Advancing Safe and Secure Public Transport for Women

Aline Delatte, Research Manager, UITP MENA Centre for Transport Excellence
Dionisio Gonzalez, Advocacy and Outreach Director, UITP

Security and safety issues are the most influential factors for women’s mobility patterns. In some countries, the lack of secure urban environment strongly restricts women’s mobility and limits their access to job opportunities, education and health care services. Getting exposed to harassment on the way to the next metro station, facing fear by standing in a crowded bus at peak hours, rushing to get home before dark are only few of the many security aspects women consider while planning their journey. While women rely more on public transport than men, they are also the most vulnerable to violence in public space. Risk of harassment in public transport is a permanent threat for women, in all countries, without exception. Ensuring safe and secure transport is the basic and most relevant requirement for inclusive development.

However, women’s access to public transport should not be reduced to a security issue but rather must be embedded in the overall mission of public transport authorities and operators to excel in customer service, by matching the specific needs of all segments of the society, including women. Expectations and needs of women have been too long neglected in public transport planning, mainly due to the “invisibility” of gender issues. The lack of disaggregated mobility data and the insignificant share of officially-reported cases of harassment in public transport could have led to a careless development in terms of gender consideration. Additionally, the unequal women’s representation in decision-making, planning, and other levels of public transport sector exacerbates the low awareness of women’s specific needs among public transport stakeholders.

As the international leading public transport association, UITP is actively promoting gender equity in public transport sector and advocating gender-responsive development. On a global level, UITP is shaping the international agenda on gender in public transport, in consortium with influential and knowledgeable organisations and agencies in the transport sector under the umbrella of the Sustainable Mobility for All (SuM4All) initiative. On regional and local level, UITP contributes to raising awareness by organising discussions in conferences and regional platforms on the needs for gender-responsive measures.

In January 2018, UITP signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the World Bank to collaborate on the safety and security of women in public transport – and to advance the achievement of common objectives. UITP and the World Bank are working on the development of a toolbox to support gender mainstreaming in public transport. In the same context, World Bank and UITP successfully launched the Public Transport for Me campaign (#PT4ME) on 2018 International Women's Day. More than 180 public transport authorities and operators over 75 countries broadcasted the #PT4ME video and disseminated posters and flyers on their network to raise public awareness on gender issues in public transport.

Additionally, UITP is conducting a substantive work to encourage and support public transport stakeholders to tackle the gender issues in a comprehensive and realistic way. Our approach is twofold: women as decision-makers and public transport employees, and women as public transport customers. These perspectives are directly intertwined: by ensuring gender equity at all levels of public transport development, women’s concerns as travellers will be better taken into consideration.

From the employment perspective, UITP is working in close cooperation with the European Transport Workers’ Federation (ETF), and the International Transport Workers' Federation. In 2014, the European Social Partners (UITP and ETF) signed joint recommendations to promote women’s employment in the European urban public transport sector and set the ambitious target to increase the share of women employed from an average of 17.5% in 2011 to at least 25% by 2020 and to 40% in 2035. The recommendations and best practices developed and highlighted in the Women’s Employment and Gender
Policy in Urban Public Transport companies in Europe – WISE projects became major references in terms of gender-sensitive work organisation and work-life-balance, health and safety at the work place, working culture, wages, career growth, training and recruitment.

From a customer perspective, building a culture of service excellence is at the core of the current global priorities of UITP Members. It includes the development of inclusive public transport, which will contribute to fill the gender gap by ensuring safe and secure access to public transport for women.

However, providing a safe and secure service for women is not only a societal concern, it is also for UITP Members, a development opportunity: women – who constitute half of the world’s population - represent a significant share of potential public transport customers. In some countries, the share of public transport trips made by women is higher than the one made by men. In France, for instance, two thirds of passengers on public transport networks are women. In the United States, 55% of mass transit riders are women. Overall, surveys show that women rely more on public transport than men.

To attract and retain female customers, we need to provide an environment in which women feel safe and secure all along their journey with an appropriate street lighting along the way to the next stations, lively waiting areas in which they feel comfortable, friendly drivers and public transport staff they trust—just to mention a few measures. Therefore, it is crucial to involve women at all levels of public transport development, as planners, decision makers, as well as civil society leaders to better understand what their daily concerns are and address them.

Women’s access to public transport is not at all the sole responsibility of public transport providers, but also the duty of all urban policy-makers to encourage inclusive development and achieve together the Sustainable Development Goals at the 2030 horizon. It is in line with ITF’s mission to foster a deeper understanding of the role of transport in economic growth, environmental sustainability and social inclusion. By addressing women’s mobility concerns, UITP and ITF contribute to raise policy makers’ awareness of the need for gender-responsive transport development. Join us! It is urgent to act.

Useful links

UITP website: http://www.uitp.org/

Sustainable Mobility for All Initiative (Sum4all): https://sum4all.org/