Travelling Safely – The EU Perspective

Maja Bakran, Deputy Director General for Mobility and Transport, European Commission

The European Union (EU) and its Member States are committed to ensuring the safety and security of their citizens. As transport users and as transport workers, women and men are not equally affected as women face higher levels of violence. Reducing this gap is a matter of fairness, economic efficiency, equality of opportunity and full participation in society.

The transport users' perspective

To be safe can mean to be free from accidents. In road safety, the EU has made major progress over the past decades, although this has slowed recently. Far more men than women are killed in road crashes: only 24% of all road fatalities are women. The proportion of male drivers killed even exceeds 80% in some countries. There are many reasons for this, but one important element is perhaps greater readiness of women to adapt their behaviour to take account of risk. Among pedestrians, however, almost twice as many women are killed as men.

Safety also means freedom from non-accidental risk, including the risk of violence or harassment. Although both women and men face the risk of violence, most victims are women. Perceptions of risk vary across Europe. When asked in a 2016 Eurobarometer survey where violence was more likely to occur, 27% of French respondents mentioned public transport but none of the Spanish respondents did.

Women use public transport more than men. Not surprisingly, they are also more aware and concerned than men about the threat of harassment or violence. Well reported events in recent years have raised the profile of this kind of risk, and may discourage the use of public transport.

This is not just a question of law enforcement. The transport community has an important role to play by main-streaming the specific concerns or vulnerabilities of women while making policy. This will require "joined-up thinking", involving transport planners, architects, companies and their workers, users' associations, psychologists, policy makers and the law enforcement community.

The transport workers' perspective

When it comes to violence at the workplace, a 2017 survey by the European Transport Workers' Federation showed that 63% of respondents had faced violence: 49% from customers, 22% from colleagues and 17% from managers/supervisors. Of those women who reported an incident, 80% did not believe that their complaint had negative consequences for the perpetrator, or made the workplace safer. This is a serious concern for women who would like to develop careers in our sector.

To take one specific example: the lack of safe, secure and well-equipped parking facilities for goods vehicles is one of the challenges which professional drivers face, and which acts as a deterrent to joining the profession. Tackling issues like this could help make our sector more attractive for women, and reduce the current gender gap. Right now, women are only 22% of the EU transport workforce, and even less - below 5% - for some occupations such as drivers. In economic terms, this is a regrettable waste of talent. As transport policy makers, we have a job to do in ensuring that women and men are given an equal and fair chance to build the transport sector of the future.
The impact of innovation and digitalisation

Tremendous changes are underway in the transport sector. Innovative digital solutions, new business models (e.g. sharing, collaborative), new services, new jobs (e.g. remote operators of vehicles) as well as new challenges (e.g. cybersecurity) are emerging. Digitalisation and new transport models can provide better, safer, more accessible and more affordable services. Connectivity and automation can compensate for human error, for example in avoiding road accidents. Door to door services will improve safety and security. Digital jobs can improve the working environment and work-life balance.

At the same time, we have to take new challenges into account. These include supervision of "unregulated" service providers, and potential threats from co-users of shared vehicles. Increased automation of supervision in public spaces like train stations means less physical presence of staff. If there is no-one there to help, a lone passenger will feel less secure – whether a man or a woman. Finally, the digital divide affects more women than men.

Women's specific needs and preferences have to be assessed and taken into account when developing new technologies and services.

What role does the EU play?

We finance useful research. In October 2017, we invited tenders under the Horizon 2020 programme for a study on demographic change and participation of women in transport. One factor mentioned is the problem of harassment and violence. Another study is also underway on safe and secure parking areas. After a survey of potential users and other interested parties, and an analysis of traffic flows/volumes/logistics' 'hotspots', the study will draw up a map of potential locations for safe and secure parking on the core Trans-European Transport Network.

We also spread good practices developed by European stakeholders. Over the last few years, several public transport campaigns have been launched (see examples below). Positive initiatives have also developed such as "on demand" bus stops closer to home at night. The Commission has a website dedicated to facilitating the exchange and the dissemination of best practices.

To assist women working in the transport sector and to encourage them to join the sector, the European Commission has launched the Women in Transport – EU Platform for change. This also addresses the issue of harassment and violence.

Conclusion

European stakeholders can learn from each other, for the benefit of women and men, and of the overall transport sector. Best practices developed in Europe can also be used in other regions of the world. ITF can help to increase safety and security for all.

Useful links


Examples of campaigns:
- EU Campaign "Say no to violence": http://ec.europa.eu/justice/saynostopvaw/