

# Climate Justice, Gender and Transport



*Transportation or mobility is a critical aspect of modern society, facilitating economic activities, social interactions and access to essential services. However, it comes at a significant environmental cost, with the global transport sector contributing approximately 24% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. This briefing paper sheds light on the different dimensions of transportation, examples of gender justice in the transportation sector, gender imbalances and gender-blind spots in European policies.*

With roughly a quarter of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions resulting from the transport sector, its contribution has been steadily increasing by around 1.7% annually since 1990, underscoring the urgency to implement sustainable solutions. Despite efforts to curb emissions, the transport sector remains heavily reliant on oil products, which account for nearly 91% of its energy consumption. While road transport is the primary contributor to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions within the sector, other modes such as cargo ships and aviation also play significant roles in climate change.

The global transportation of oil and goods plays a pivotal role in capitalism and globalisation, directly linked to the exploitation of natural resources and labour. This system is marked by unequal exchange dynamics and hierarchical labour arrangements which often reflect racial and gender biases. It is sustained by global trading policies in which the European Union aims to enable European companies to move their investments anywhere in the world and export to a range of sectors, to increase the movement of goods and services. For example, EU agricultural subsidies and trade policies have promoted the export of agricultural products of lower quality at cheaper prices to countries in the Global South, outcompeting local subsistence farmers who are often women, while contributing to an increase of CO<sub>2</sub> through transportation.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), women represent approximately 17% of the global transport workforce, with only 1-2% in seafaring roles. The European Commission reports that women comprise 22% of the transportation workforce in the EU. Increasing women's representation in the trans-

port sector's policy formulation is vital to addressing women's mobility needs. For this reason, significant efforts need to be made to adopt a systematic gender analysis and mainstreaming in all planning and development processes for transportation.

When it comes to transportation consumption, research indicates notable disparities in mobility patterns between women and men (there is very limited data on mobility patterns with intersections belonging to LGBTQI groups).

## Road Traffic: High Pollution and Substantial Gender Imbalance

Individual mobility patterns of men are linked to motorised traffic – men constitute the majority of car users and motorcycle drivers. In contrast, women represent the majority of users of (urban) public transportation systems, and they rely more than men on walking. In the Global South, many women cannot afford any means of transport due to women's economic situation, caregiving roles and safety concerns. Barrier-free accessibility is another concern e.g. for women with children, elderly people or persons with disabilities, while personal safety in transportation is often also a concern of LGBTQI+ people. Understanding these (intersecting) gendered dynamics alongside the broader environmental impacts of transportation is crucial to developing effective policies and initiatives to mitigate climate change and promote equitable access to transportation resources.

Road traffic is the primary contributor to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the transport sector. Given that men predominantly use cars and motorcycles, their travel patterns result in higher energy consumption and carbon emissions compared to women. Research in Europe indicates that women demonstrate greater environmental awareness, particularly regarding car usage. From a climate justice standpoint, reducing motorised road mobility is imperative. While remote rural areas in the Global South may benefit from improved road connections (e.g. better access for girls and women to education, health services or for marketing agricultural produce), urban planning experts advocate for denser settlements to reduce the

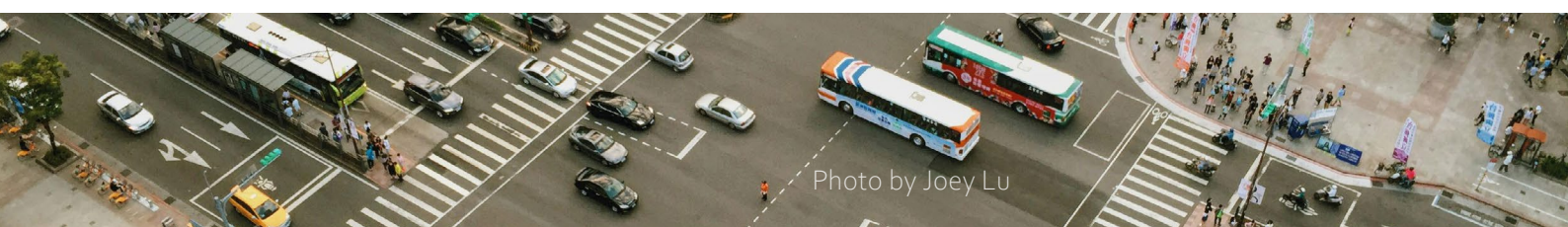


Photo by Joey Lu

need for new roads in the Global North. Concentrating settlements in villages and cities supports public transport solutions and promotes walkability, benefiting women and those with caregiving responsibilities.

## Women & Transportation: From Unpaid Care Work to Safety Concerns

Globally, women shoulder three-quarters of unpaid care work, leading to more complex travel patterns for women compared to men. Women often undertake shorter trips but with multiple tasks, such as taking children to school while running errands or assisting family members with mobility limitations. However, existing transport networks primarily cater to commuting needs, neglecting women's requirements for multiple off-peak trips. Furthermore, personal safety concerns significantly influence women's mobility choices. Fear of sexual harassment and assault leads women to prioritise safer transport options, even if they are more time-consuming. This exacerbates time constraints and "time poverty" for women with unpaid caring responsibilities.

Gender differences in the use of bicycles and new shared mobility options in Europe are notable. Research indicates that men cycle significantly more than women, with women's lower bicycle usage largely attributed to concerns about traffic safety. Similarly, men tend to utilise new mobility services such as e-scooters and car sharing more than women. Barriers to women's adoption of these services include concerns about security (e.g., sharing vehicles with strangers), availability, complexity (e.g., cumbersome registration processes), cost, and limited carrying capacity. Bike-sharing and e-scooters are often unsuitable for transporting children, additional passengers, strollers, luggage, or shopping bags. Moreover, the design of these services often seems to be masculine-oriented, with factors like the weight of bikes or e-scooters posing challenges for

women in terms of manoeuvrability.

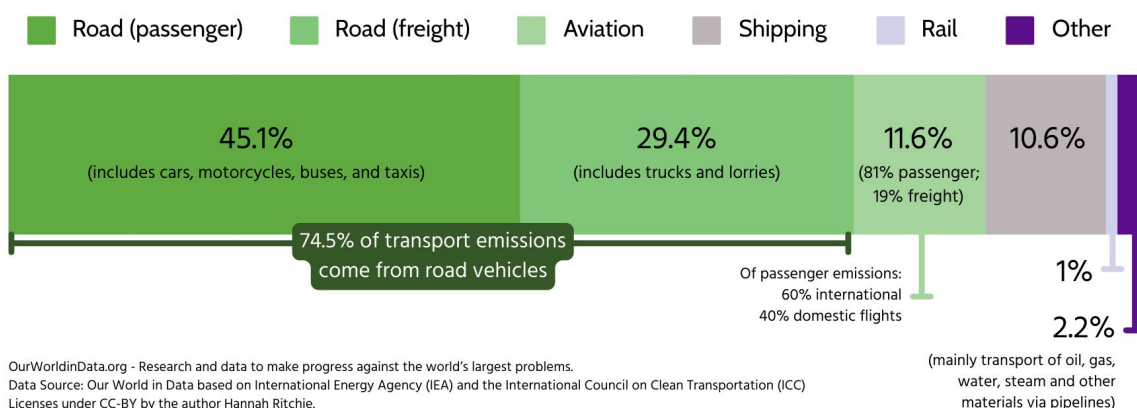
## The Lack of Intersectional Consideration in the European Green Deal

The European Green Deal aims to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, with the "Smart and Sustainable Mobility Strategy" (SSMS) being a key component. While the strategy acknowledges gendered employment gaps, it lacks proposals for mainstreaming gender equality in mobility and transport policies and fails to address safety concerns for vulnerable individuals using public transport or working in the industry. Moreover, critics argue that the policy overly prioritises individual mobility by promoting electric cars over public transportation. This approach exacerbates environmental damage due to increased demand for raw materials like minerals and rare earth for electronic devices and batteries. The strategy's emphasis on male and middle-class mobility patterns and neocolonial extractivism further perpetuates inequalities and environmental degradation.

Railways play a significant role in both goods and passenger transport for longer distances, contributing only 1% to greenhouse gas emissions within the transport sector, making them highly sustainable. Despite this, many countries face challenges in maintaining and improving railway infrastructure due to the prioritisation of motorised vehicle use and aviation over the last decades. It is also important to note that rail transportation presents a lower gender disparity in usage compared to all other transport modes. Nevertheless, the persistence of pricing disparities poses a significant barrier to accessibility, particularly for women and marginalised groups. Prioritising investment and policy initiatives that bolster railway infrastructure while eliminating harmful subsidies or tax exemptions such as kerosene for aviation, is key to building sustainable transportation.

## Global CO2 emissions from transport

This is based on global transport emissions in 2018, which totalled 8 billion tonnes CO2. Transport accounts for 24% of CO2 emissions from energy.



OurWorldinData.org - Research and data to make progress against the world's largest problems.  
Data Source: Our World in Data based on International Energy Agency (IEA) and the International Council on Clean Transportation (ICC)  
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## Recommendations

- The EU and Member States should prioritise sustainable and equitable public transport options, catering to the diverse needs of women and other underserved groups of people by integrating a gender-responsive approach in policy development.
- Policymakers and decision-makers at both a government and private sector level should work towards increasing women's representation in the transport and mobility sector while also increasing the meaningful participation of women and caregivers in climate and transport policy development.
- The EU and Member states should redirect public investment and subsidies from environmentally harmful transport infrastructure towards cleaner public mobility solutions.
- Governments should promote sustainable consumption, based on macro-economic policies that promote reusing materials and decrease the excessive global shipping of goods and oil. Part of these policies are trade policies based on human rights, environmental standards and feminist social justice. The EU and Member States should ensure fair pay and labour conditions, along with stringent environmental standards, to foster more sustainable production, transport, and consumption cycles.



Photo by UN Habitat, Cairo

## Women's experience in Greater Cairo's public transportation system

"The studies point to a number of challenges faced by women, including irregular service, overcrowding, and constant risk of sexual harassment. Participants called for expanded public transport fleets to address overcrowding and improve reliability. Complaint redressal systems are needed to ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice. Safe, universally accessible sidewalks with adequate lighting and shopfronts that offer an 'eye on the street' effect are needed to improve security during the walk to public transport stops and stations." (UN-Habitat, 2021)

## Informal transport: Women's neglected mobility needs

"Popular transport services (...) provide huge coverage, high-frequency services at a low cost. Popular transportation is often the only service available and offers relatively short walking distances from origin to destination. Despite the necessity of these services, popular transit being out of government control has little to no regulation, contributing to shifting prices, lax safety, labour and environment laws and overly centralised and congested routes. Like formal transport services, popular transit is often blind to the complex mobility needs of women which go beyond those of an able-bodied man. Women's journeys are less linear and often involve more stops than a man's, for instance, to drop children at school, check on elderly parents, or run household chores. Moreover, women rely more on pedestrian routes, and they are more likely to use public transit during off-peak travel times. Women also have less access to private vehicles and are less likely to have a driver's license than men. Lastly, women also report regular incidents of sexual harassment and assault on popular transit." (Baskin, 2023)



Photo by Jeffrey Czum

## Make (female) care-oriented values become the norm

"It needs to be carefully considered how the interests and needs of women can be met without promoting unsustainable means of transport. In industrialised countries, a crucial question is how to make women's more environmentally friendly behaviour a benchmark for all – how to support such behaviour instead of hampering it and forcing women to adopt male behaviour." (GenderCC)



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## About The Project

'Gender and Climate Justice: Knowledge for Empowerment' with the acronym 'COPGendered' is an EU-funded project under the Erasmus+ programme that commenced in December 2022 and will run for three years. The project is led by WIDE+ and a transnational consortium of seven leading partners, including Gender CC, WIDE Austria, GADIP, KULU Women and Development, Mundubat, and CSCD. The primary aim is to equip learners with tools, knowledge, and methodologies to understand and address the critical connections between gender inequality and the climate crisis.

This briefing paper is part of a series of papers that delve into specific themes on the nexus of gender and climate justice. This includes the following briefing papers:

- Gender and Climate Justice
- Climate Justice, Gender and Energy
- Climate Justice, Gender and LGBTIQ
- Gender and Climate-Induced Migration
- Climate Justice, Gender and Extractivism

You can read more about the COPGendered project at: <https://wideplus.org/copgendered-project/>



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