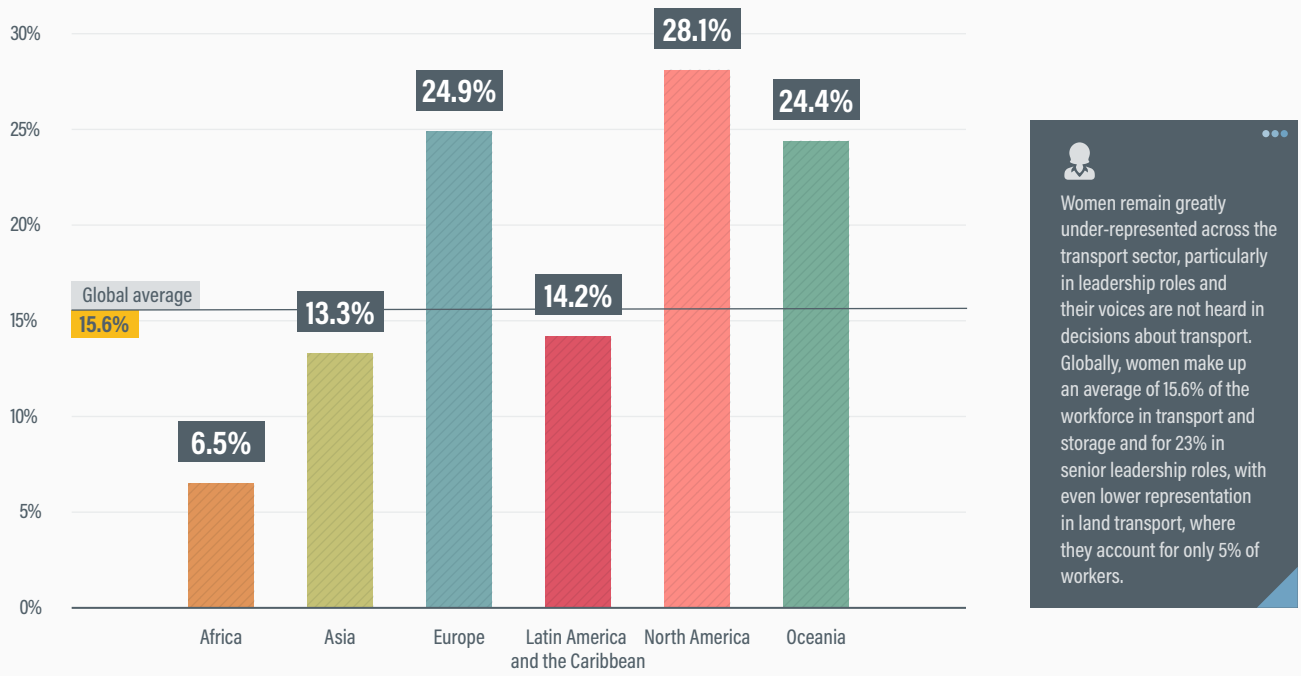
- In Mongolia, 89% of respondents reported witnessing inappropriate behaviour related to sexual harassment on public transport in 2019.[18]
- In 2024, 73% of women in the United States reported having been harassed in a public space, including on mass transport systems (bus, subway, metro, train or plane) or taxi or ride-sharing services.[19]
- Around two-thirds of women in the United Kingdom reported experiencing sexual harassment in a public space in 2021 – an estimate that rises to 86% for women aged 18-34.[20]
- A 2022 study in Rwanda showed that 42% of women were concerned about gender-based violence when commuting during the day, and 55% when commuting at night.[21]

When transport systems are not designed with women's needs in mind, the consequences extend far beyond mobility and include time poverty, constrained economic opportunities, and diminished access to social and civic life. Globally, the lack of safe and accessible transport has been identified as the single greatest barrier preventing women from entering the workforce.[22] Addressing these challenges requires the intentional design of inclusive transport systems that are informed by women's mobility patterns, needs and constraints.[23]

Women remain greatly under-represented across the transport sector – particularly in leadership roles – and their voices are not heard in decisions about transport. On average, women made up 15.6% of the global workforce in transport and storage (and 23% in senior leadership roles) in 2023, with only 5% women's representation in the land transport workforce (Figure 2)**.**[24] Regional disparities are also stark.

- Women comprised 21% of the transport workforce in Europe and Central Asia but only 3% in the Middle East and North Africa in 2023.[25]
- In 2023, North America had the highest shares of women employed in transport among world regions, at more than double the global average.[26] Women comprised 25% of Canada's transport-related workforce and 28.5% of the US transport and storage sector workforce.[27]
- Africa had the lowest share of women employed in transport and storage industries in 2023, at only 6.5% (less than half the global average) – down from 8.2% in 2021.[28]
- The next-lowest shares of women's employment in transport and storage in 2023 were in Asia (13.3%), Latin America and the Caribbean (14.2%), Oceania (24.4%) and Europe (24.9%). [29]

FIGURE 2. Share of women employed in transport and storage, 2023



Source: See endnote 24 for this section.

The transport sector is often perceived to be an unfriendly workplace for women due to the lack of basic facilities such as toilets, resting areas, safety equipment, etc. This is exacerbated for frontline female workers because of entrenched social conditioning that deems driving as men's work, as well as fear of harassment from male colleagues and passengers.[30]

Despite immense opportunities for expanding women's employment in the freight and logistics sectors, ongoing barriers have continued to limit participation. In 2021, there were an estimated 2.6 million truck driver vacancies across the Americas, Asia and Europe.[31] Research highlights that women often possess traits that can make them strong candidates for truck driving, including lower risk-taking tendencies, fewer unsafe driving violations and better focus.[32] Yet persistent barriers include safety concerns, inadequate lighting and resting spaces, unsafe parking facilities and the male-dominated culture of the industry.[33] (See the Spotlight on the Gender-Responsive Freight Sector in Asia.)

These workplace challenges are part of a broader ecosystem of systemic barriers that exclude women from transport careers at every level, beginning with low enrolment in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields and limited participation in technical and vocational education and training, which reduces the number of qualified women entering the sector.[34] The exclusion continues through biased recruitment practices and extends to career progression, where women face leadership stereotypes, exclusion from professional networks, and limited opportunities for promotion despite their qualifications. Workplace policies remain inadequate for women's needs, while persistent wage gaps exist.[35]

Many regions also lack comprehensive legal frameworks including equal pay laws and anti-harassment protections, with some regions enforcing restrictions on women's employment in certain transport jobs. Women also face significant barriers to becoming transport entrepreneurs due to a lack of awareness of and restricted access to finance as well as bureaucratic challenges such as obtaining licences. The lack of gender-disaggregated data collection, analysis and sharing prevents effective policy responses and masks the true extent of gender inequality in the sector.[36]

Climate-induced disruptions such as flooding and heat stress, as well as issues such as air pollution, threaten to widen already precarious mobility gaps between men and women. Although women, like other groups facing inequities, are disproportionately affected, the impacts are shaped by intersecting factors such as socio-economic status, ethnicity, location, etc. Heat stress, flooding and poor air quality have become a part of everyday urban life but have a greater impact on women, who are more exposed than men to environmental stressors.[37] Women face prolonged exposure to air pollution when transport systems are unreliable or unaffordable.[38]

Safety and the perception of safety are also impacted by climate-related disruptions. Heavy rainfall or flooding often

leads to public transport service delays or cancellations, forcing women to board overcrowded vehicles, wait longer at poorly lit or unsafe transit stops, and take longer and potentially unsafe routes. Urban infrastructure typically fails to account for heat stress, with unshaded transit stops and pedestrian walkways making commuting a physically uncomfortable experience.[39]

Policy and investment developments

Integrating gender-transformative planning with climate-resilient infrastructure, technological innovations, and inclusive policy design is critical to building transport systems that not only withstand climate disruptions, but also enable inclusive growth, equitable access and sustainability. Realising the potential of women to transform transport systems requires supportive policies that embed gender equity in e-mobility planning, financing mechanisms that address women's limited access to credit, and targeted training to equip women with the skills needed for new jobs in the sector.

In recent years, the focus of gender-responsive mobility has shifted from a protectionist approach to a more pro-active and enabling one (Box 2)**.**[40] **Gender-responsive mobility has increasingly been linked to broader goals such as climate change mitigation, resilience and sustainable development.**

Box 2. Rising global awareness of the need for gender-responsive mobility

The recognition that urban design and transport infrastructure have primarily responded to the needs of men (and insufficiently to women's needs) began to emerge in the 1970s in the United States and then across Europe by the 1990s. These efforts laid the groundwork for challenging gendered assumptions in mobility systems.

- In 1992, at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), the Women's Agenda 21 was put forward, laying the groundwork for integrating gender parity into development and for wider institutional responses.
- By the late 1990s, safety audits had become a mainstream tool for assessing women's experiences in public spaces, including transport, in selected high-income countries.
- The World Bank's Gender Strategy Action Plan in the 2000s integrated gender into development sectors, including mobility in 2016.

Source: See endnote 40 for this section.

In 2015, the Paris Agreement formally recognised the intersection between gender and climate action.[41] **This was followed by some countries adopting frameworks to address gender disparities across sectors such as transport, education and health care.**

- In the Philippines, the Magna Carta of Women and the Safe Spaces Act (enacted in 2009), together with Department of Transport orders, provide strong institutional backing for policies that ensure equal opportunity, eliminate discrimination and mandate women's representation in governance.[42]
- In Viet Nam, legal reforms including the 2015 amendments to the State Budget Law institutionalised gender-responsive budgeting as a cross-cutting principle in public spending.[43]

The enhanced five-year Lima Work Programme on Gender (LWPG) and its Gender Action Plan were adopted in 2019 at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Madrid (Spain) (COP 25), underscoring the need for gender-responsive policies, including in transport decarbonisation.[44] The original LWPG on gender-responsive climate policy and action was established in 2014 in alignment with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Focusing on transport infrastructure is a powerful lever to advance Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality, by improving women's access to jobs, education, health care, and essential services and thereby supporting their economic empowerment and social inclusion.[45] Investments in public transit, walkable cities and cycle lanes simultaneously advance both SDG 5 and SDG 13 on climate action. Women's leadership in climate and transport decision making fosters more inclusive and sustainable solutions.

Policy makers increasingly recognise the need to move beyond stand-alone gender and transport policies and to institutionalise gender inclusion across wider visions, objectives and governance structures. This requires gender budgeting, fiscal and non-fiscal incentives, cross-sectoral co-ordination mechanisms, and the appointment of gender experts within transport authorities to ensure that inclusion is intentional and consistent across modes.

Capacity building plays a crucial role in operationalising gender-responsive mobility, and policy makers and planners must be equipped to apply a gender lens when designing policies and infrastructure. Resources that offer guidance across assessment, infrastructure design, service delivery and monitoring include the World Bank's Toolkit for Enabling Gender-Responsive Urban Mobility, the Asian Development Bank's Gender and Transport Toolkit and the International Transport Forum's Gender Analysis Toolkit for Transport Policies.[46]

Policies aimed at improving the safety and affordability of transport have become more targeted to address the needs of women and other vulnerable users. On-the-ground initiatives, such as gender sensitisation training for transport staff, police officers, and security personnel, are also key for gender-responsive transport services.

- In Nakuru County (Kenya), a Public Transport Code of Conduct was developed in 2024, in partnership with Flone Initiative, to establish minimum professional standards among transit operators, with an emphasis on gender and disability inclusion, sexual harassment prevention and environmental sustainability.[47]
- In 2022, the Metro de Santiago (Chile) launched the "Stand Up" campaign against sexual harassment in transit, empowering not just victims but also bystanders to intervene safely.[48]
- India's free bus travel schemes for women, implemented in states including Delhi, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana, have greatly increased women's ridership, with Delhi reporting a 20% increase in women's share of total daily ridership between 2019 and 2023.[49]

Digital and climate-smart tools that incorporate gender-responsive perspectives can help prevent the reinforcement of existing inequalities in transport. Artificial intelligence, intelligent traffic management systems, fleet integration technologies, automated vehicle inspections and digital ticketing systems are already transforming how transport is planned and managed.[50] However, ethical safeguards are needed to protect data privacy and to prevent the reinforcement of harmful gender biases. Using digitalised public transport ticketing data to collect and analyse gender-disaggregated travel patterns can enhance evidence-based planning and policy development.

Digital solutions and public campaigns can reinforce safe mobility by helping to raise awareness about different forms of harassment and how to intervene or seek help. However, addressing the gender digital divide requires policies that promote the equitable use of technologies, especially by lower-income women who are frequently excluded from such innovations.

- In India, the Safetipin app crowdsources safety audits of public spaces, enabling women and city authorities to identify and address unsafe areas.[51]
- In Japan, the Digi Police app allows users to signal harassment with a written message or an audible alert; as of 2019, it was being downloaded around 10,000 times per month.[52]

Such interventions, combined with systemic policy change, address gender-based violence as a structural barrier to mobility, balancing short-term interventions that provide immediate relief (such as women-only transport services) with longer-term strategies that transform the system itself. Incorporating violence reduction as a critical transport policy goal, and recognising reductions in harassment and assault as co-benefits in transport policy appraisal, can help guide investments towards developing systems where everyone can travel safely and with dignity.[53]

The evolving landscape of work, characterised by the rise of the gig economy and increased female workforce participation, calls for a fundamental rethinking of mobility systems. Increasing women's participation in management, service and operational roles in transport is crucial for sustainable and inclusive mobility. Transport policies must support women's economic empowerment by integrating the "mobility of care" and adapting to the needs of a growing female workforce and changing work-related travel patterns. Increasing women's participation in transport leadership enhances focus on gender-specific needs and can contribute to more inclusive, equitable and sustainable systems.

Efforts have been made to increase women's participation in the transport workforce, recognising their key role in accelerating the transition to a low-carbon transport sector. Women's inclusion in leadership positions can strengthen decision making by enhancing consideration of social and environmental impacts, which in turn drives greener and more sustainable choices.[54] More women in front-facing and operational roles can lead to better service quality and increased perception of safety.

- Initiatives are under way in Albania, Armenia, Georgia, Serbia and Türkiye to improve recruitment, training and representation of women in both frontline and leadership roles in transport.[55]
- In Odisha (India), the Capital Region Urban Transport agency has deployed women conductors and is training female and transgender drivers for its electric fleet. Half of all Mo Bus conductors and guides are women, and 100% of Mo E-Ride drivers are women from disadvantaged communities.[56] In addition, the agency implemented measures such as separate washrooms for women workers at bus depots and better lighting at bus shelters – leading to a 200% increase in ridership over 4.5 years.[57]
- In Nepal, the microfinance platform Aloi uses digital tokens to enable informal women entrepreneurs to access credit and build credit histories, helping them to scale green businesses including the purchase of electric vehicles such as Safa Tempos and electric scooters.[58]

The transition to the fast-growing e-mobility sector offers not only significant decarbonisation benefits but also opportunities to address gender inequities in transport,

including for first- and last-mile connectivity. The e-mobility ecosystem requires new skillsets in electrical and digital technologies, where women are not at a disadvantage compared to traditional automotive skills.[59] Research indicates that women passengers often prefer electric two- and three-wheeler services provided by women drivers, enhancing perceptions of safety and reliability.[60]

- Evidence from initiatives in Colombia, India, Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe demonstrates how women are already entering roles as electric bus drivers, three-wheeler operators, technicians, entrepreneurs and managers.[61]
- In Bogotá (Colombia), the all-electric public transport operator La Rolita achieved 60% female representation in its driving workforce in 2024, combining gender inclusion with environmental sustainability.[62]
- Case studies such as India's Mo E-Ride, Nepal's Safa Tempo and Zimbabwe's Mobility for Africa illustrate how women-led e-mobility services can simultaneously improve mobility, generate income and enhance women's perception of safety.[63]

Although significant progress has been made in developing gender-responsive mobility systems, implementation remains inconsistent. Evidence-based planning has been hampered by a lack of data capturing the diverse and intersectional needs and travel patterns of women. In addition to gender-disaggregated data, inclusive transport planning requires active community engagement and a focus on safety, accessibility and reliability. Policies risk reinforcing exclusion by catering only to a narrow segment of the female population, rather than addressing broader realities. Moving beyond tokenistic measures, a transformative approach is needed that embeds safety, sustainability, equity, and climate resilience into comprehensive, scalable strategies, recognising that women and other under-served groups are currently not a focus of climate-resilient transport systems.

Policies that focus on short-term and visible "quick fix" solutions – such as women-only transit services – provide temporary relief yet fail to tackle the more systemic social, cultural and infrastructural barriers that women face in accessing safe and equitable transport. Such measures can at times reinforce misconceptions by framing women's safety as a narrow concern, rather than recognising it as a wider systemic challenge that requires institutional accountability and comprehensive policy reforms. Women-only services risk stigmatising women further by segregating them, and they often overlook the varied and complex needs of different groups of women.

Reversing the trend of women shifting to private transport as their incomes rise requires urgent investment in gender-inclusive public transport, to maintain demand for this viable, attractive and low-emission option. Investment in public transport can strengthen integrated transport networks by improving physical, information and fare integration among modes and enabling more efficient transfers that can reduce unnecessary trips and therefore lower emissions.

The Avoid-Shift-Improve framework offers a way to help women continue to choose sustainable transport because it meets their safety and accessibility needs, even as their economic status improves. This framework supports efforts to "avoid" unnecessary travel through better land use planning and digital solutions; "shift" to sustainable modes by making walking, cycling, and public transport safe and attractive; and "improve" system efficiency, comfort, and safety to retain users.

Partnerships in action

- In June 2025, the **Global Alliance for Feminist Transport** initiated **No One Left Behind**, a call for impact that aims to centre equity and inclusion in the UN Decade of Sustainable Transport. The call outlines ten strategic goals to guide governments, funders and practitioners in building mobility systems that are truly inclusive, to address the historical mismatch between mobility systems and the lived realities of many people. It was initiated at the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Expert Group Meeting on Sustainable Transport.[64]

1.5
DRIVING GENDER EQUALITY: EMPOWERING WOMEN AND TRANSFORMING TRANSPORT

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