



ADVANCING  
PUBLIC  
TRANSPORT



European  
Investment Bank

➤ KNOWLEDGE BRIEF

# GENDER BEST PRACTICES IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT

JUNE | 2024

# KNOWLEDGE BRIEF

## IS PUBLIC TRANSPORT FIT FOR WOMEN?

### INTRODUCTION

In 2023, the European Investment Bank (EIB) commissioned the Union Internationale des Transports Publics (UITP) to conduct a study with the objective of benchmarking existing gender practices in the public transport industry globally. The study focused on policies and practices implemented worldwide to create a more inclusive workforce in the sector and to support the development of infrastructure and service planning to better meet women's mobility needs and travel patterns.

Through wide consultation with UITP members (through an online survey), the results of this study offer an overview of gender and diversity policies and practices, with a specific emphasis on their applicability in the European context. The consultation was designed to explore a wide range of topics related to gender dynamics in the public transport sector, which were analysed according to two research perspectives:

- Meeting women's needs as users of public transport, focusing on the respondents' awareness and practices to include gender-sensitive perspectives in the design and planning of mobility services;
- Ensuring a diverse and inclusive public transport workforce, focusing on the current representation of women in the public transport workforce and existing strategies and internal organisation governance to address gender-diverse recruitment and retention, discrimination and harassment.

The goal of the study was to further pave the way for a future in which public transport systems are fully attuned to the diverse needs of their users and staff, ensuring that public transport not only facilitates mobility but also significantly contributes to the broader goals set for gender equity and social inclusion.



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## METHODOLOGY

The findings summarised in this report are the results of two consultation activities conducted in 2023: (i) a questionnaire survey addressed to a broad group of public transport stakeholders worldwide and complemented by (ii) in-depth interviews with selected survey respondents. The aim was to ensure a diverse range of perspectives and to delve deeper into the survey responses. Both activities involved and benefited UITP members.

The survey resulted in 51 responses, consisting of 37 Public Transport Operators (PTOs) and 14 Public Transport Authorities (PTAs), with a majority of European stakeholders (39) and a smaller representation of organisations from Latin America (five), North America (three), Asia-Pacific (two), Africa (one) and Eurasia (one). Considering the response rate and the geographical distribution of the respondents, drawing definitive conclusions from the data proved to be challenging, although clear trends emerged and were further explored in in-depth interviews.

Interviews were conducted with the diversity managers of six organisations, which resulted in extensive discussions about barriers to women's equal participation and the identification of good practices and recommendations.



## WOMEN AS PASSENGERS

### AVAILABILITY OF SEX-DISAGGREGATED PASSENGER DATA

The results show that collecting sex-disaggregated passenger data is not a common practice: 54% of the 51 respondents do not collect these data. Possible reasons for this lack of data, as mentioned by some operators, are technical difficulties or a desire not to make distinctions on the basis of gender or race. This deficiency not only hampers the ability to accurately capture diverse travel behaviours but also jeopardises efforts to create inclusive and safe transport systems.

However, when data are available (as stated by 46% of the respondents who reported capturing sex-disaggregated data), they confirm that women tend to make more use of public transport than men.

### GENDER-SENSITIVE DESIGN AND PLANNING OF MOBILITY SERVICES

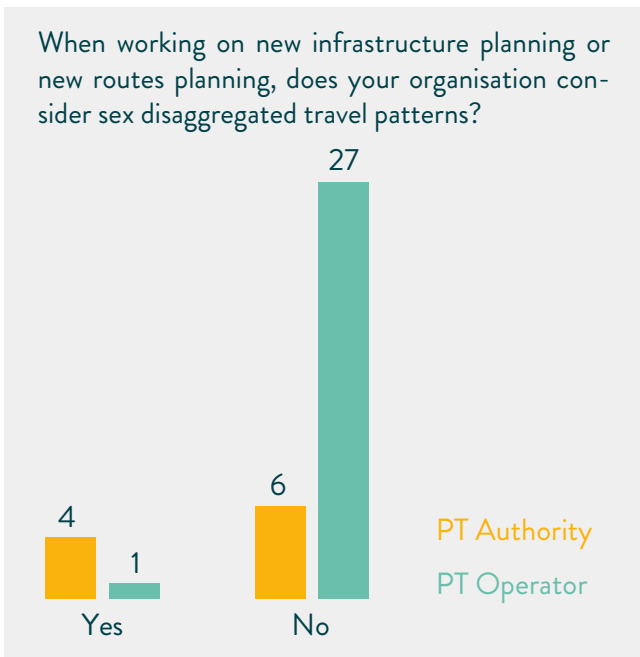
It is well known that women's travelling patterns on public transport often differ significantly from men's, reflecting distinct needs, responsibilities and priorities. While men may prioritise longer commutes to work, women frequently engage in shorter trips for errands, caregiving and other activities, in addition to their work commuting trip. These journeys often involve multiple stops at essential locations.

However, public transport planning does not always adequately address these unique patterns, leading to potential disparities in service provision<sup>1</sup>. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality's (EIGE's) Gender Equality Index 2023,<sup>2</sup> women are more likely to experience limited access to sustainable transport options, restricting their opportunities to access paid work and to seek a better work-life balance. Limited access to transport or to certain modes of transport can hinder access to employment, education and essential services and thus reinforce gender gaps in poverty and social exclusion.

This situation is confirmed by the UITP survey results. More than half of the respondents do not have data on female travel patterns, and the vast majority do not work on route planning with mechanisms or tools to take a gender perspective into consideration. More specifically, very few of the respondents consider planning routes based on sex-disaggregated travel patterns and caring activities (13%) or scheduling the timetable according to sex-disaggregated travelling patterns (18%) or consider security on board and at stops and terminals beyond compliance with applicable legislation (30%) (Figure 1).

<sup>1</sup> World Bank Group, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and UITP (2022). Integrating gender considerations into public transport policies and operations. Washington, DC: The World Bank, 1–49.

<sup>2</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) (2023). Gender Equality Index 2023: Towards a green transition in transport and energy. Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/gender-equality-index-2023-towards-green-transition-transport-and-energy>



► Figure 1 – Adoption of sex-disaggregated data in route planning (number of validated responses = 38). PT, public transport

A lack of inclusivity in public transport planning can significantly reduce access to economic opportunities for users, for example by limiting the benefit they derive from public transport and by increasing the time and costs attached to commuting. This can particularly affect women, who tend to rely on shorter commutes because of their care responsibilities and use public transport more than men. Failing to maximise the use of public transport also contributes to air pollution and inefficient and unequal resource use. Recent research even shows that “an equal transportation system plays a crucial role in reducing carbon emission with a possible energy efficiency of 29%”.<sup>3</sup>

However, when it comes to engaging local communities in the planning stage, 55% of respondents do conduct surveys, market research or focus groups meetings, as shown by the survey responses below.

### SAFE, SECURE AND COMFORTABLE TRIPS FOR ALL, INCLUDING WOMEN

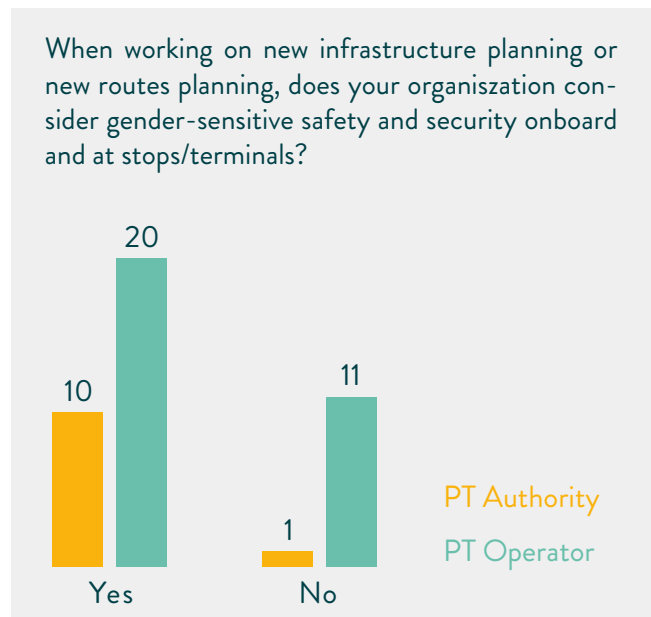
While it is common for operators to consider gender-sensitive security in the planning of new infrastructure and services (Figure 2), it appears that there is a lack of explicit measures specifically targeting women’s security in the actual operations, indicating a need for greater emphasis on gender-specific approaches. Security is perceived as a concern for all passengers (86% of respondents do have closed-circuit television cameras (CCTV) on vehicles and at stations, 83% of which are monitored in real time), but gender dimensions are of-

### GOOD PRACTICE THE USER AT THE HEART

At FGC (Ferrocarrils de la Generalitat de Catalunya) we have worked many times with focus groups to get their inputs and re-design our spaces according to their needs, and we regularly meet with them. One example would be during a gender audit initiative where the company wanted to learn about its female users’ service perception. As a result of this audit and through working with a focus group, FGC worked on re-designing its spaces. We have also worked with people with disabilities. One example would be a project aimed at adapting signage and information systems for people with cognitive disabilities and functional diversity. This project was conceived as a pilot project and a prototype station was designed according to the comments and suggestions of targeted focus groups. After the pilot project some guidelines have been developed and measures are being implemented.

Ferrocarrils de la Generalitat de Catalunya, Spain

ten not integrated into existing practices (only 40% of respondents have measures in place or collect data about gender harassment and/or crimes when women are the victims in public transport settings).



► Figure 2 – Adoption of security gender considerations in planning new infrastructure or services (number of validated responses = 42). PT, public transport.

3 Kronsell, A., Stepanova, O., Håkansson, J., Winslott Hiselius, L., Dalholm, O., Nyberg, J., et al. (2023). Gender Equality and Increased Energy Efficiency in the Transport Sector. Available at: <https://www.gu.se/en/research/gender-equality-and-increased-energy-efficiency-in-the-transport-sector>

To address this gap, there are promising emerging methods, mobile apps and technological developments that have potential to address security concerns for all passengers, including women. For example, some respondents mentioned the development of journey planner apps that offer real-time information on busy lines and departure schedules, thereby enhancing convenience and potentially improving security by enabling passengers to make more informed travel choices. In addition, initiatives such as the implementation of panic buttons connected to law enforcement agencies and the introduction of surveillance cameras on board trains and at stations serve as tangible measures to enhance security and deter criminal activities. By adopting these approaches, public transport authorities can better address the unique security con-

cerns of female passengers and create a more inclusive and secure transport environment for everyone.

To ensure an adequate level of comfort during public transport trips, facilities dedicated to female passengers, and which also consider women’s travel patterns, are key. However, according to the results of the survey, the availability of such facilities is still limited, with roughly half of the respondents offering space for buggies/ pushchairs (24 out of 51) and toilets in stations with baby changing facilities (21 out of 51).

## WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

### EMPLOYMENT DATA OVERVIEW

The operators and authorities surveyed represent an overall workforce of about 600 000 employees, almost all of them full-time employees. Out of this sample, the average share of female staff is 21%, with a higher average rate among public transport authorities (29%) than within operators (20%). These figures, although global, seem to be comparable with the European average for the land transport sector (15.5%) published by Eurostat in 2023,<sup>4</sup> but far below the average share of women employed in Europe (all sectors), which is 46%.

The split of employment data by mode (Figure 2) suggests that driving buses is the least attractive transport mode for female drivers, with an average of 9% of women bus drivers observed out of 21 respondents operating bus services. A significantly higher share of female drivers are registered in Spain, where female metro and rail and suburban rail drivers make up 57% and 32%, respectively, and in the Netherlands, where female tram drivers represent 43%.

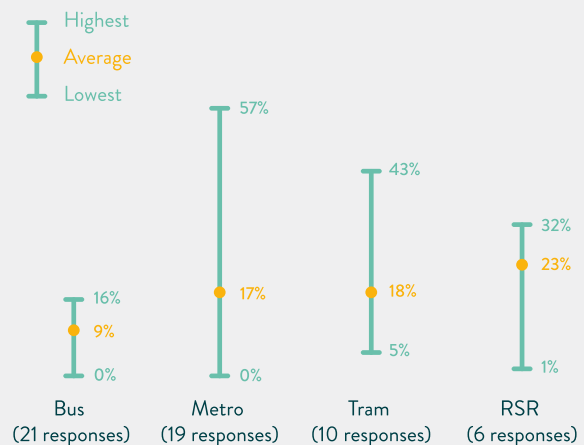
### GOOD PRACTICE STANDING UP FOR VICTIMS OF HARASSMENT

Metro de Santiago, Chile started a campaign against street harassment in 2022, using the methodology of the “Stand Up” project known as 5D. (Distract, Delegate, Document, Delay and Direct). More than 700 screens, panels, trains and social networks displayed the Stand Up campaign to encourage citizens to take a short training that teaches how to safely help those who are experiencing harassment: simple actions that can make a big difference to the victim.

Metro de Santiago, Chile



Share of women employees in driving operations



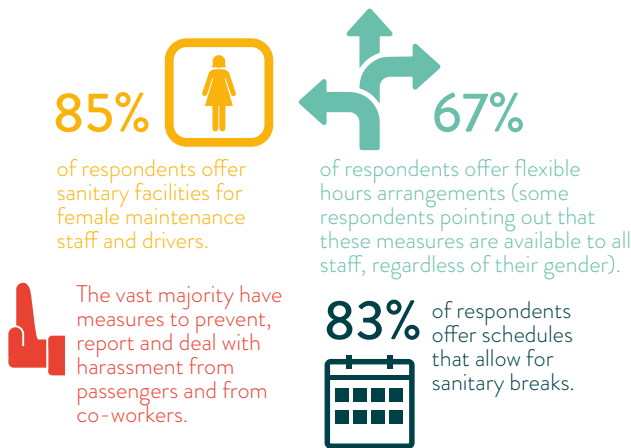
► Figure 3 – Share of women employees in driving operations per transport mode (number of respondents = 36). RSR, regional and suburban rail.

<sup>4</sup> Eurostat (2024). Key figures on European transport, 2023 edition. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/15216629/18384997/KS-HE-23-001-EN-N.pdf/65eb90bc-4856-f6a5-b12f-cf87854587f7?version=4.0&t=1707145038133>

Regarding the share of women employed at senior and middle management levels in the public transport sector, the results show that 26% and 25%, respectively, are women employees, which is below the general EU level (according to Eurostat, in 2020 women represented 34% of managers in Europe<sup>5</sup>). In other administration positions (such as accounting and human resources) the share of women in our sample is similar to or higher than the average share of women employed in Europe (55% and 64%, respectively), except in management roles.

## GENDER-INCLUSIVE POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Most of the respondents have policies in place to address gender and diversity aspects; the most common are anti-discrimination policies and practices, followed by policies addressing gender-based violence and harassment, maternity/paternity and parental leave, equal pay and grievance mechanisms. Apart from these policies and practices, organisations also take measures to promote women’s well-being and work-life balance:



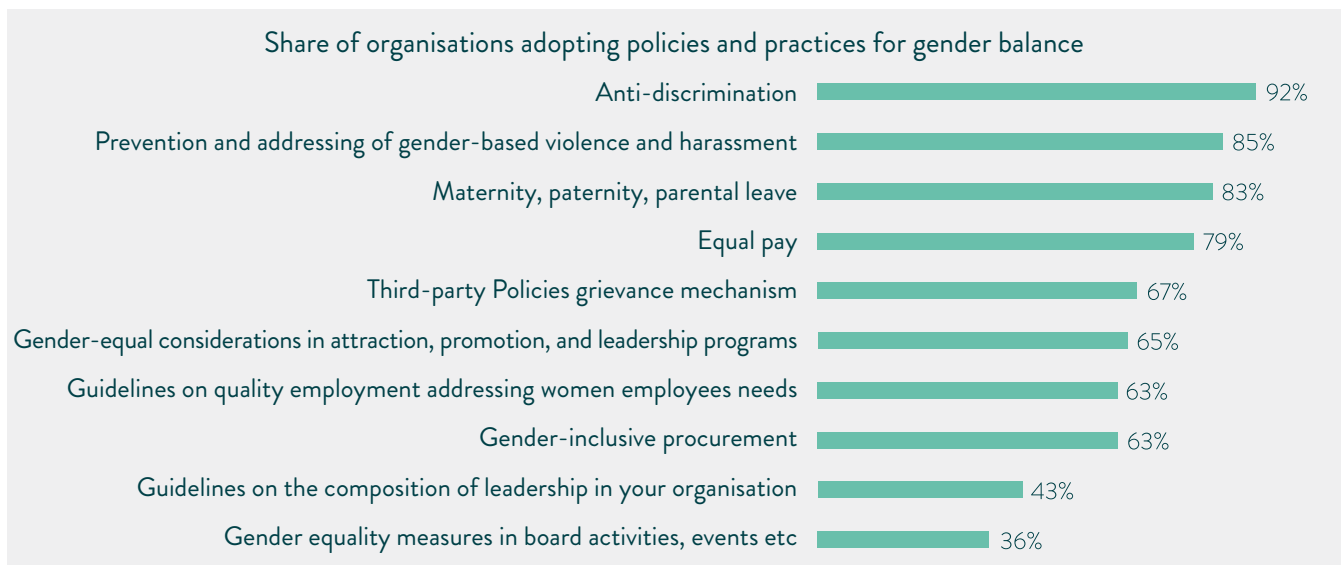
Gender-inclusive procurement policies, advocated for by the European Commission as part of the social considerations in public procurement,<sup>6</sup> are also part of the key practices put forward by the respondents (63%).

### GOOD PRACTICE RESPONSIBLE PROCUREMENT

As part of its corporate social responsibility requirements, SNCF has adopted a responsible procurement strategy including an ethical procurement charter based on anti-discrimination principles and zero-tolerance policies against harassment.

SNCF Group, France

Despite such measures being included in the policies of respondents (whether at municipal, regional or company levels), no correlation was found between them and the actual share of women employed. This can be explained by considering the novelty of diversity and inclusion approaches in public transport organisations, but it seems to confirm the existence of barriers for the actual implementation of the measures, such as entrepreneurial culture, biases or a lack of inclusive leadership.



► Figure 4 - Adoption of gender-inclusive policy and practices.

5 Eurostat (2021). Women remain outnumbered in management. Available from:

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/edn-20210305-2#:~:text=In%20Q3%2020%2C%20more%20than,represented%20amongst%20managers%20\(34%25\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/edn-20210305-2#:~:text=In%20Q3%2020%2C%20more%20than,represented%20amongst%20managers%20(34%25))

6 European Commission (2021). Buying Social – A guide to taking account of social considerations in public procurement. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/45767>



► Copyright: Copenhagen Metro, Denmark

### GOOD PRACTICE NO TOLERANCE FOR DISCRIMINATION

FNM is committed to promoting programs aimed at providing equal opportunities for all employees to foster diversity and inclusiveness within the Group's companies. The FNM Group recognises the importance of protecting the diversity of every person, which can generate added value across all business processes. In line with an inclusive approach, no form of discrimination is tolerated on the basis of ethnic origin, skin colour, gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, age, political opinion, trade union affiliation, marital status, physical or mental disability and any other status or personal characteristic.

FNM Group, Italy

### GOOD PRACTICE EMPOWERED@THEWHEEL

In 2023, OC Transpo (Ottawa, Canada) launched an intensive campaign entitled "EmpoWered@theWheel" to encourage and empower more women to consider a career in public transit.

The position of Bus Operator is a steppingstone into leadership positions such as Supervisors, Superintendents or Instructors. OC Transpo believes that increasing the number of women entering the Bus Operator role will lead to a higher percentage of women in these leadership roles in the near future.

The organisation also created an initiative to have women-only New Bus Operator Training classes, where all participants were women and were led by female Instructors.

On top of a large advertising campaign, OC Transpo partners with local community organisations for women who distribute the information and advertising. These organisations include immigration/refugee support organisations, educational institutions, city and provincial employment centres, and professional trade organisations.

OC Transpo continues to be a champion for equity and diversity in the workplace by having a strict Code of Conduct and workplace harassment policies. It also promotes a strong Peer Support Network and access to a robust Employee Assistance Program.

OC Transpo, Canada

### BARRIERS TO AN EQUAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN THE SECTOR

The in-depth interviews conducted with six European public transport stakeholders confirmed that barriers to equal participation of women in the public transport sector still remain, especially when it comes to driving and maintenance activities. These barriers include the following.

► Culture, stereotypes, beliefs

In the domain of public transport, the journey towards gender equality is fraught with obstacles rooted in culture, stereotypes and systemic biases. Despite efforts to promote inclusivity and address gender disparities,



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significant challenges persist, hindering progress towards creating safe, accessible and equitable transport systems. Fewer women pursue roles as bus drivers because of perceived barriers and lack of encouragement. For example, the belief that operating a bus is difficult and requires a level of confidence that women may feel they lack demonstrates the pervasive influence of gendered expectations on career decisions and opportunities.

➤ Lack of diversity and inclusion prioritisation in leadership

The importance of supportive attitudes from top management in fostering an inclusive work environment is essential. The absence of diversity in leadership positions reflects a systemic barrier to achieving equal participation in the workforce. The homogeneous composition of directors, predominantly men, underscores a lack of representation and diversity within the organisation’s leadership ranks, and could fail to prioritise inclusivity or embrace a diverse range of perspectives.

➤ Policy awareness

Awareness of existing policies for equal participation remains a significant challenge, particularly among front-line staff, including drivers. Despite efforts to disseminate policies, these are often poorly understood, highlighting the need for targeted communication strategies and proactive engagement with employees.

**GOOD PRACTICE**  
**INCREASING DIVERSITY AT THE TOP**

We updated our Board Diversity Policy to include a specific gender diversity target for the Board to have no less than 25% female members by 2025, showing top level commitment to one of our environmental, social and governance “ESG” objectives, social inclusion.

MTR Corporation Limited, Hong Kong SAR, China

➤ Work organisation

Split shifts and inflexible schedules still account for the main barriers in attracting female drivers — and drivers in general. According to an interviewee: “They [the drivers] often have split shifts, and the work-life balance is difficult. They can choose which shift they want and do not want, but there is no guarantee that they are able to get what they want. It’s difficult to combine [such work schedules] with the care for family and children”.



## GOOD PRACTICE REDUCING THE GENDER PAY GAP

Although salary discrimination (of any kind) is illegal in Spain, the gender pay gap is still a real issue as it is highly affected by women not being present in higher-responsibility-and-salary positions. Therefore, FGC has implemented quotas at different levels and has also established the promotion of the under-represented gender as tie breaker between candidates to boost the presence of women in male-dominated positions and, at the same time, reduce the pay gap, which is effectively decreasing comparing to the previous years and was estimated at 5.6% in 2022 (based on total hourly salary)

Ferrocarrils de la Generalitat de Catalunya, Spain



► Copyright: MAV-START RAILWAY PASSENGER TRANSPORT CO, Hungary



► Copyright: Copenhagen Metro, Denmark

Although many organisations have equal pay policies, some respondents admitted that the gender pay gap still exists. Measures such as transparency about sex-disaggregated data and stronger enforcement of the right to equal pay as envisaged in the recently approved EU directive<sup>7</sup> (to be enacted by EU members by 7 June 2026) should help tackle this issue.

## GOOD PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite growing awareness of the importance of incorporating a gender lens into public transport planning, significant challenges persist in effectively implementing such practices across the sector. While some initiatives aim to address gender disparities in route planning and security measures, there remains a notable gap in prioritising the collection and utilisation of sex-disaggregated data.

Regardless of the barriers highlighted in this study, more organisations are aware of the value, benefits and necessity of a diverse workforce and are working towards achieving a better gender balance. A recent International Transport Forum report indicates the following:

“Greater gender equality or diversity in the transport workforce will not only address the discrimination women face in the workforce as a matter of human rights and fundamental principles and rights at work, it will also create more economic efficiency leading to poverty reduction (UN Women, 2016). Poverty rates are higher for women than for men on a global level, in both urban and rural areas (World Bank, 2018). Existing gender inequalities also make women and girls more vulnerable than men and boys to poverty (World Bank, 2011). Increasing women’s participation in the workforce could thus play an important role in poverty reduction”.<sup>8</sup>

From policies to gender equality plans, from improving infrastructures and working conditions to training

7 European Union (2023). Equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women – Rules on pay transparency. Available at:

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/equal-pay-for-equal-work-or-work-of-equal-value-between-men-and-women-rules-on-pay-transparency.html>

8 International Transport Forum (2020). The gender dimension of the transport workforce. Available at: <https://www.itf-oecd.org/sites/default/files/docs/gender-dimension-transport-workforce.pdf>

employees on unconscious bias, and from setting up mentorship programmes for women to having in place inclusive procurement practices — measures are being implemented at all levels.

The results of the UITP consultation suggest that there is not one single measure, or selection of measures, that holds the key to success. However, it seems very clear that the one defining element that distinguishes the front runner organisations from the rest is the organisation's values and beliefs, and the commitment of top-level management to ensuring that the culture of inclusion is ingrained at every level. Without this, policies may be in place but not enforced and rules may be established but not followed, ultimately resulting in failed measures and limited progress.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORT AUTHORITIES AND OPERATORS INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- **Leadership Commitment:** Ensure top-down support and commitment to gender diversity initiatives and establish the role of diversity manager with direct access to the board of directors.
- **Women's Leadership and Mentorship:** Implement mentorship programmes and support networks for women in under-represented roles, fostering a culture of inclusivity and empowerment. In addition, emphasise accountability mechanisms to ensure adherence to inclusive practices and address instances of discrimination or harassment promptly and effectively.
- **Innovative Recruitment Strategies:** Develop targeted marketing campaigns and use inclusive language in job descriptions to attract a diverse range of candidates to traditionally male-dominated roles. Promotion of diversity and representation should be both internal and part of recruitment strategies to effectively target and support under-represented groups.
- **Flexible Scheduling:** Implement flexible scheduling practices effectively or facilitate shift exchanges between staff, providing specific guidance on accommodating diverse employee needs, overcoming potential challenges and ensuring inclusivity for all members of the workforce.
- **Policy advocacy.** Advocate for political priorities and legislative frameworks supporting gender equality and



inclusivity within the public transport sector, emphasising accountability mechanisms to ensure adherence to inclusive practices and address instances of discrimination or harassment promptly and effectively.

- **Infrastructure adaptation.** Invest in infrastructure improvements, such as adequate sanitary facilities, to address the specific needs of women passengers and employees. Provide gender-sensitive amenities such as clean toilets and nursing facilities to accommodate the diverse needs of women passengers.
- **Collect and analyse sex-disaggregated user data.** Consider the data in decisions about planning transport routes and schedules.
- **Inclusive design approach.** Incorporate women's perspectives in the planning and design of public transport infrastructure and services to create inclusive spaces that prioritise security, comfort and accessibility for all passengers.
- **Monitoring and evaluation.** Establish baseline metrics and key performance indicators for gender equality, regularly monitor progress and evaluate the effectiveness of diversity initiatives. Select metrics that accurately reflect progress towards gender equality and inclusivity goals, such as representation in leadership roles, pay equity and employee satisfaction, to track the effectiveness of diversity initiatives accurately.
- **Promotion of diversity and representation.** Actively promote diversity and representation, including targeting under-represented groups. Clarify whether this promotion should be internal or part of recruitment strategies to effectively target and support under-represented groups.
- **Cultural transformation initiatives.** Implement comprehensive cultural transformation initiatives, including diversity training, employee resource groups and mentorship programmes. Emphasise accountability mechanisms to hold individuals and the organisation accountable for adhering to inclusive practices and addressing instances of discrimination or harassment promptly and effectively.

As cultural transformation is the lynchpin of change, public transport authorities/operators should implement comprehensive cultural transformation initiatives aimed at challenging stereotypes, fostering inclusivity and promoting diversity. These initiatives could include the following:

- **Diversity training.** Conduct regular diversity and inclusion training sessions for all employees, with a specific focus on addressing the needs and perspectives of women passengers, to raise awareness about unconscious biases and stereotypes.
- **Support networks.** Establish employee resource groups or affinity networks in which individuals from under-represented groups, including women passengers, can share experiences, support one another and advocate for positive change, ensuring that their unique needs are addressed.
- **Mentorship programmes.** Create mentorship programmes that pair employees from diverse backgrounds, including women, with mentors who can provide guidance, support and career development opportunities, tailored to the experiences and challenges faced by women as passengers.
- **Gender sensitivity in policies.** Incorporate gender sensitivity and inclusivity into organisational values, policies and practices, with leadership actively championing these principles, reflecting the perspectives and requirements of women passengers in service delivery.
- **Zero-tolerance policies.** Implement zero-tolerance policies against discrimination, harassment and bullying, ensuring that mechanisms are in place for reporting and addressing incidents promptly and effectively, prioritising the security and comfort of female passengers.
- **Visibility and recognition.** Promote awareness and recognition of women's contributions within the organisation through internal communications, awards and leadership opportunities, and emphasise women's representation in external communications, showcasing their importance as passengers and stakeholders.



## SURVEY OVERVIEW

Number of survey responses	51	Number of mobility services operated/managed by mode:	97
Number of survey responses by organisation	51	Bus	29
Public transport authorities	14	Metro	26
Public transport operators	37	Tram	22
Number of survey responses by region:	51	Rail and suburban rail	13
Europe	39	Waterborne	7
Latin America	5	Total employees	599 983
North America	3	Full time employees (FTE)	562 968
Asia-Pacific	2	Women full time employees (FTE)	116 417
Africa	1	Total drivers	298 211
Eurasia	1	Women drivers	59 767

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The initiative was led by Christel Goossens and Lindsey Mancini at UITP and Caroline Lemoine at the EIB. They were supported by Patrizia Fagiani, Carmen Niethammer and Maja Roginska (EIB) and Jacopo Scudellari, Michele Tozzi and Dionisio Gonzalez (UITP). Appreciation is extended to Sara Gärtner (consultant, Goodpoint).

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## DISCLAIMER

This knowledge brief presents results and conclusions drawn from a survey conducted by UITP among its own members.

Any views, opinions and recommendations expressed do not necessarily reflect the view of the European Investment Bank. For EIB mandatory procedures, please refer to EIB project documentation and templates available at [www.eib.org](http://www.eib.org)

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