

Press Release

New Study Highlights Low Female Workforce Participation and Inadequate Facilities for Women Commuters in Public Transport

Delhi: A new multi-city study has revealed insightful findings about the daily realities of women in public bus transport — both as staff and as commuters. The report, titled “*Gender Inclusivity in India’s Public Transport*,” has been prepared by ITDP India and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH under the Indo-German Development Cooperation project “Sustainable Urban Mobility – Air Quality, Climate Action, Accessibility (SUM-ACA),” commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The report was launched in November.

The report, with the help of data from Association of State Road Transport Undertaking (ASRTU) found that women make up a mere 0.16% of driver positions and 15% of conductor roles in public transport operations across the country, and their employment was plagued with issues ranging from lack of availability of resting spaces at bus depots, to harassment in buses.

Simultaneously, to offer a macro perspective, the study also used gender-specific quantitative insights from the recently concluded Transport4All Challenge conducted in 46 cities. This captured women’s experiences with public transport, focusing on safety, affordability, and accessibility. Conducted through structured questionnaires and interviews, it gathered over 2,00,000 responses, including 78,000 from women commuters, providing valuable insights into their travel patterns and challenges.

Complementing this, the report offers robust qualitative insights from 04 cities- Pune, Chennai, Bengaluru, Delhi, where Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held exclusively with women staff from various state transport undertakings (STUs). Each session followed a structured questionnaire exploring employment conditions, workplace safety, harassment, infrastructure challenges, work–life balance, and professional achievements.

This approach, combining surveys, focus group discussions, stakeholder interviews, and field audits, allowed for a holistic understanding of both workplace and commuter-level experiences.

Manjunath Sekhar, Director, Sustainable Urban Mobility, GIZ India, said, “I am delighted to see this important report come to life through the close collaboration with ITDP India. ITDP India’s deep technical expertise and sustained engagement with cities have been invaluable in shaping the evidence and insights presented here.

He further added, “Gender inclusivity in public transport is no longer a peripheral issue but central to building safe, equitable, and future-ready mobility systems. I hope the findings and recommendations inspire transport agencies, policymakers, and city partners across India to

take bold and practical steps toward creating public transport systems for all to travel with dignity, safety, and confidence.”

Adding to it, Aswathy Dilip, Managing Director of ITDP India said, “Women users make up for most of the public transport users. In fact, the 2011 Census also states that 84% of trips taken by women for work in urban India were by public transport, whereas for men it was 71%. This itself should prompt all public transport providers to ensure their services are conducive to women users. This should start from improving women-workforce participation in public transport operations, because women in operations will be better sensitised to the needs of women commuters.”

Highlights from the study:

Issues Faced by Women Transport Staff

Across all cities, women working as drivers, conductors, and mechanics reported persistent structural and cultural challenges. Based on FGDs conducted with 74 women staffers, following were the key issues raised-

1. **Inadequate workplace facilities:** Many depots lacked basic amenities such as gender specific toilets for women, separate resting areas, and changing rooms.
2. **Discrimination:** Women faced dismissive attitudes and disrespectful behaviour from male colleagues and passengers, creating a demoralising work environment.
3. **Health and safety concerns:** Long shifts, physical strain, and poor sanitation facilities contribute to chronic back pain, joint issues, and reproductive health problems.
4. **Safety risks:** Women guides reported facing verbal and physical harassment from passengers without access to panic buttons or emergency support systems. While supervisors were responsive, women noted that formal safety protocols and gender-sensitive leadership remain lacking.

Expanding on it, Ravneet Kaur Goraya, Associate Transport Systems, ITDP India who worked on the research said, “Our focus group discussions found that many depots still lack clean toilets, gender-specific facilities, and safe resting spaces. These are not small inconveniences, they are daily barriers, and that should never be part of anyone’s job requirements.”

Issues Faced by Women Commuters

The Transport4All survey, revealed that women commuters face a range of barriers that impact their safety, comfort, and access to opportunities.

1. **Safety and harassment:** 30% of women reported experiencing harassment or theft in and around public transport, while 8% cited rude staff or rash driving.
2. **Overcrowding and discomfort:** 41% highlighted overcrowding at stations and inside vehicles, increasing the risk of unwanted physical contact.
3. **Delays and unreliability:** 32% cited long waiting and journey times, often leading to anxiety and unsafe travel conditions.

One important point to note is that when we surveyed women commuters, 24% expressed willingness to shift to public transport for most trips if conditions improved. This indicates a significant potential to increase women's use of public transport if safety, convenience, and comfort is enhanced.

Speaking about these findings, Kashmira Dubash, Deputy Director, ITDP India said, "Our findings highlight that systemic issues are aplenty for both the women staff and women commuters. Both these groups were working in/using public transport, not because of the infrastructure provided, but despite the infrastructure provided for them. This must change."

The report also gives seven actionable recommendations which can be spearheaded not just by State Transport Undertakings (STU) but also be institutionalised at a national level. Each recommendation is supplemented with a ready-to-use checklist with activities to take up, and the timeline/milestone by which it should be done, which can be used by operators to keep track of their adherence. Recommendations include:

1. Ensure 50% women participation in workforce across positions
2. Having an anti-discrimination and anti-harassment redressal cell
3. Percentage of terminals, depots and bus stops with uniform and consistent lighting of 30-40 lux
4. Having 40-60 buses per lakh population with load factor not exceeding 100% during peak hours
5. Making 50% of the buses low floor
6. Routine gender sensitisation for staff and commuters

The findings clearly underline that public transport must evolve from being gender-neutral to more deliberate focus on gender responsiveness in planning, design, and operations.

In terms of workforce representation, despite being among the largest user groups, women remain underrepresented in the workforce (women make up less than 1% of drivers) and continue to face challenges related to safety, infrastructure, and workplace support.

Improving women's participation in the public transport workforce is not merely a matter of representation it is essential to creating systems that are safe, inclusive, and reflective of the people they serve as commuters

A national-level intervention directed towards all STUs is the need of the hour directed at addressing each of these issues.

Access the full publication here: itdp.in/resource/gender-inclusivity-in-india-pt/

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About GIZ India

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH has been working with partners in



India for sustainable development since 1971. As Germany's largest development partner, India collaborates with GIZ across key areas such as energy, environment, climate change, and sustainable urban and economic development. Commissioned mainly by the German Federal Ministries BMZ, BMUV, and BMWK, GIZ supports the Government of India in advancing flagship initiatives like Smart Cities, Clean India Mission, and Skill India towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

About ITDP India

ITDP India provides a wide range of technical and strategic support to national, state, and city governments—helping them design and implement people-centric transport systems. Our expertise spans technical advisory, data-driven research, knowledge publications, and capacity-building programmes. We focus on enabling cities to develop efficient, high-quality public transport systems—including electric mobility solutions—while also prioritising safe and accessible infrastructure for walking and cycling. Our work supports traffic reduction mechanisms, low emission zones, and the development of integrated mobility plans that promote cleaner air, reduced congestion, gender responsive mobility, and improved quality of life.