Women in Rail

Enhancing the role of women in rail transport in ASEAN member states

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Gender equality among workers and users



Scott Olson/Getty Images



Background

1. Why it matters
2. Institutional support
3. Current situation

Why gender equality is important in the ***rail workforce***



Global Railway Review image

- ➔ Improving female ridership by better integrating women's travel needs
  - ◆ Higher ridership → Higher earnings for rail companies
- ➔ Innovation needed for effective climate change mitigation
- ➔ Avoiding staff shortages
  - ◆ Growing the rail sector to replace higher polluting modes

Why gender equality is important in terms of ***ridership***



DNA Image

- ➔ Economic growth
  - ◆ Improved access to childcare facilities, academic institutions and job markets
  - ◆ Higher share of female participation in the economy
  - ◆ Increase in GDP
  - ◆ Reduced poverty
- ➔ Health benefits for women and children
  - ◆ Improved access to health care facilities, food, water and communities
- ➔ Sustainable climate change mitigation
  - ◆ More rail users → lower emissions

Institutional support (1)

ESCAP *10 Guiding Principles for Sustainable Freight Transport in Asia and the Pacific (2023)*

Principle 6: To enhance the inclusiveness of the freight transport sector by promoting women's participation

- ➔ Frame and implement proactive strategies and policies to enhance the role and involvement of women in the freight transport sector across the region.
- ➔ Involve academia and the private sector in actively imparting the required knowledge and skills to women.
- ➔ Encourage the adoption of hybrid occupational models, where applicable, such as working from home and other innovative solutions, to motivate women to increase their participation in the freight transport sector.
- ➔ Promote the development of equipment and technologies that minimise the impact of harmful factors of work on women's health.

Institutional support (2)



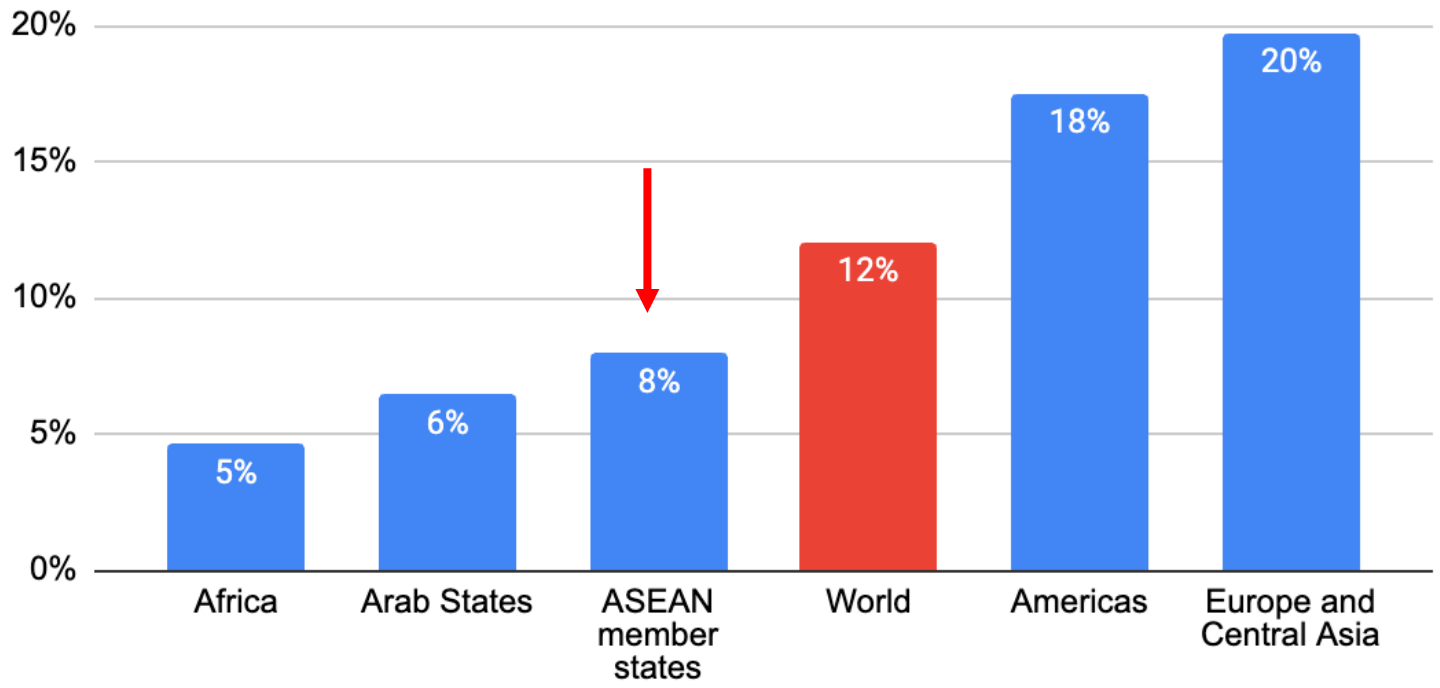
Sustainable Development Goals

- ➔ SDG 5: Gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls
- ➔ SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth
- ➔ SDG 10: Reduced inequalities

ESCAP upcoming gender publications:

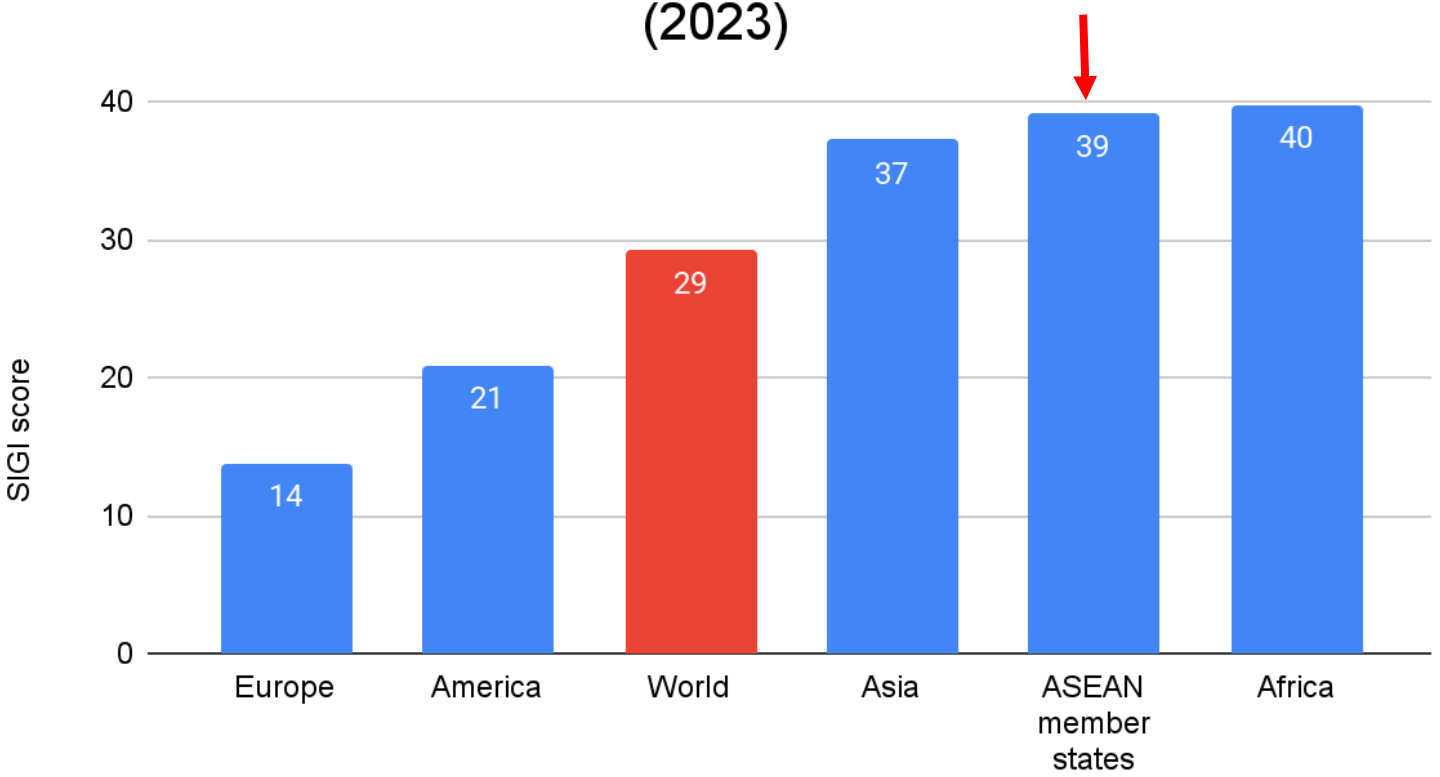
- ➔ *Recommendations for Improving Gender Equality in the ASEAN Rail Sector*
- ➔ *Gender Toolkit for Rail Corridors*
  - ◆ Supporting Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the Operationalization of Rail Transport Corridors in Southeast Asia

Figure 1. Share of women in the rail workforce by region (2024)



Source: ILO Harmonized Microdata, https://ilostat.ilo.org/.

Figure 4. Social Institutions and Gender Index Score by Region (2023)



Source: OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) 2023. Accessed 3 February 2025 (link).

Improving Female Participation in the ASEAN Rail Workforce



Global Railway Review image

Women in the workforce

1. Pipeline
2. Recruitment
3. Candidate selection
4. Retention (safety, work-life balance, etc.)

Challenge: Lack of women interested and trained to work in the rail sector

Solutions:

- ➔ **Organize for women working in rail to speak about career opportunities in the sector and STEM jobs more generally in primary and secondary schools as well as universities**
- ➔ **Offer training opportunities specifically for women**
- ➔ **Create awards to showcase exemplary female workers in the rail sector**



Challenge: Not enough women applying to jobs

Solutions:

- ➔ **Expand recruitment channels to include those that best target female candidates.**
- ➔ **Rewrite job listings with gender-neutral language and be transparent about salaries and working conditions.**
- ➔ **Recruit new staff with female workers representing the company in order to attract more female applicants.**



Challenge: Not enough women being hired

Solutions:

- ➔ **Standardize recruitment and interview procedures**
- ➔ **Use blind CV selection methods**
- ➔ **Set quotas on the share of female applicants**
- ➔ **Require gender bias awareness training**
- ➔ **Use diverse interview panels to reduce bias in candidate assessments**



Image link

Challenge: Ensuring the safety and security of female rail workers (1)

Solutions:

- ➔ **Establish clear protocols to handle sexual harassment and designate a contact person to support and guide victims**
- ➔ **Create an easy way for all workers to signal for help if they feel in danger, particularly in public areas like trains and stations and in isolated work locations**
- ➔ **Ensure that all stations are well lit**



Image link

Challenge: Ensuring the safety and security of female rail workers (2)

Solutions:

- ➔ **Prepare correctly adapted uniforms and protective clothing for women before they start working in positions for which they are required**
- ➔ **Invest in clean and safe restrooms for men and women**
- ➔ **Build safe and convenient changing rooms**
- ➔ **Make available private rooms for pumping or nursing as well as refrigerators, and establish an agreement allowing time for women to use those facilities during the working day**



Image link

Challenge: Shifting company rules and working habits to support a better work-life balance

Solutions:

- ➔ **Offer teleworking, flexible hours, and/or options to work part-time whenever possible for a given occupation**
- ➔ **Establish or prolong paid maternity and paternity leave**
- ➔ **Ensure high-quality and affordable public or private childcare options exist for all staff or offer an on-site facility**
- ➔ **Encouragement and support from management for staff to take parental leave and benefit from flexible working arrangements**



Image link

Challenge: Ensuring female rail workers have access to the same **career development** opportunities as their male colleagues



Forbes photo

Solutions:

- ➔ **Create or join networks to connect and support women working rail and/or mentorship programs**
- ➔ **Make salary levels, raises, promotion requirements and decisions as transparent as possible for all positions**
- ➔ **Favour concrete metrics to help managers avoid unconscious gender bias tendencies when evaluating employees' performance**
- ➔ **Require railway companies to share data on salaries of employees by position and by gender.**
- ➔ **Enforce equal pay and non-discrimination in the workplace based on gender**

Challenge: Coordinating and supporting gender equality measures.

Solutions:

- ➔ **Create a Designated Diversity Office (DDO)**
- ➔ **Establish clear, quantifiable targets for any steps taken to improve gender diversity in rail in order to motivate change and properly assess progress**
- ➔ **Include training on appropriate workplace behaviour and on the organization's dedication to promoting gender equality during onboarding of new staff**



Gender Mainstreaming in Rail Ministries

- ➔ DEFINITION: **Analyse all rail projects and policies with a gender lens to consider the different impacts on men and women**
- ➔ **Apply Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) to public spending on rail**
- ➔ **Organize diverse panels for all events and conferences (e.g. at least one woman or gender parity)**
- ➔ **Participate in gender equality initiatives, networks and working groups for the rail sector**
- ➔ **Push for improvements in legislation to better support gender equality**



UN Women Image

Recommendations for filling gender data gaps

- ➔ Prioritize data gaps to fill for measuring gender equality in the rail sector based on country context
- ➔ Disaggregate data by sex whenever possible in existing data collections
- ➔ Collaborate with other ministries (e.g. health, labour, education) to share existing data and the burden of filling data gaps
- ➔ Make use of gender-disaggregated data published by international organizations (e.g. ILO, OECD, WB)
- ➔ Survey the rail workforce



UN Women Image

Concluding remarks

- **Action is needed** to avoid staff shortages and to reduce equality gaps as the rail sector grows
- **Now is an ideal moment** to shift towards inclusivity and sustainability by diversifying the workforce
- **Everyone will benefit** from measures taken to support gender equality in the ASEAN rail sector

Improving Female Ridership on ASEAN Rail



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Obstacles limiting women's use of railways in ASEAN member states

- ➔ Safety and security
- ➔ First/last-mile connectivity to rail
- ➔ Infrastructure and transport planning of railways
- ➔ Affordability
- ➔ Social barriers to women's mobility
- ➔ Trafficking of women and girls

Women’s safety (1)

- ➔ Gender mainstreaming in transport planning
- ➔ Increasing female participation in the transport workforce and police force
- ➔ Security officer and police presence
- ➔ Training for public transport stakeholders
- ➔ Visibility (lighting, overcrowding)
- ➔ Digital solutions and improved reporting systems (CCTVs, geo-tagging)

Women's safety (2)

- ➔ Public relations campaigns
- ➔ *Short-term use* of sex-segregation in public transport: Women-only seats, carriages, and buses
- ➔ Shared-mobility and taxis for women
- ➔ Raising awareness of human trafficking and HIV/AIDS

Affordability

- ➔ Travel subsidies for women
- ➔ Transport tickets that allow for intermodal trip chaining (fare integration)

Last/first mile connectivity

- ➔ Improved connections to rural areas

Infrastructure

- ➔ Transport infrastructure: adapting streets, stations and trains to fit women’s needs

Concluding remarks

- **Women experience limited mobility** compared to men, which impacts their access to basic needs and job markets
- **Safety** is the biggest issue affecting female ridership of rail
- **Everyone will benefit** from measures taken to improve women’s mobility

Next Steps

- ➔ Awaiting responses from ASEAN survey on gender mainstreaming in rail ministries
- ➔ Inputs from ASEAN member states
- ➔ Revisions to report and toolkit

Thank you

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