



BULLETIN

FAL

FACILITATION OF TRANSPORT AND TRADE IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

# The gender perspective in transport in Latin America and the Caribbean

## Introduction

Although the issue of gender is rising steadily on the agendas of governments and international organizations, it continues to receive only limited attention in political and institutional realms and even less in practical settings, due to the patriarchal structure that prevails in many spheres in the region.

The concept of gender equality has gradually evolved from protections for working women to the promotion of equity and equality.<sup>1</sup> Every country in Latin America and the Caribbean has ratified the 1979 United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

However, the principal conventions of the International Labour Organization on the rights of women workers have not been uniformly ratified: although Convention 100 (Equal Remuneration, 1951) and Convention 111 (Nondiscrimination in Employment and Occupation, 1958) have been ratified by all of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, others have not been universally accepted. Convention 103 (Maternity Protection, 1952, revised and reissued as Convention 183, 2000) and Convention 156 (Workers with Family Responsibilities, 1981), for example, have few signatories both in the region and in the world: just 28 and 39 countries, respectively.

This issue of the *FAL Bulletin* analyses the situation of women in the transport sector in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, from the perspective of women workers. The study begins by giving an overview of labour conditions, looks specifically at the transport sector, and concludes with a series of public policy recommendations. This study is among the activities being implemented by the Unit under the project "Strategies for environmental sustainability: climate change and energy," an initiative funded by the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID).

The author of this *bulletin* is Ana Brunet, a consultant in the Infrastructure Services Unit of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

For more information, please contact [trans@cepal.org](mailto:trans@cepal.org).

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UNITED NATIONS



<sup>1</sup> *Legislación y jurisprudencia comparadas sobre derechos laborales de las mujeres, Centroamérica y República Dominicana*, ILO.

## I. Overview of the situation of women workers

Within the parameters of this paper, the issues described below must be considered in order to provide a comprehensive view of the situation of women workers throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, issues that are also seen in the transport sector:

- (a) **Wage gap:** Women continue to experience a gender wage gap, making on average 10% to 17% less than their male counterparts for the same work, regardless of age, education level or type of employment.<sup>2</sup> The gap is wider among the less educated and the young,<sup>3</sup> and wider still if non-wage benefits are considered.<sup>4</sup> A February 2008 study by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) looked at the gender pay gap in various countries around the world and found that it was a constant. For example, the gap was 12.9% in Brazil and 18.9% in Argentina, and in other countries it was as high as 20% and even higher (Finland and Spain, respectively).
- (b) **Unemployment:** The percentage of women between the ages of 25 and 65 who are unemployed is 6.3%, compared with 3.7% of men who are unemployed in the same age group. Among people between the ages of 15 and 24, the figures are 17.6% and 11.4%, respectively.<sup>5</sup>
- (c) **Informality and vulnerable employment:** With lower-income groups affected disproportionately,<sup>6</sup> women experience informality and job insecurity at a rate of 58%, compared with 50% among men.<sup>7</sup>
- (d) **Vertical segregation:** Women participate in decision-making or management bodies at a significantly lower rate than their male counterparts, a phenomenon that is not unique to the region.<sup>8</sup>
- (e) **Horizontal segregation:** Despite gains in education, the majority of women continue to work in so-called “female” occupations: domestic service, teaching and office work.<sup>9</sup> The participation of women in the transport, storage and communications sector, even in developed economies, does not exceed 35%. The only sectors with lower rates of female workforce participation are construction, mining and extractive industries, electricity, gas and water supply. Although

the participation rate in these sectors has increased gradually over the past 20 years, it continues to hover around 25%, far below the rate in other “traditional” labour activities (agriculture, hunting and forestry, commerce, hotels and restaurants, financial intermediation, other services, education, health and social work).

Table 1  
FEMALE PARTICIPATION BY ECONOMIC SECTOR (1995-2005)

	1995	2000	2005
Construction	9.3	8.9	8.6
Education	66.6	68.5	70.2
Health and social work	76.4	77.9	77.7
Other services, social and personal	51.5	52.7	54.2
<b>Transport, storage and communications</b>	<b>24.6</b>	<b>25.7</b>	<b>25.9</b>

Source: Global Employment Trends for Women (March 2009), ILO. Percentage of women employed by sector. Countries included: Australia, Austria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

- (f) **The double shift:** In addition to paid work, women care for members of the household and perform domestic tasks. As a result, they often take part-time jobs, which prevents them from entering the workplace on equal footing,<sup>10</sup> because they are otherwise unable to reconcile family and work responsibilities, with the former taking precedence over the latter, causing them to defer their professional, social, and even personal lives.<sup>11</sup>

## II. The situation of women in the transportation sector

Transport falls within the so-called “male” professions, in which occupational segregation is especially pronounced, and as in other sectors, women are concentrated in low-paying and vulnerable jobs, which are often subcontracts for cleaning services, catering and telecentres whose workers do not have stable employment conditions (ITF, 2010). The stereotype<sup>12</sup> of the “male” sector may have arisen due to the heavy labour that was required in earlier times. However, with the technological advances that

<sup>2</sup> ECLAC. *Statistical Yearbook for Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> IDB. *The Gender Dividend*.

<sup>4</sup> ILO. *Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling: Women in Management*, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> IDB. *The Gender Dividend*. 2010.

<sup>6</sup> ECLAC. *Statistical Yearbook for Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> IDB, 2010. op. cit., 6.

<sup>8</sup> ILO. *Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling: Women in Management*, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> IDB, Op. cit., 6. ILO, op. cit., 9.

<sup>10</sup> ECLAC, 2010. *Time for Equality*.

<sup>11</sup> *Guía para la incorporación de la perspectiva de género*. Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Spain.

<sup>12</sup> Stereotypes: These are sets of simple ideas that are deeply rooted in the collective conscience and bypass the filter of rational thought. Stereotypes identify what the behaviors and attitudes, correct and incorrect, of women and men should be, constructing their personalities along a single dimension. *Guía para la incorporación de la perspectiva de género*. Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Spain.

have been made in the transport sector, there are virtually no barriers any longer to full access for women. The transformation that has taken place in the ports sector offers one example.

Another argument that is invoked to disqualify this sector as a potential job market for women has to do with work schedules, which is faulty logic considering the shift work that women perform in hospitals,<sup>13</sup> where, paradoxically, they make up a majority of the workforce, or rural teachers who travel across great distances under harsh conditions to perform their jobs.

In any event, the fact remains that there are paternalistic laws in the region that prohibit women from working at night or in dangerous jobs, notions that have become obsolete and project an image of women that is inconsistent with the rights that should prevail.<sup>14</sup> Often, instead of addressing the “job risk” of the so-called risky activities, women are excluded from the labour market.

The absence of specific statistical data in most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean is a reflection of the fact that public policies in the region have not proactively addressed the issue. Due to the lack of disaggregated indicators for the transport industry specifically, differentiated from the storage and communications industries, there is no way to conduct a real diagnostic assessment of gender in the sector, or to monitor issues associated with gender mainstreaming or women’s working conditions (wages, training programmes, promotion, sexual harassment, and many others). This also makes it hard to monitor and evaluate gender policies that have been implemented.

### III. Participation of women in the transport sector in Latin America and the Caribbean

The low participation of women in the transport sector is a trend that has been gradually reversing around the world, with growing female employment rates in operator jobs and in the services sector,<sup>15</sup> and the same trend is observed in Latin America and the Caribbean, as described below.

In Argentina, there were 1,400 registered captains of the high seas in 2007, of which 32 were women (2.3%). Meanwhile, in Brazil, the percentage of male and female workers in the transport, storage and communications sector rose from 3.8% to 4.6% of the total workforce in the period 1992-2006, with male participation climbing

from 5.7% to 7% whereas female participation increased from 1% to 1.4%.

In Colombia, according to information from the Labor Market Observatory, 1,614,874 people were employed in the transport, storage and communications sector in 2010, or 8.43% of the total workforce, but only 19% of sector workers were women.

The same trend is observed in Costa Rica, where 6.3% of the total workforce is employed in the transport, storage and communications sector, with male participation at 82%, compared with female participation at 18% (National Statistics and Census Institute, National Household Survey, 2010).

In Cuba, the National Statistics Office reports that the percentage of the workforce employed in the transport, storage and communications sector grew by 6.8% in the period 2004-2009, with the number of women workers in the sector rising from 67,300 in 2004 to 74,300 in 2008, or 24.8% of the total.

And in El Salvador, the transport, storage and communications sector employed between 4% and 5% of the country’s workforce in the period 2000-2009. Data disaggregated by sex and mode of transport, as well as complementary activities (travel agencies, cargo handling, storage and warehousing, etc.) and communications, indicate that men account for 81% of the sector workforce and women account for 19%. The figures by subsector follow:

- (a) Ground transport: 13,745 men and 913 women.
- (b) Water transport: 20 men and no women.
- (c) Air transport: 450 men and 434 women, equal to 49.09%.<sup>16</sup>
- (d) Complementary activities: 4,118 men and 2,082 women.
- (e) Communications: 6,513 men and 2,544 women.

In Paraguay, the percentage of the total workforce employed in the transport, storage and communications sector remained virtually unchanged in the periods 1997-1998 and 2000-2001. In urban areas, 8.9% and 8.5% of economically active men worked in the sector, compared with just 1.5% and 1.4% of their female cohorts. In rural areas, 2.2% of economically active men worked in transport, storage and communications, whereas barely 0.6% and 0.3% of economically active women were employed in the sector during those periods.

<sup>13</sup> OECD, Gender and transport. Discussion paper, November 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Legislation and op. cit., 2.

<sup>15</sup> ITF. *Dejando huella: Las trabajadoras de los transportes en el siglo XXI*, 2010.

<sup>16</sup> VII Economic Census, 2005.

In the Caribbean, conditions are even worse. The few statistics that are disaggregated by gender indicate that the sector workforce is comprised almost exclusively of men. According to official statistics from the Bahamas, all pilots and deck officers are men, as are all mechanics and motor vehicle repair workers, and all taxi and commercial drivers and bus and tram operators. Only among truck drivers do women have any presence (2%). In Jamaica, the number of men working in the transport, storage and communications sector between January 2009 and 2011 was nearly four times greater than the number of women.

#### IV. The wage gap in the transport sector in Latin America and the Caribbean

The International Transport Union reported in February 2008 that in the transport, storage and communications sector, the wage gap between men and women in Argentina and Brazil was around 15.2% and 3.9%, respectively, on average earnings.

In Chile, based on the average monthly earnings of male and female workers in 2010, the gender wage gap was -0.8% among wage drivers and -13.7% among wage earners by sector of activity (transport, storage and communications). Only in the case of own-account drivers could a wage gap in favor of women (3.7%) be detected.

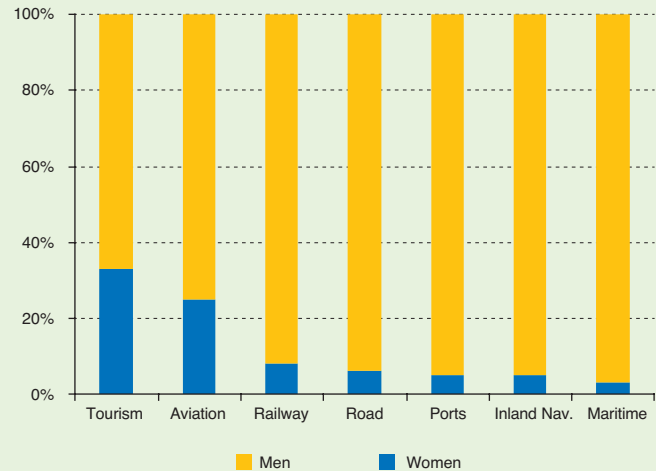
In Paraguay, an interesting difference was noted among women drivers in the transportation sector: when they worked as wage earners, they earned less than their male counterparts: 75.3% in the public sector and 69.4% in the private sector. In contrast, women drivers who were employers or supervisors collected 162.4% of what men in the same occupational category earned per month (1997-1998).

#### V. The participation of women in transport unions

The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) is a global federation of transport unions. Its distribution by gender and transport sector is presented in figure 1. According to its own data, its membership includes a majority of the world's unionized transport workers, but it represents only a small minority of the men and women who earn a living working in transport, probably less than 5% and no more than 10%.<sup>17</sup> The federation has a Women's Department, which has been promoting various initiatives to address the problems that women face at the job entry level as well as throughout their period of employment.

<sup>17</sup> ITF, op. cit., 19.

Figure 1  
WOMEN AFFILIATED TO THE ITF BY TRANSPORT SECTOR, 1998



Source: ITF, Equality Testing in Transport, 1998.

As evidence of the proactive intervention of the ITF, affiliated unions now have an area dedicated to addressing gender issues. Transport unions in Argentina have expanded their hiring quota for women to 40%,<sup>18</sup> and even a maritime union recognized that mainstreaming women into the sector was the result of awareness campaigns led by the ITF.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the reality is that women tend to join unions in smaller numbers than men. An ILO/ICFTU survey reported that the most common reason that women do not join a union is that they fail to see the potential benefits of union membership and their family obligations leave them no time to participate in a union. Getting women to participate in the collective bargaining process and persuading male negotiators to place issues that affect women on the bargaining table continue to represent major obstacles for women union members around the world.<sup>20</sup> Other studies have shown that opposition to gender mainstreaming comes from within the sector itself, from male workers and union members.<sup>21</sup>

The Women's Department conducted a survey on equality in the transport sector in 1998, which looked at a number of areas: on working conditions, it asked questions about family rights, jobs, pensions, recruitment, appearance, uniforms and image. It also asked about procedures on equal opportunities, sexual harassment and dealing with abusive or violent customers. Lastly, survey respondents were asked to rate their companies on fairness and

<sup>18</sup> ITF, op. cit., 19.

<sup>19</sup> Own survey, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> ITF, op. cit., 19.

<sup>21</sup> ITF Bulletin, 2010.



commitment to equality, health and safety. A total of 825 respondents completed the questionnaire, with the following regional distribution: Asia Pacific, 12%; Latin America and the Caribbean, 7%; North America, 3%; Europe, 75%; and Africa, 3%.

The survey produced these findings:

- An unacceptable level of discrimination exists at the level of job entry.
- A high proportion of women cannot exercise full maternity rights.
- Many women are discriminated against if they are married or have children.
- In addition to pay differences, women have fewer job opportunities than men.
- Many companies fail to apply the principle of equal pay for work of equal value.
- There is a disproportionate prevalence of casual staff, temporary contracts and part-time workers.
- A large majority of women are not given the same access to promotion as men.
- The vast majority of workers do not know whether equal opportunity policies or antiharassment policies are in place where they work.

The ITF found the plight of women in the sector troubling, considering that most respondents were from countries where extensive equality legislation was already in place.<sup>22</sup> In response, it launched more active campaigns for the advancement of women and will soon publish an update to the 1998 study, which will provide a more current assessment of the sector and highlight the achievements of the past decade.

- The Inter-American Committee on Ports of the Organization of American States (OAS/CIP) has a Subcommittee on Women in Ports ([www.oas.org/cip](http://www.oas.org/cip)). The Maritime Confederation of Chile (COMACH), a member of the ITF, created the Chilean Network of Women in Maritime and Port Sectors with its member organizations.
- The “Women at the Wheel of Mass Transit” project promoted by the Municipality of Asunción, Paraguay, trains women to operate public transit vehicles, targeting older women in low-income brackets who are unemployed. A similar project being implemented in the Municipality of Vicente López, in the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina, under the programme “Bicentennial Transport,” is targeting women exclusively to work as bus drivers.
- The Municipality of San Salvador de Jujuy (Argentine Republic) partnered with a private transport company to implement a programme that will provide training to women. Ultimately, 10 women will be selected to drive long-distance buses. A similar initiative is being implemented in Tamaulipas, Reynosa (Mexico), by the Municipal Institute for Women, to give women access to jobs as public transit operators. And in Xalapa, Veracruz (Mexico), 300 women in the Independent Union of Women Transport Workers received loans to purchase taxis.
- With a view to improving the representation and integration of women in the urban public transport sector, the International Association of Public Transport (UITP) and the European Transport Workers’ Federation (ETF) are implementing the WISE project. In France, meanwhile, the organization Femmes en Mouvement teamed up with the Office of the Secretary for Women’s Rights to produce a video titled “Public transport: work for women,” which was used by the Ministry of Education and Labour to educate young women about

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