



Mobility and Transport Connectivity Series

# She Drives Change: A Toolkit for Redefining Opportunities for Women in Transport

## Chapter 1: The Case for Unlocking the Potential for Women in Transport



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Chapter 1:  
The Case for Unlocking the Potential for  
Women in Transport

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## Table of Contents

<b>Preface</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>vii</b>
<b>The Case for Unlocking the Potential for Women in Transport</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Rationale and Benefits .....	2
A Framework for Action .....	5
A Results Chain to Addressing the Constraints Women Face in Transport Operations .....	9

## Preface

*She Drives Change: A Toolkit for Redefining Opportunities for Women in Transport* is a comprehensive resource designed to empower transport sector professionals and policy makers to address disparities in mobility, employment, and entrepreneurship between women and men within the transport sector. The objective of this toolkit is to provide users with a structured approach to identifying and addressing gaps between men and women in various transport subsectors, including urban transport, rural and peri-urban roads, rail, aviation, maritime transport, and economic corridors and logistics. The toolkit presents specific interventions and indicators tailored to each subsector. The toolkit draws primarily from the World Bank's project experience and several other cases provided by other organizations.

The toolkit leverages practical insights from projects that tackle gender disparities in the transport sector, showcasing concrete examples and discussing common challenges and solutions. Projects were selected based on innovative approaches and a strong results chain, clearly articulating constraints, interventions, and indicators to measure progress. Examples span various subsectors and regions, ensuring diverse contexts and solutions, with preference for projects with several years of implementation to demonstrate tangible results. While some indicators may be challenging to adopt due to data limitations, the toolkit provides a comprehensive list of both tested and aspirational indicators for practitioners.

To enhance accessibility to the material, sector-specific interventions are detailed in separate chapters. This introductory chapter explains the rationale behind the inclusion of a woman's perspective when designing transport operations, highlighting the benefits and necessity of such an approach. It provides a theoretical framework that conceptualizes the factors contributing to the disproportionate barriers faced by women and identifies entry points for interventions.

### **Online Interactive Toolkit:**

A digital version of this toolkit is available at [www.shedriveschange.org](http://www.shedriveschange.org) (as of July 2025). This online, interactive version serves as a dynamic and continuously evolving resource, ensuring that users have access to the most up-to-date and relevant examples. As a living document, the online toolkit will not be static; rather, it will be updated with new insights, best practices, and innovative approaches as they emerge, making it an indispensable resource for transport planners and gender specialists.

### **Downloadable (PDF) Toolkit:**

The entire toolkit, including this chapter and the sector-related chapters, is available at [She Drives Change: A Toolkit for Redefining Opportunities for Women in Transport](http://www.shedriveschange.org).

## Acknowledgments

This toolkit was prepared under the guidance of Nato Kurshitashvili (Senior Transport Specialist) from the World Bank's Transport Global Practice, with contributions from the following authors: Ursula Casabonne (Senior Gender Consultant), Mitali Nikore (Senior Gender Consultant), and Brinda Juneja (Gender Consultant).

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# 1

## The Case for Unlocking the Potential for Women in Transport



**Transportation costs, safety concerns, and limited access disproportionately affect women, hindering their ability to work, attend school, and access health care and other essential services.**

Overcoming these challenges could significantly boost women’s economic participation and contributions to gross domestic product (GDP) while enhancing human capital for themselves and for future generations. Addressing mobility barriers also supports transport decarbonization goals. Women rely more on public transport and walking than men, making it essential to improve public transport affordability, accessibility, and safety to retain the green dividends of women’s current travel patterns and encourage others—primarily men—to shift from private vehicle use. Addressing mobility barriers affecting women and men differently can also benefit transport service providers by increasing ridership and improving transport service outcomes.

**Women are significantly underrepresented in the transport sector workforce, accounting for approximately 12 percent of transportation and storage workers worldwide.<sup>1</sup>** Women’s participation varies by subsector. Globally, women comprise only 5 percent of workers in land transport, 10 percent in water transport, 21 percent in warehousing and transportation support activities, and 38 percent in aviation. Barriers to women’s participation in the transport sector are present within each stage of the employment life cycle, including in relation to women’s attraction, recruitment, and retention; policies and practices in the workplace; and leadership and career progression. Regulatory frameworks also hinder women’s participation by restricting access to specific jobs in transport. For example, women are legally prohibited from working in specific transport jobs in 12 countries, 20 countries restrict women from night work, and 45 economies ban women from hazardous jobs.<sup>2</sup> These restrictions limit employment opportunities and reinforce outdated stereotypes about the suitability of transport roles for women, leading to inefficiencies and talent misallocation, which erode employers’ ability to improve decision-making, innovation, and financial performance.

## Rationale and Benefits

**Operations that address the constraints faced by women in transport offer both intrinsic and instrumental benefits.** Intrinsically, user-centric operations empower individuals, especially women, by enhancing agency, freedom, and choice in mobility. These operations also ensure equitable access to jobs and essential services, which fosters personal growth and improves quality of life. Instrumentally, user-centric transport systems increase efficiency, revenue, and user satisfaction by attracting a more diverse customer base. These systems also improve accessibility and boost women’s economic contributions to GDP. Additionally, user-centric transport systems support environmental sustainability through low-carbon solutions and operational efficiency, while boosting company performance and alleviating labor shortages. Incorporating women’s considerations into transport operations is key to building efficient and sustainable mobility systems. Box 1.1 outlines the rationale for addressing the constraints women face in transport operations and the associated benefits.

<sup>1</sup> Kurshitashvili, N., et al. 2025. *Addressing Barriers to Women’s Participation in Transport: Global, ECA, and MENA Perspectives (English)*. Mobility and Transport Connectivity Series. Washington, DC: World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099010925132542721>.

<sup>2</sup> World Bank. 2024. *Women, Business and the Law*. <https://wbl.worldbank.org/en/wbl>.

## Box 1.1. A World of Reasons to Unlock Women's Potential in Transport

### Why address women's mobility barriers?

#### *Agency, Freedom, and Choice*

- Mobility barriers stand as a major factor influencing the daily lives of billions of women and girls globally—significantly reducing their life quality and chances. Mobility empowers both women and men to make choices that influence their lives and give individuals greater freedom in terms of time and space, enabling them to take control of their personal and professional lives.

#### *Access to Healthcare, Education, Jobs, and Leisure*

- Adequate mobility allows women and men to access jobs and vital healthcare and education services. Without suitable transport options, individuals—particularly women—are often forced to forgo opportunities essential for their growth and that of their families.

#### *Economic Benefits*

- Ensuring equitable access to transportation for both women and men can unlock substantial economic potential by increasing labor force participation, boosting productivity, and fostering inclusive growth.

#### *Environmental Benefits*

- Promoting sustainable transport options like public transit, walking, and other low-carbon mobility choices, which currently more women than men rely on, can significantly reduce carbon emissions. By addressing the specific mobility needs of all demographics, we can foster more sustainable travel patterns that support environmental goals and help mitigate climate change.

#### *Service Provider Advantages*

- User-centric transport services catering to women and men's distinct needs can improve operational efficiency and attract a broader customer base, increasing revenues.

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### Why promote women's employment in transport?

#### *Economic Benefits*

- Promoting women at all levels of the transport sector, especially in traditionally male-dominated, well-paid, high-skilled technical and managerial roles, helps expand the female labor force, which is crucial for driving economic growth.

### *Business Benefits*

- Promoting women can enhance the performance of transport companies. Teams that include women and men, particularly at the senior leadership level, often perform better. Women play a crucial role in client relationship management, which is essential for public-facing roles like passenger transport. Companies with a more balanced representation of women and men are also better aligned with the communities they serve, gaining greater respect and trust from the public.

### *Demographic Benefits*

- In many regions, the transport sector faces labor shortages due to aging populations. Increasing the share of women in the transport workforce is essential for sustaining growth and ensuring access to a large, qualified talent pool, which is crucial for the industry's future.

### *Environmental Benefits*

- The transition to sustainable transport systems requires fresh perspectives. Women bring valuable insights and skills essential for the energy transition. Important perspectives include promoting modal shifts and advancing sustainability goals. Women, particularly those in leadership, are adept at driving eco-friendly practices and environmental protection measures, underscoring the importance of having both women's and men's perspectives in the decision-making process.

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## **Why address women's entrepreneurship barriers?**

### *Economic Benefits*

- Women-owned and managed businesses are critical engines of job creation and innovation. Enabling more women to start and grow businesses in the transport sector boosts labor force participation, unlocks underutilized talent, and drives more resilient economies.

### *Service and Sector Benefits*

- Women-led enterprises in transport can improve transport service quality and responsiveness by better addressing the diverse needs of transport users.

### *Addressing Systemic Barriers*

- Tackling the barriers women face in transport entrepreneurship through targeted interventions strengthens the pipeline of women-led enterprises and ensures more equitable participation in the sector's value chains.

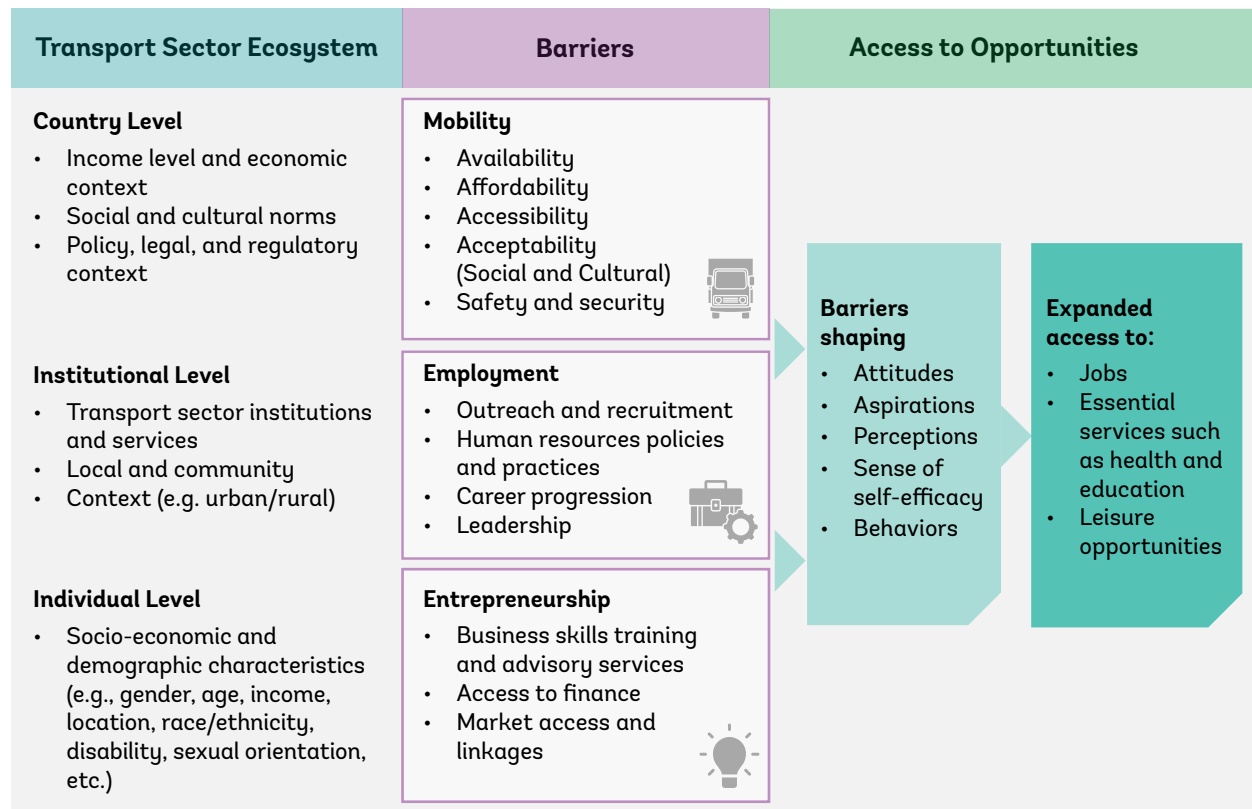
### *Promoting women's employment*

- Supporting women in starting entrepreneurial ventures within the transport sector has a proven multiplying effect. Women-led transport businesses are often more likely to employ a higher proportion of women, thereby creating additional job opportunities for female workers.

## A Framework for Action

Figure 1.1 presents a comprehensive framework that conceptualizes how transportation systems interact with country-, institutional-, and individual-level factors to shape disproportionate barriers for women. This framework helps identify entry points for interventions that address disparities between women and men in mobility, employment, and entrepreneurship in transport sector operations, ultimately improving access to economic opportunities and essential services for women as well as men.

**Figure 1.1. Conceptual Framework for Identifying Interventions in Transport Sector Operations that Address Disparities between Women and Men in Mobility, Employment, and Entrepreneurship**



Source: Adapted from similar frameworks developed by the research team.

The framework is structured around three key dimensions: environmental factors in the transport ecosystem that shape barriers affecting women and men differently; barriers that span mobility, employment, and entrepreneurship; and access to opportunities that can be achieved by addressing these challenges. Together, these dimensions offer a comprehensive approach to understanding and addressing the unique challenges women face in the sector, along with the benefits of overcoming the challenges.

## Transport Sector Ecosystem

This first dimension addresses the transport sector ecosystem and the environmental factors that shape access opportunities for women and men. These factors are divided into country, institutional, and individual characteristics:

- **Country:** This encompasses the national environment, including income and regional disparities, as well as the normative, policy, and legal frameworks that can either constrain or facilitate women's access to economic opportunities and essential services. Policies and legal frameworks can either support or hinder women's access to opportunities, including those within the transport sector. For example, in some countries, laws restrict women from certain transport jobs or roles deemed hazardous or from working at night, under the pretext of protection.
- **Institutional:** This refers to the local environment at the community level, which includes institutions that can either support or hinder women's mobility and economic activities. The community context—whether urban or rural—can impose constraints that influence women's decisions about if, when, where, and how to travel. This level also includes institutions responsible for decision-making and planning, particularly those that may perpetuate or challenge outdated biases in transport systems, ultimately impacting women's mobility and employment opportunities.
- **Individual:** This focuses on individual characteristics, such as gender, age, race and ethnicity, personal income, disability, or education, as well as factors related to power and agency, including capabilities, aspirations, and self-confidence. For example, the needs of a woman with a disability living in a rural part of a country with poor public transportation will be qualitatively different from those of a woman with no disability living in a city with at least some options for urban transportation. In a similar vein, an elderly man who is low-income and has limited mobility would have more acutely pronounced mobility needs than a young man who has resources to afford private transportation and full mobility.

## Barriers

The second dimension addresses three key barriers that arise from differences between men and women in transport sector operations: mobility, employment, and entrepreneurship. These barriers interact with the contextual country, institutional, and individual factors to determine how women and men utilize transport systems, pursue employment opportunities, and engage in entrepreneurship. Ultimately, these dynamics influence women's behaviors, self-efficacy, opportunities, and ultimately, outcomes.

### The Mobility Barrier

The first barrier relates to mobility and encompasses the challenges women and men face based on their circumstances, needs, and choices. Mobility refers to the ability to move freely and safely within one's environment, facilitated by accessible, secure, and affordable transport infrastructure and services that cater to a person's specific needs and enable full participation in social, economic, and civic activities. The mobility barrier is categorized into five areas, irrespective of transport mode or trip nature:

- **Availability:** This refers to the connectivity and coverage of the transport system. In rural areas, the availability of transport infrastructure (e.g., roads and pathways) may be more critical, while in urban settings, the availability of transport services (e.g., public transportation, shared transport) is more salient. Public transport often does not serve any internal routes in communities and is only available at certain times (e.g., only during daytime) or the service is excessively infrequent. This results in women walking long distances or taking informal modes of transport to cover feeder roads, which can be expensive and unsafe. A lack of evening transport options means that many women working in the service sector are less likely to take night-shift jobs.
- **Affordability:** This encompasses travel costs and the extent to which individuals can afford to travel when and where they want. It includes both direct (financial) costs and the opportunity costs of potential consumption that must be forgone for mandatory trips. Women’s complex daily trips, including those undertaken for caretaking purposes, take time away from other activities, such as productive work or leisure, and result in higher travel costs. Safety concerns disproportionately impact low-income women who often prioritize safety over affordability and who are willing to pay more for transport modes that provide a greater sense of safety. These additional travel costs mean that women pay disproportionately more than men for caretaking, safety, and other reasons.
- **Accessibility (including physical accessibility):** This includes not only the ease with which individuals can use the transport system but also the spatial interaction between mobility and land use. While physical accessibility considers how different individuals—such as non-disabled persons, parents with young children, pregnant women, the elderly, or individuals with disabilities—navigate the transport system, a broader definition of accessibility accounts for how land use and the proximity of services impact mobility. Evidence shows that closeness to essential services is particularly relevant for women’s time poverty and overall mobility. While both accessibility dimensions are essential, this toolkit primarily focuses on physical accessibility.
- **Acceptability (social and cultural):** Acceptability in transport refers to the degree to which transportation services, infrastructure, and policies are socially, culturally, and behaviorally suitable for different user groups. It encompasses physical factors—such as comfort, safety, and reliability—and social norms that shape public attitudes, perceptions, and expectations about who can access and use various transport modes. Acceptability also considers the influence of societal norms on mobility choices, including differing judgments and behavioral reactions to men and women using public and private transport systems. Ensuring high acceptability means addressing barriers that limit equitable access and fostering an environment where all individuals can travel freely and safely.
- **Safety and personal security:** “Safety,” for the purposes of this toolkit, refers to infrastructure deficiencies on roads, stations, and trains that could lead to accidents or risky settings, such as potholes in roads, large gaps between the train and the platform, or unsafe staircases. “Personal security” refers to vulnerability to sexual harassment, physical or verbal assault, robbery with use of force, and other crimes. This toolkit addresses both safety and personal security concerns.

## The Employment Barrier

The employment barrier includes the many challenges in creating and expanding job opportunities for women across various skill levels while attracting and retaining diverse talent. This barrier is categorized into four areas aimed at enhancing equitable employment opportunities in the transport sector:

- **Outreach and recruitment:** This involves the processes and strategies used to draw female and male talent into the transport sector. It includes methods for raising awareness and generating interest among potential candidates, emphasizing the importance of fostering an applicant pool of men and women that reflect the community's demographics and skill sets.
- **Human resource (HR) policies and practices:** This refers to policies and practices supporting flexible work, childcare access, and safe, respectful work environments, which are critical for women's retention.
- **Career progression:** This focuses on the factors that influence an employee's ability to grow within the organization and their decision to remain long-term. It encompasses access to professional development opportunities, mentorship, promotion pathways, and employee engagement initiatives.
- **Leadership:** This includes the structures and dynamics that guide organizational management. It emphasizes the representation of diverse individuals in leadership roles, which is essential for shaping organizational culture and influencing strategic direction.

## The Entrepreneurship Barrier

The entrepreneurship barrier refers to the challenges women face in accessing opportunities in the transport sector, thus hindering their ability to start and grow businesses. This barrier is categorized into three areas that enhance economic participation and foster equitable job opportunities:

- **Business skills training and advisory services:** This focuses on equipping women with the proper training and mentorship to enhance their ability to navigate entrepreneurship and leverage opportunities in transport-related businesses.
- **Access to finance:** This refers to the difficulties women entrepreneurs experience in obtaining the funding and financial resources they need to enter and grow within transport-related industries. It includes issues such as limited access to credit, lack of collateral, and biases in lending practices that disproportionately affect women and marginalized entrepreneurs.
- **Market access and linkages:** This pertains to supporting women entrepreneurs in building networks and market connections—including access to trade fairs, business associations, and transport sector partnerships—that can help them scale their businesses and improve supply chain integration.

Transport sector projects can play a crucial role in fostering women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment by addressing women's financial and skills constraints and access to market barriers. Transport investments can unlock new economic opportunities for women entrepreneurs and contribute to broader economic growth. Additionally, economic corridors and trade facilitation initiatives offer strategic entry points for reducing the financial barriers women entrepreneurs face.

These initiatives can improve access to financial services by partnering with financial institutions to establish banking solutions at transport hubs and border crossings, enabling women traders to secure funding, process transactions, and grow their businesses. Transport operations can also strengthen public procurement by including provisions that encourage women-owned businesses to participate in supply chains and access contracts in transport infrastructure development and maintenance. Business training, financial literacy programs, and mentorship further equip women with the skills needed to scale their enterprises.

Beyond financial access, transport projects can directly contribute to creating safer and more accessible mobility options for women entrepreneurs. Reliable transport networks improve last-mile connectivity, enhance public transport security, and ensure that women can safely reach markets, financial institutions, and business hubs—critical factors for sustaining and expanding their businesses.

## A Results Chain to Address the Constraints Women Face in Transport Operations

A robust results chain is crucial for effectively addressing disparities in mobility, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities between men and women within transport operations. The World Bank Group (WBG) has placed significant emphasis on measuring results to guarantee the effectiveness and accountability of its gender equality initiatives, as highlighted in the WBG Gender Strategy for 2024–2030.<sup>3</sup> By identifying gender gaps, implementing targeted actions, and monitoring outcomes, teams can design more impactful interventions. Since 2017, the World Bank has utilized a “Gender Tag” for its operations, which follows three key steps:

### 1. Identifying Gaps (Analysis)

Task teams must first identify a relevant gender gap within the project’s context. This gap could relate to unequal access to mobility, employment, and/or entrepreneurship. For instance, in transport projects, this might include women’s mobility constraints and limited access to transportation, and underrepresentation in the transport workforce.

### 2. Implementing Actions to Address Gaps (Actions)

Concrete actions must be outlined to address the identified gaps. These actions should be integrated into the project’s core components and aim for sustainable impact. For example, in transport operations, these actions might include increasing safety measures for women in public transportation or creating employment opportunities for women in the sector.

### 3. Monitoring and Measuring Outcomes (M&E)

To track progress, measurable indicators at output and outcome levels are suggested to monitor how effectively the project closes the gap(s). They are incorporated into the project’s results framework to ensure accountability.

<sup>3</sup> World Bank Group. 2024. *World Bank Group Gender Strategy 2024 – 2030: Accelerate Gender Equality to End Poverty on a Livable Planet*. Washington, DC. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/gender/brief/gender-strategy-update-2024-30-accelerating-equality-and-empowerment-for-all>.

## Disclaimer

This toolkit provides targeted interventions and indicators to improve transport planning and operations by addressing differences in mobility, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities between women and men. However, these interventions and indicators do not automatically meet the criteria for gender tagging in World Bank transport operations. World Bank teams should continue consulting with Global Practice specialists and the Gender Group to ensure alignment with the latest tagging requirements.

The toolkit does not strictly follow the Gender Tag methodology for several reasons:

- **Evolving methodology:** The tagging framework is continuously updated and indicators previously eligible for tagging may no longer qualify.
- **Broader scope:** The toolkit covers a wide range of transport interventions, many of which extend beyond the scope of tagging, addressing other critical inequalities between men and women in transport projects.
- **Context-specific tagging:** Gender tagging depends on the specific context of each project and country. Simply applying current tagging criteria would ignore broader socioeconomic factors.

Lastly but importantly, the toolkit advocates for the removal of unnecessary barriers to ensure all qualified individuals—men and women alike—have a fair opportunity to succeed and that efforts to increase women’s participation in the transport sector are rooted in meritocracy. The focus is on expanding access - not lowering expectations, and removing obstacles - not reducing requirements, ultimately fostering a stronger, more competitive transport workforce for the future.

