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# Policy Brief: Making public transport and urban spaces safer and inclusive for women

*A policy brief based on the 'Toolkit for  
Enabling Gender Responsive Urban Mobility  
and Public Spaces'*

**India**



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This document is an adaptation from the toolkit - Enabling Gender Responsive Urban Mobility and Public Spaces

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## INTRODUCTION

**Cities are engines of growth, job-creation, and innovation.** As workers and firms interact closely, cities generate increases in labor productivity through agglomeration economies. Evidence shows a clear, positive correlation between urbanization and real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita for the world as a whole and in developing Asia and in India in particular.

**Globally, lack of consideration for diverse population needs in urban planning and design has constrained women’s access to socio-economic opportunities.** Women are under-represented in urban planning and design institutions, often excluded from decision-making, and often denied a seat at the table to voice their concerns.

**Indian cities need gender-responsive urban mobility and public spaces so that benefits of city-led economic growth can be more equitably distributed.** India has amongst the lowest female labor force participation rates (FLFPR) globally, at 22.8% in 2019-20<sup>1</sup>. Barriers in accessing public transport, lack of safety during travel, and social norms restricting mobility, severely limit women’s work, education, and life choices

**This toolkit is intended to bridge the knowledge gaps between policy making and program implementation for gender-responsive urban mobility and public space in India.** It is a guide towards introducing gender equality and women’s empowerment principles into designing urban mobility systems and public spaces, so that they mitigate rather than reinforce gender inequalities

### Central themes of the toolkit

Inclusion	Safety
Understanding mobility patterns	Reducing the threat perception
Enhancing representation in decision making	Enabling effective grievance redressal mechanisms
Improving infrastrucure and service designs	Empowering bystanders

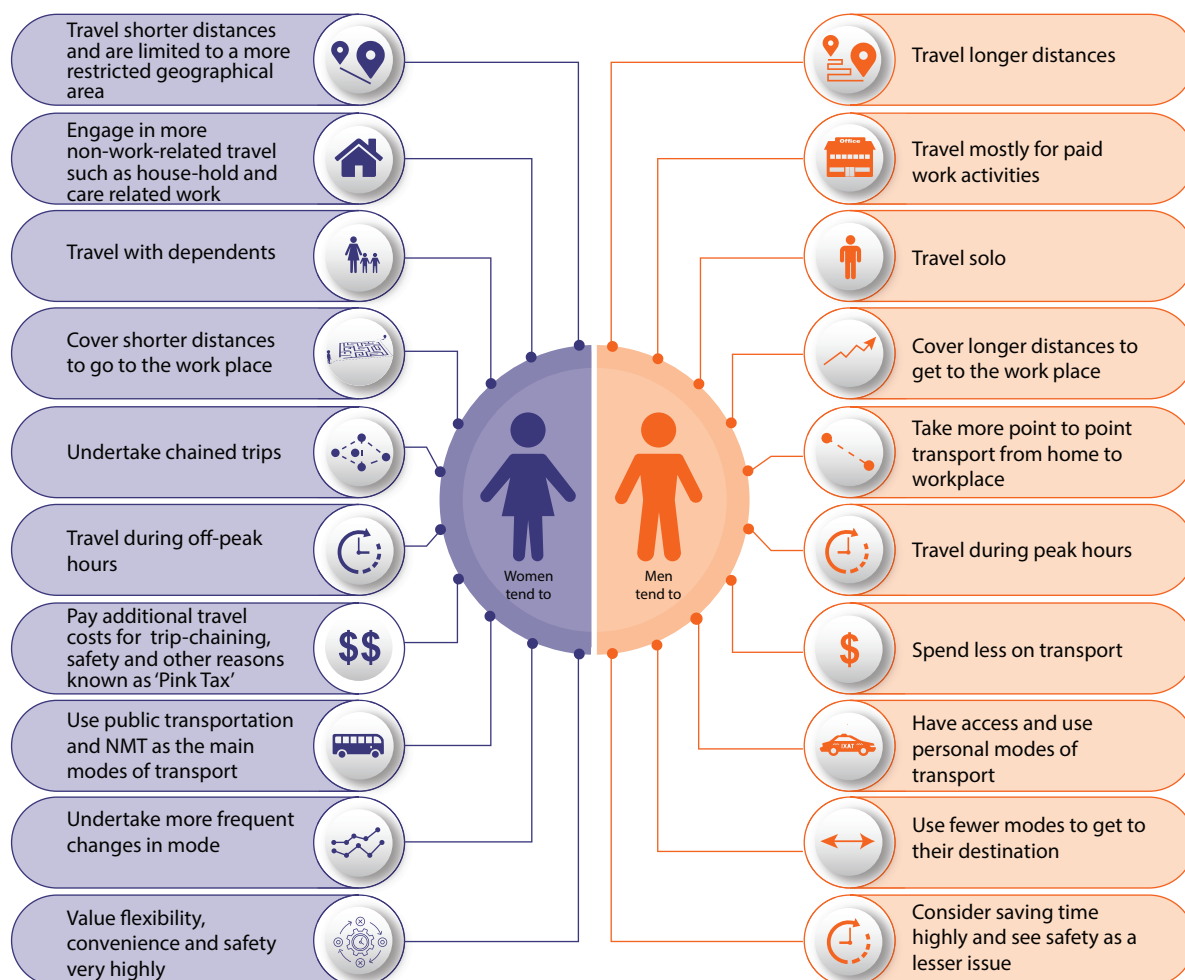
<sup>1</sup> India, MOSPI (Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation). 2020. *Periodic Labour Force Survey 2019-20*. Annual Report, New Delhi. [https://www.mospi.gov.in/documents/213904/301563/Annual\\_Report\\_PLFS\\_2019\\_20m1627036454797.pdf/18afb74a-3980-ab83-0431-1e84321f75af](https://www.mospi.gov.in/documents/213904/301563/Annual_Report_PLFS_2019_20m1627036454797.pdf/18afb74a-3980-ab83-0431-1e84321f75af)

## WHY VIEW THROUGH A GENDER LENS?

**Women are active users of public transport across Indian cities.** 84% of their trips are by public, intermediate public, and non-motorized modes of transport. A meta-analysis of literature and surveys globally and in India shows some clear patterns of public transport usage for women and men.

**Urban mobility systems are often not designed to account for gender-based differences in mobility patterns.** Despite women forming a significant user-group, little gender disaggregated analysis of mobility patterns at city level in India is available. When such analysis is available, it is seldom used to design tailored urban mobility solutions that suits differential needs of women and other genders

### Differences in mobility patterns between men and women

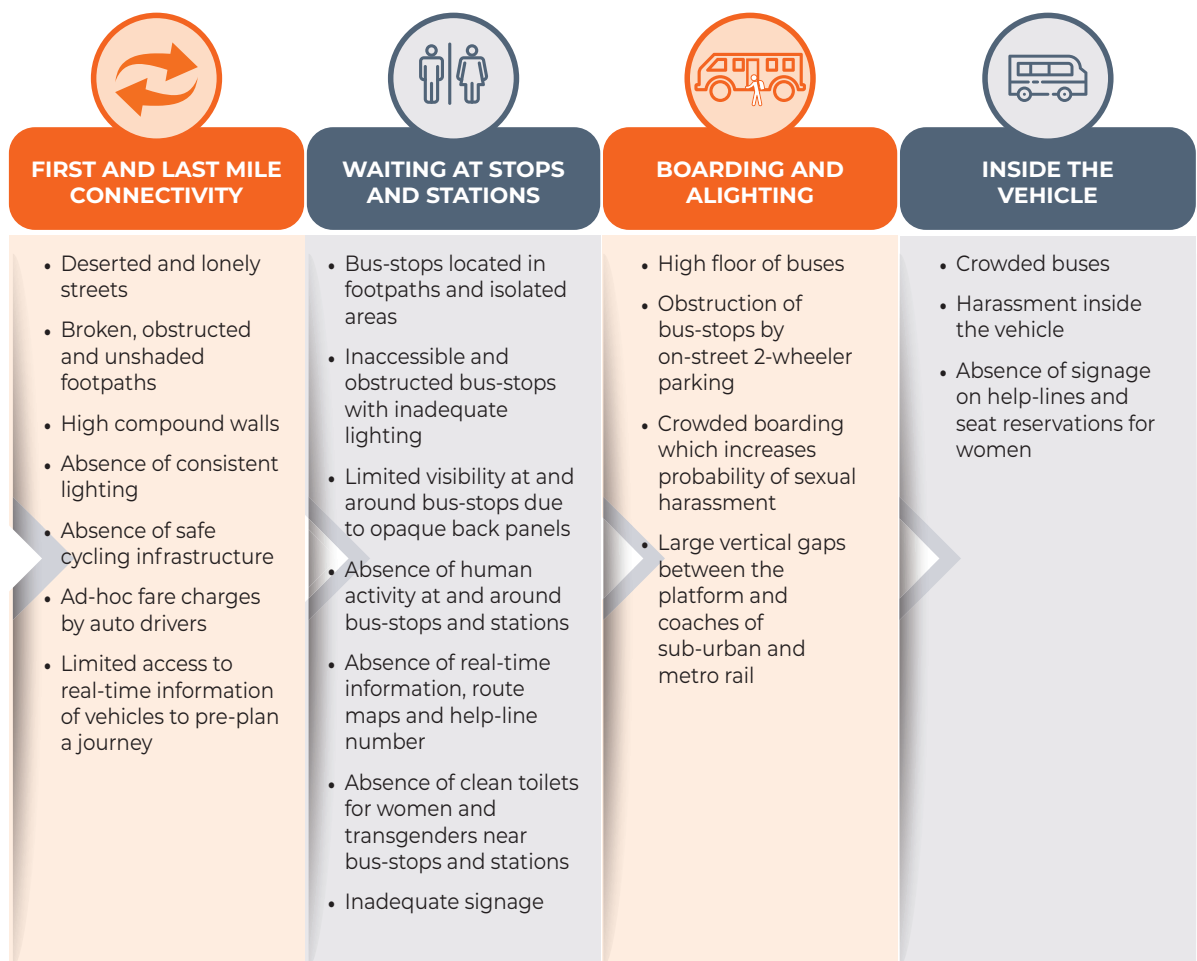


## BARRIERS ACROSS A PUBLIC TRANSPORT JOURNEY

Despite being major users of public transport, **women's concerns around safety, affordability, accessibility, connectivity and over-crowding are often neglected** by policy-makers and technical staff who design urban mobility systems, in favor of a system that benefits a "neutral" male user.

Women face barriers to using public transport owing to gender-blind design elements, during access and egress, waiting at stops and transfers, boarding and alighting, and inside the vehicle.

### Four stages of public transport journey and their challenges for women



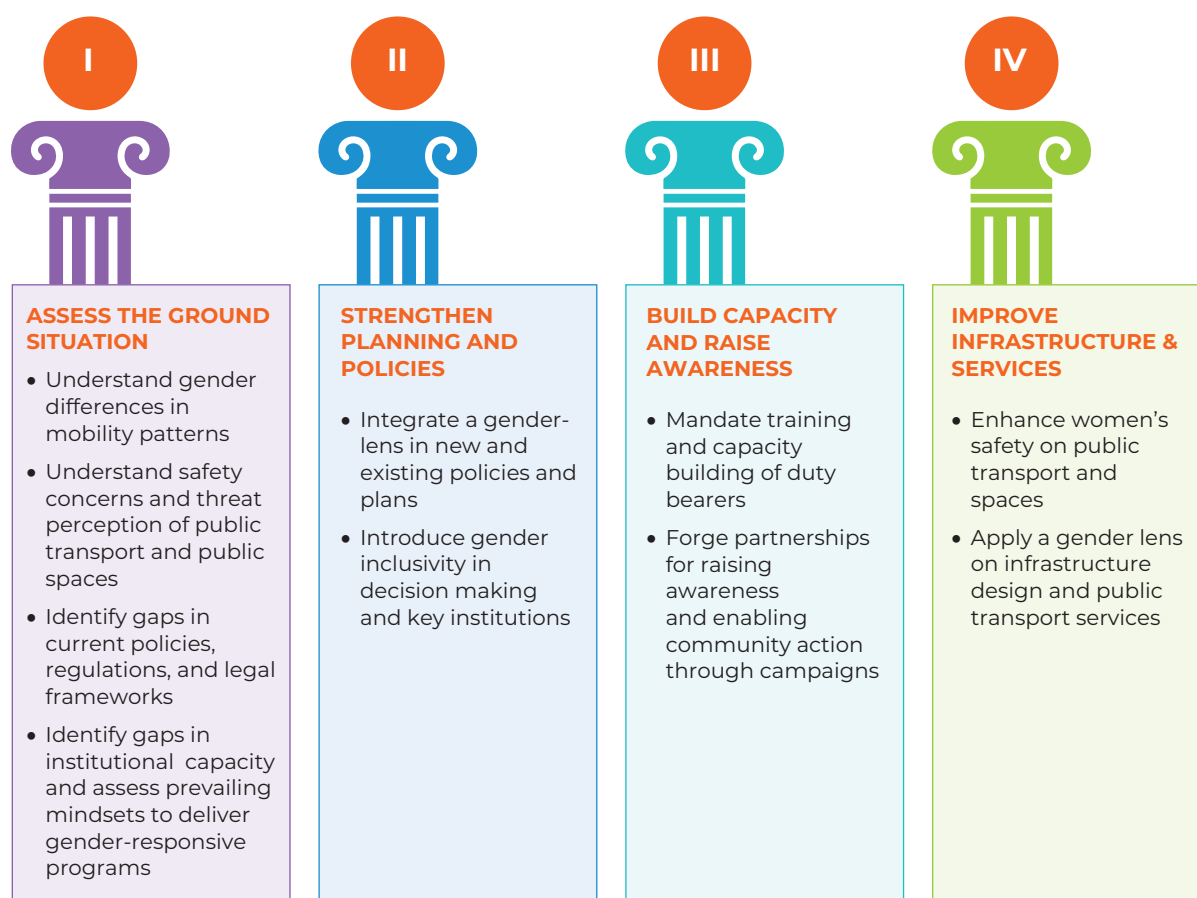
# KEY ELEMENTS OF A GENDER-RESPONSIVE URBAN MOBILITY PROGRAM

**Pillar I - Assess the ground situation** to understand gender-disaggregated mobility patterns, safety concerns and expectations of women commuters, policies, mindsets of duty bearers and right holders and level of gender inclusivity in the built infrastructure and transport services.

**Pillar II - Strengthen policies**, supporting legislations, regulations, guidelines, plan documents and other manuals, by suitably incorporating a gender-lens.

**Pillar III - Build the capacity** of duty-bearers responsible for implementing policies, plans, programs, and projects **and raise awareness** for duty-bearers and right holders alike at the community level.

**Pillar IV - Improve** the design of **infrastructure** and introduce gender-responsive **services** to improve the inclusion and safety of public transport and public spaces.



## Pillar I - Assess the ground situation

The design of inclusive public transport services and public spaces, begins with an on-ground baseline gender gap assessment. The ground assessment aim to understand the barriers to women's use of public transport services and public spaces, as well as the underlying causes, thus providing data to help bridge the gaps be at the planning, policy, mindset level or the project implementation level.



Undertake regular **collection** and analysis of **gender-disaggregated mobility data** to understand differentiated patterns to improve the transport services.



Benchmark **technical capacity**, gender representation, and understand prevailing **mindsets** across stakeholders and implementing agencies.



Complement data collection surveys by qualitative focus group **discussions** with women to understand the drivers behind **preferences and their expectations**.



Undertake regular **safety audits** of public transport and public spaces.



Review existing transport sector policies, regulations, plan documents, legal frameworks, and guidelines to **identify gaps** for gender inclusion and responsiveness.



Assess the robustness of the **grievance redressal mechanisms** by regularly surveying users to reduce the under-reporting of sexual harassment.





## Pillar II - Strengthen Policies

Existing policies, plans, laws, and institutions can be made more inclusive by incorporating a gender-lens and ensuring diverse representation at key institutions. Following the review undertaken during the previous stage of assessment, a way forward can be charted to address the identified gap. The two key elements include integrating a gender-lens in new and existing policies and promoting gender inclusivity at key institutions, particularly in leadership and decision making.



Mainstream gender-disaggregated concerns and incorporate **gender action plans** within the comprehensive mobility plans (CMP) developed at the city-level



Devise **preferential procurement** policies to prioritize purchases from gender-responsive suppliers



Diversify **representation** in urban local bodies, public transport authorities, especially at senior leadership and decision-making level.



Devise fare policies to **lower cost of travel** for women to boost their ridership



Establish a **dedicated team** to implement and monitor the gender action plan



Devise special policies / schemes to **include women in the mobility field**



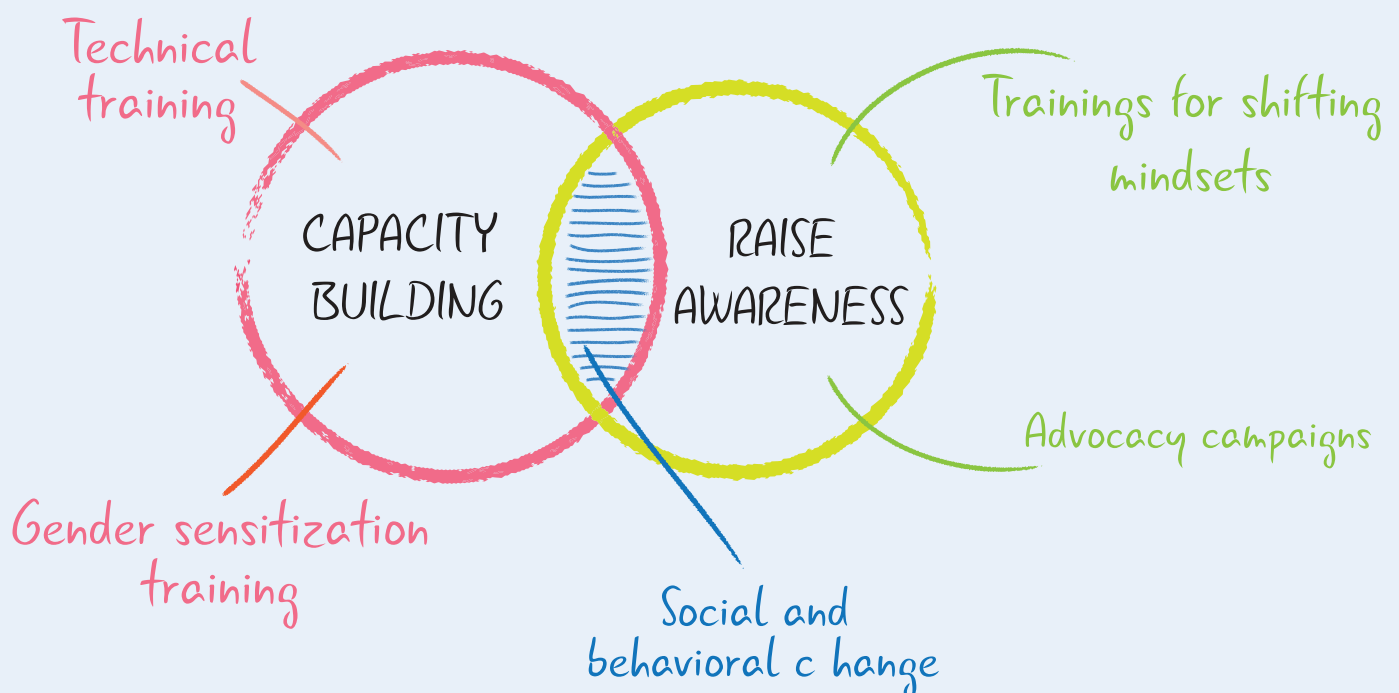
Strengthen **grievance redressal** to fast-track sexual harassment complaints



## Pillar III - Build Capacity & Raise Awareness

Whether women are able to exercise their “rights to a city” depends on the delivery of public services by duty bearers and attitude change in the community, making gender sensitization, capacity building and awareness creation critical. The ‘right to the city’ framework advocates building safe cities such that women have equal rights to enjoy the city and claim space in anyway they wish to, without experiencing violence or the threat of violence.

- Arrange for **capacity building** and gender-sensitization of management at ULBs, PTAs and implementing agencies to ensure gender responsive planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public transport services.
- Arrange for **gender sensitization** training for drivers, conductors, police and other people facing staff in public spaces and transport services
- Raise awareness at individual and community level for shifting mindsets through **social and behavioral change campaigns**
- Partner with **community-based organizations** for accelerating the awareness spread through advocacy efforts
- Arrange for large scale **by-stander intervention trainings**



## Pillar IV - Improve Infrastructure & Services

Barriers to use of public transport and public spaces can be reduced by placing a gender-lens on the infrastructure design of streets, stations and public transport vehicles, and introducing gender-responsive services can diminish these barriers

- Install adequate **lighting** in streets, public spaces, at stations and in public transport vehicles
- Increase the **proportion of women frontline staff** – bus drivers, conductors, security officials
- Establish **emergency services**, including emergency buttons, helplines, mobile based service for emergency complaints, marshals and rapid response teams
- Streamline **intermediate public transport** (IPT) services to increase safety
- Plan urban mobility systems to simplify **modal changes** and ensure **service on routes frequented by women**
- Introduce gender-sensitive guidelines and infrastructure design to **ease boarding, alighting and transfers**
- Introduce **gender-informed design** of public transport vehicles
- Provide **gender-responsive infrastructure** at stations, terminals, and depots



## CONCLUDING REMARKS

For women, girls, sexual and gender minorities, and people with disabilities (PWDs) to experience safe and inclusive, gender-informed public spaces and transport services that address their unique requirements, concerted and long-term commitment is required across stakeholders, including policymakers, duty bearers and citizens.

Gender-responsive interventions for urban mobility and public spaces can be designed around four key pillars: (i) assess the

ground situation; (ii) strengthen planning and policies; (iii) Build capacity and raise awareness; and (iv) improve infrastructure and services. While interventions suggested under each of the four pillars can be introduced even as stand-alone initiatives, a coordinated program at state or city level can unlock synergies and amplify the impact of each intervention.



To understand more about **what needs to be done** to tread towards gender-inclusive urban mobility click here for Volume I of the toolkit - Enabling Gender Responsive Urban Mobility and Public Spaces

To understand **how to plan**, design and implement a participatory, inclusive urban mobility program refer to the Volume II of the toolkit