



**Commission on the Status of Women
Sixty-third Session**

**INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL
ON THE PRIORITY THEME**

*Social protection systems, access to public
services and sustainable infrastructure for
gender equality and the empowerment of women
and girls:*

Harnessing synergies and securing financing

**Enhancing women's mobility through
gender-responsive transport systems**

By

Nato Kurshitashvili*

Gender Specialist – Transport Global Practice,
World Bank

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* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

Transport is not only about introducing new fleet and modernizing stations and tracks, as it has been viewed traditionally. Transport is a means to sustainable economic growth: it facilitates mobility of people and connects them to various services, such as health and education, and income-generating opportunities. It is also a source of job creation. Benefits of transport can only be fully realized if it is leaving no one behind. Transport is not gender neutral: transport infrastructure and services do not necessarily equally benefit women and girls, men and boys. These differences have significant consequences for individuals, families and economies. For example, International Labor Organization¹ estimates that in developing countries, limited access to and safety of transportation is the single greatest obstacle to women’s participation in the labor market: it reduces their participation probability by as much as 16.5 percentage points.

Experiences of women, girls, men and boys with transport systems differ, particularly when related to safety, personal security, frequency, accessibility and affordability of transport. For example, lack of safe transport options can translate into girls missing schools, women not looking for jobs far away from homes, giving up their jobs or being unable to access health or childcare services. For example, 47% of the surveyed women in Jordan reported to have turned down job opportunities due to the current state of public transportation naming safety, security and affordability as some of the key barriers². This is when only 14% of women are involved in the labor force in the country as compared to 64% for their male counterparts. 91% of the women interviewed across 20 cities in India felt that public transport was very unsafe³.

As women generally tend to have lower cash incomes and less decision-making control over household financial resources, they have limited affordability for transport services. This is further exacerbated by women’s travel patterns that require them to make shorter and more frequent journeys with multiple stops (so-called ‘trip-chaining’) and by the lack of integrated ticketing systems. Harassment further adds to the transportation costs that women bear. For example, the median extra travel cost that women bear for safety and caretaking reasons in New-York could go up to \$100 a month whilst it is zero for men⁴. This results in a form of price discrimination –often referred to as “pink tax” - an extra amount that women pay for certain products and services. In rural Yemen, women pay 15%-20% more than men for public transport⁵. The same study found that villages with roads had a higher female literacy rate and higher access to mother and child care. Inadequate, unaffordable and unsafe transport disproportionately affects women and girls’ access to public services and limits their ability to direct adequate resources to their human capital development. Women and girls may also fail to show up in health and

1 World Employment Social Outlook: Trends for Women 2017, International Labor Organization

2 Gender in Public Transportation: A perspective of women users of public transportation; Sadaqa et al, October 2018

³ What Do Women and Girls Want From Urban Mobility Systems? Ola Mobility Institute; March 2019

4 The Pink Tax on Transportation: Women’s Challenges in Mobility; Kaufman, S, et al, 2018; New York University’s Rudin Center for Transportation

5 Gender and Transport in the Middle East and North Africa Region: Case Studies from the West Bank and Yemen; World Bank 2011

educational facilities that is often a program conditionality for social assistance cash transfers.

It is not only transport services that women and men experience differently but road infrastructure. Women and men have different priorities in terms of the roads that need to be prioritized for road construction and rehabilitation; infrastructure for non-motorized transport; street lighting and universally accessible footpaths; bus stops and traffic calming measures as well as amenities, such as, public toilets, seating and ticket queuing lines in terminals and public space, broadly. As an example, underpasses are often reported to be dark and unsafe, are often used as open public toilets, and are inaccessible for people with special mobility needs or parents with pushchairs. Due to these concerns, women and girls often resort to crossing the roads that do not have pedestrian overpasses exposing themselves to risks of injury and even death. If these seemingly minor features are not reflected in the road selection and design, they affect all but especially women and girls restricting their mobility and access to public amenities.

At the same time, in the planning and design of transport infrastructure and services, there needs to be a recognition that women are not a homogenous group and they experience transport differently due to their differences in their income, age, disabilities, ethnicity, religion, race, geographical location or sexual orientation. For instance, the experience of a rural woman living in impoverished parts of a developing country with no or poor public transport (e.g. above example of rural Yemen) will be qualitatively different than that of a woman in a city with options for urban transportation (e.g. New-York). In a similar vein, ride-hailing options that have addressed transportation challenges for many middle-class employed women (both door-to-door and first and last-mile connectivity that feeds public transit), are largely unaffordable for the majority of poor women (and men) and/or unavailable on the outskirts of cities where lower income households tend to live - even when these transport apps operate in these cities.

It is also worth noting that lack of gender-sensitive transport infrastructure and services and lack of women in the sector often reinforce each other. Share of women in the sector as drivers, engineers or leaders remains low. As a result, transport services remain heavily male-dominated, which contributes to women's voices as transport users not being heard, with often little incentives for transport services to respond to particular needs of women service users. That said, employing more women in the transport sector can lead to more inclusive transport service development by bringing women's perspectives directly on a decision-making table. Moreover, a focus on women's employment in the sector can help transport operators project a more progressive image that is more representative of their customer base, which may affect riders' perceptions of transport safety and actual incidence of sexual harassment in public transport as more and more women will start taking up public-facing roles in the sector as drivers, security personnel and traffic police.

Besides lack of women in the sector in absolute terms, there is a pronounced division throughout the sector between the types of occupations carried out by women and men. For example, women in transport tend to work mainly in

administration, sales and catering, which are also often the lowest paid. The most common issues that typically impede women's access to employment include 'soft' factors, such as perceptions and gender stereotypes; the prevalence of a male-dominated working culture in many companies, inflexible terms and conditions of employment and workplace health and safety issues as well as legal barriers. According to the World Bank's 2019 Women, Business and the Law report⁶, 21 economies restrict women from working in transportation and 29 economies prevent them from working the same night hours as men, which are likely to be affecting the sector due to its atypical/irregular working hours.

Way forward

- **Better articulate 'Why'**: although the benefits of gender-responsive transportation have been increasingly recognized, this topic has not received the utmost attention it deserves. This is due in part to lack of a fuller understanding of the crucial role that transport plays in promoting gender equality and women's economic empowerment; in part - absence of critical number of women in the sector to influence transport planning and design, partly due to lack of sex-disaggregated data and compelling arguments about wider benefits that gender-responsive transport service brings to all. With regards to the latter, quite a few can be made, e.g. enhancing women's mobility boosts women's labor force participation and countries' economic growth. Also, gender-responsive transport can score environmental benefits as it can result in less private and more public transport usage, which contributes to reducing traffic congestion, enhanced safety and improved environmental outcomes.
- **Invest in data**: to better substantiate the case for "Why" and gather information on 'How', mobility surveys need to consider a wide range of socio-economic and demographic characteristics of a broad profile of road users, e.g. motorized and non-motorized transport users (both drivers and passengers) as well as pedestrians. The surveys must look at affordability, accessibility, frequency and safety of transport and explore the challenges that road users face to complete first and last mile of their trips. Mobility surveys can be complemented by qualitative research, e.g. focus group discussions. This 'triangulation approach', e.g. validating data through cross verification of quantitative and qualitative sources will produce better understanding of gender dimension of transport services. Other alternatives, e.g. GPS data can be used to analyze mobility patterns as a more cost-effective option. Another area that lacks sex-disaggregated data is road safety. Administrative data on road safety, which typically includes police and health facility records, vital registration and death certification as well as insurance data is valuable from a gender point of view, if sex-disaggregated. However, they seldom are and when they are, they are not

⁶ World Bank's Women, Business and the Law database: <http://wbl.worldbank.org/>

standardized. Exposure-related data, such as, passenger travel modes, vehicle-kilometers travelled, and results of origin-destination surveys can be extremely valuable for gender analysis as much as it can provide nuanced understanding and shed light on the reasons behind high gender gaps in road fatalities (three times more males than females die on roads worldwide).

- **Transport is not an end itself** but a means to access public services and income-generating opportunities. For transport systems to improve women and girl's access to public services and enable them to benefit from social protection systems, gender needs to be considered at the onset of the transport planning. For example, it is often during the 'first mile' (walking from the home to stop) and 'last mile' (walking from a transport stop to their destination) of a journey where women face the most harassment and violence. The lack of adequate feeder roads and transit transport to main routes makes these journeys particularly lengthy, costly and unsafe affecting women's and girl's access to public services and jobs. Transport frequency and scheduling is another key factor in the nexus between transport, public services and social protection; e.g. when childcare facilities are not based in home communities, parents, who tend to be mainly women, travel distances to drop and pick up children. Infrequent and unreliable transport that is not accommodating opening and closing hours of childcare facilities further adds to women's time poverty. Transport service that does not provide stroller accessibility or have deep steps makes boarding and alighting difficult, particularly for women with children. Defining reasonable travel fare modalities that considers women's affordability (particularly their trip chaining patterns) is another aspect. Taking into consideration these complex gendered nuances requires closer coordination among social protection, public services and transport agents. More importantly, this requires comprehension that transport is not only about increasing women and girls' mobility measured as the number of trips undertaken per day but also enhancing their accessibility, which is the ease with which they can access opportunities (jobs, health, education, skills training, social protection).
- **Employ more women in the transport sector**: there is a need for transport providers to undertake a range of actions tackling less visible but deeply embedded barriers that impede women's access to employment in the sector including but not limited to addressing gender stereotypes, which have a strong influence on the education choices that women and men make and which see driving positions as a 'male' occupation, as well as workplace health and safety issues ranging from lack of appropriate facilities (e.g. separate toilets and changing rooms for men and women) to sexual harassment in the workplace⁷. A critical aspect in attracting women to transport jobs is to create a 'female talent pipeline' by raising the profile of transport sector professions among females and fostering cooperation

⁷ Schulz, K, Kurshitashvili, N, 2018 <http://blogs.worldbank.org/jobs/node/1116>

between employers and education institutions to increase young women's enrolment in STEM fields and establish a school to employment transition routes. For the sustainability of these individual efforts being undertaken at individual company level, these efforts will need to involve relevant departments/focal points of the transport/infrastructure ministries and municipalities. Finally, as mentioned earlier, discriminatory laws that prevent women from entering a range of occupations in the transport sector need to be repealed.

- **Change practices and behaviours:** organizational culture of this male-dominated sector tends to discourage women's advancement in the sector and ignore the needs of female passengers. Improving infrastructure/services and employing women alone will not be enough unless practices and behaviour of those delivering transport services are shifted. Some of the measures include adopting policies of zero tolerance to sexual harassment, training and capacity building of the personnel (particularly those who are in customer facing roles, such as security, drivers, etc.) and putting in place rigorous grievance redress mechanisms. It is also important to ensure that these efforts go beyond individual projects and are reflected in sector policies and regulations for better enforcement. For example, with the support of the World Bank, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has just adopted the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct (CoC) that will regulate the passenger, operator and employee behaviour. The CoC makes references to sexual harassment, non-discrimination in employment and women-friendly workplace; provides for public feedback mechanism with various reporting lines and monitoring indicators; mandates relevant agencies to conduct training for drivers and operators on the CoC and ties up licensing of drivers to this training. Importantly, the government will introduce the code in the service agreements with the public transport operators and will reflect it in a bylaw.