



'Neutral' transport, gendered poverty



March 2026

REPORT

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في القطار القادم؟



02	Introduction
03	Vienna and Amsterdam's mobility of care
06	Empowerment through cycling
09	Training UK bus drivers against VAWG
12	Gender equality in Roman mobility
15	Q/A
19	Key conclusions

PICS

On page 3:

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On page 5:

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On page 6:

—[#BIKEYGEES](#)

On page 8:

—[#BIKEYGEES](#)

On page 9:

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On page 10:

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On page 13:

—[RVillalon](#), Shutterstock

On page 14:

—[Alex Mastro](#), Shutterstock

Table of contents

Titled 'Neutral transport, gendered poverty', this webinar in the POLIS Just Transition Webinar Series examines how universal mobility policies can fall short when designed without a gender lens, and how this can perpetuate transport poverty for women and gender-diverse people.

Organised by the Just Transition Taskforce in celebration of Women's History Month 2026, the session continues POLIS' efforts to highlight inclusive, place-based solutions that address structural inequalities in mobility systems, with a focus on embedding gender considerations into transport policy and planning.

POLIS launched its Just Transition Agenda in 2021 and expanded its efforts in 2022 by establishing a dedicated Taskforce to drive further action across thematic areas. Since 2023, the Taskforce has organised a series of webinars exploring key topics, including urban-rural mobility, EV charging, active travel for people with disabilities, and more. This edition focuses on the intersection of gender and transport poverty, and the risks of 'one-size-fits-all' approaches that overlook diverse mobility needs.

As highlighted in POLIS' Social Climate Fund policy paper, transport poverty is fundamentally an issue of access. However, access is not neutral: gendered travel patterns, care responsibilities, safety concerns, and time constraints shape how different groups experience mobility systems. Without accounting for these factors, transport

measures can unintentionally reinforce exclusion rather than reduce it.

This webinar explores how integrating gender mainstreaming into transport policy can strengthen universal approaches, improve accessibility, and advance mobility justice. Drawing on four complementary perspectives, the session highlights how more inclusive planning can ensure that climate action supports equitable outcomes and leaves no one behind.

The webinar featured four expert speakers:

- Lotte Reijnders, Ipsos I&O;
- Annette Krüger and Francesca Brecha, #BIKEYGEES/YallaFAHR;
- Carolyn Quainton, Understood;
- Maria Isabel Duran, Roma Servizi per la Mobilità.



Vienna and Amsterdam's mobility of care

03

Lotte Reijnders, researcher at [Ipsos I&O](#), presented findings from an [academic study examining how gender-sensitive planning shapes public transport experiences for mothers in Vienna and Amsterdam](#). Grounded in feminist planning theory, the research centres on '**mobilities of care**', the everyday travel associated with caregiving responsibilities such as escorting children, shopping, and visiting relatives. These trips, still disproportionately undertaken by women, are often marginalised in transport systems designed primarily around linear commuting patterns.

The study was motivated by a stark policy contrast. **Vienna** has [embedded gender mainstreaming](#) in urban and transport planning since the 1990s, while in **Amsterdam**, the concept remains less systematically developed. To explore the implications of this divergence, Reijnders conducted a **comparative analysis combining policy review with qualitative fieldwork**. Using a 'go-along' interview method, she accompanied mothers during their daily journeys, enabling real-time observation of interactions with infrastructure, vehicles, and other passengers. The research included 44 interviews in Vienna (September 2023 to January 2024) and 40 in Amsterdam (February to June 2024), supported by extensive in-situ observation.

Findings reveal significant differences in lived experience. **In Vienna**, mothers consistently reported **positive interactions with the public transport system**.



March 2026

REPORT



Accessibility is a defining feature: most vehicles and stations are barrier-free, with multiple elevators and escalators available. Public transport vehicles, particularly trams and metros, provide substantial designated space for strollers, often up to ten per vehicle, clearly marked through priority signage. These markings play a behavioural role, reducing ambiguity and facilitating shared use of space. In addition, real-time onboard announcements regarding broken elevators or escalators allow passengers to anticipate disruptions and adjust routes accordingly. **Affordability** further supports use, with a flat daily fare of approximately €1.25 enabling unlimited travel and facilitating trip chaining, a key requirement for care-related mobility. The main limitation identified concerns older tram models, which remain difficult to access with strollers.

In Amsterdam, by contrast, **experiences are more constrained despite the technical accessibility of all vehicles.** Capacity limitations, typically allowing only two strollers per tram or bus, combined with priority rules for wheelchair users, create **practical barriers to access.** These rules are actively managed by conductors, who may deny boarding when space is insufficient. In metro systems, the absence of clearly designated stroller areas forces users to negotiate space, often leading to hesitation or avoidance, particularly during peak periods. Infrastructure reliability compounds these challenges: many stations rely on a single elevator or escalator, which is frequently out of service, and unlike in Vienna, there are no

'Institutionalising gender mainstreaming works.'

—Reijnders

What is 'mobility of care'?

It is everyday travel that is linked to caregiving and household responsibilities:



It is a complex type of mobility

Women perform most care-related trips, which require **trip-chaining** and **flexibility**

An overview of 'mobility of care'

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March 2026

REPORT

Choosing public transport

Vienna and Amsterdam's mothers approach public transport (PT) and mobility of care in very different ways:

VIENNA

Mothers choose PT because it is **convenient**



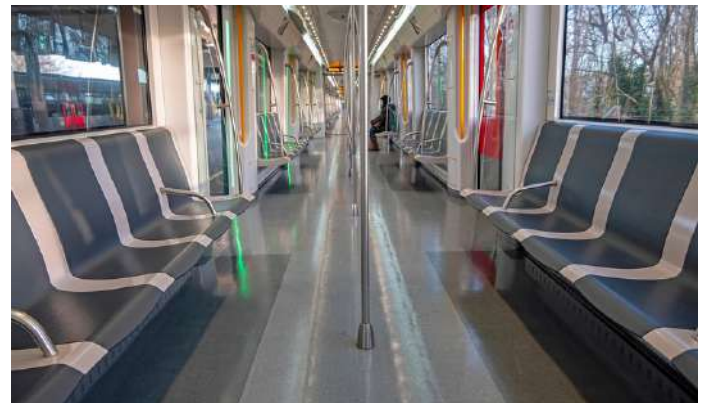
AMSTERDAM

Mothers choose PT because it is **a necessity**



Mothers' PT choices in Vienna and Amsterdam

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onboard announcements to inform passengers in advance. As a result, mothers are often forced to seek assistance or reroute via alternative stations, increasing both travel time and complexity.

Cost structures further differentiate the two contexts. While **Vienna's flat fare** supports flexible, multi-stop journeys, **Amsterdam's distance-based pricing** means that detours, for instance, due to broken elevators, result in higher travel costs. This is compounded by earlier child fare thresholds, from age four compared to six in Vienna, which can disproportionately affect larger or lower-income households.

These **structural differences shape user perceptions**. In Vienna, public transport is widely regarded as a convenient, affordable, and supportive mode for everyday mobility, including care-related travel. In Amsterdam, it is more often framed as a constrained or necessity-based option, used when alternatives such as cycling are impractical due to distance or safety concerns.



Empowerment through cycling

'Empowerment through cycling is so important', Annette Krüger, founder of [#BIKEYGEES](#), emphasised at the start of her intervention, highlighting that learning to cycle provides women not only with a practical mobility skill, but also with confidence that extends into other areas of life.

Francesca Brecha, long-time trainer with the organisation, then presented the [YallaFAHR project](#), which builds on more than a decade of experience **supporting migrant women to learn cycling**. Through the work of [#BIKEYGEES](#), over 2,200 women in Germany have already learned to ride a bicycle, alongside growing demand for accessible, transferable training formats.

The project specifically addresses a structural gap: **migrant women cycle significantly less in everyday life than women without a migrant background**. Only around one third cycle regularly, compared to roughly 60% of non-migrant women, and studies indicate that only about 40% of migrant women from non-EU countries can actually ride a bicycle, often because they did not learn in childhood. The initiative, therefore, targets a group rarely addressed in cycling policy, aiming to **strengthen independent mobility** through low-threshold, multilingual, community-based learning formats.

This has led to YallaFAHR, a federally funded project supported by the [German Federal Ministry of Transport](#), which seeks to scale the

'Every woman should be able to cycle, and should be allowed to do so.'

—Brecha



March 2026

REPORT



Training women to cycle

#BIKEYGEES supports refugee and migrant women in learning to cycle through accessible, peer-to-peer training:

1 TRUST-BUILDING

Participants get together in a **women-only space**, and learn more about **helmets** and **basic safety**



2 LEARNING IN TEAMS

Participants form **groups of three**, with helpers supporting balance and movement, and everyone **rotating roles**



3 PRACTICING

Participants **practice** starting, balancing, and braking in **traffic-free areas**, all in the presence of helpers



4 CYCLING TOGETHER

More advanced learners participate in **group rides** in **low-traffic areas** to learn road positioning and signals



5 PASSING IT ON

Former participants **become trainers** and **organise sessions** in their own communities!

approach beyond Berlin and Brandenburg and embed it across multiple regions. The focus is on **transforming instructor-led courses into peer-to-peer learning structures**, where women who have learned to cycle become trainers themselves within their own communities.

The methodology is deliberately simple and **designed for replication**. Training takes place in small groups of three, with participants alternating between learning and teaching roles. This structure enables rapid, visible progress and builds confidence early, supporting a 'snowball effect' in which learning spreads through social networks rather than remaining dependent on formal instruction.

Accessibility is central throughout. The programme uses **multilingual materials** in languages such as English, Arabic, Farsi and German, pictograms to reach participants with limited literacy, and simple explanatory videos. Training progresses gradually from traffic-free environments to real traffic situations, with repetition, visual instruction, and space for questions. Sessions are intentionally informal and supportive, often ending with shared social activities such as going for ice cream or to a café.

Participants are then encouraged to **recruit others** through WhatsApp groups, flyers, and social media, while also receiving guidance on suitable local training spaces such as parks or youth traffic schools. Over time, organisational responsibility is increasingly transferred to

The #BIKEYGEES training journey

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March 2026

REPORT

participants, reinforcing ownership and sustainability. Volunteers who learned to cycle as adults also act as role models, strengthening trust and relatability within the learning process.

The project's ambition is to consolidate and scale over ten years of practical experience into freely accessible learning materials and online tutorials, enabling other organisations and individuals to replicate the approach independently. These materials are distributed widely through digital channels and supported by collaborations with local partners, including migrant associations, cycling schools, accommodation providers, and repair shops.

Early outcomes already show **broader spillover effects**: some refugee shelters have independently established bicycle and helmet rental schemes after hosting trainings, and informal cycling groups have emerged in other cities. Multilingual materials co-developed with participants are freely available online and have already been downloaded thousands of times across at least 16 languages.

Outreach combines digital dissemination with grassroots strategies, including stickering campaigns, presence at public events, and collaborations with community networks. However, WhatsApp groups and word-of-mouth remain the most effective channels for reaching women in practice.



Training UK bus drivers against VAWG

09



Carolyn Quinton, from Understood, presented a national training module developed over the past 12 months for bus drivers in the UK, focused on violence against women and girls (VAWG).

She began by giving a broad definition of VAWG, a term used in the UK to describe a spectrum of behaviours, ranging from physical violence to more 'everyday' forms of harassment, including staring, intimidation, unwanted proximity, wolf-whistling, and sexist comments.

The training was commissioned by the Confederation of Passenger Transport, the UK's industry body for bus and coach operators, reflecting both a moral imperative and an emerging legal requirement. National policy now commits to halving VAWG within ten years, while the Bus Services Act makes it mandatory for operators to train staff to recognise and respond to behaviour that may make women or girls feel unsafe. The module is also embedded within compulsory driver CPC training, ensuring sector-wide coverage.

Around one third of women in the UK feel unsafe using public transport after dark, and 88% report experiencing unwanted behaviour in the past five years. Quinton emphasised that **VAWG is significantly underreported**, particularly because many forms of harassment are normalised or dismissed. The training is grounded in the principle that **improving safety for women and girls improves safety for all passengers**.



March 2026

REPORT

Its core objectives are threefold: to enable drivers to recognise VAWG, to respond safely within the constraints of operating a vehicle, and to report incidents in a way that supports wider intelligence-sharing with police and transport authorities.

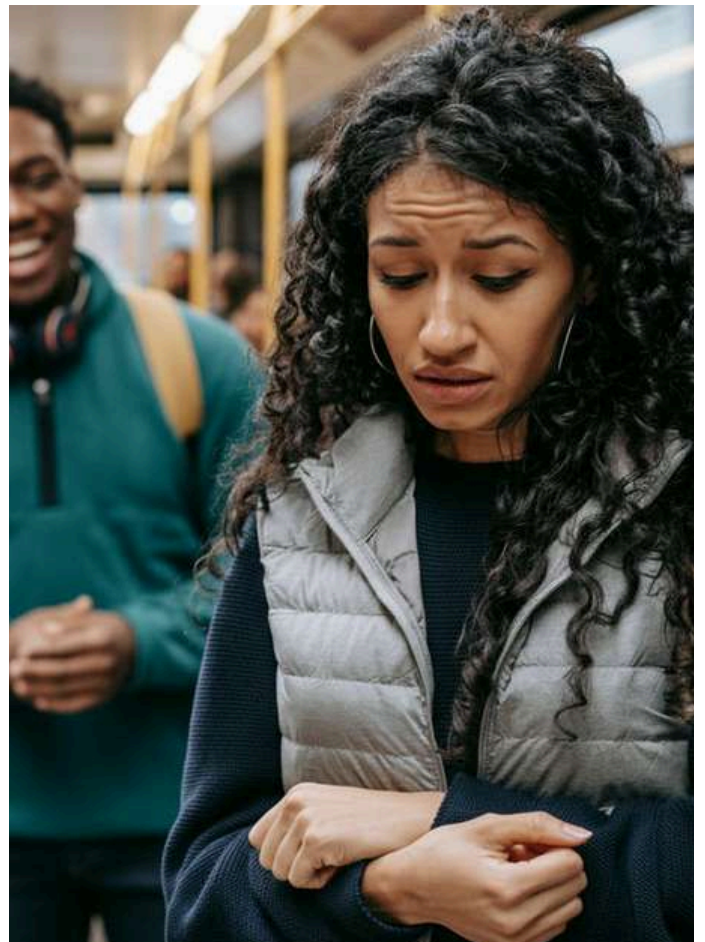
The training was developed in collaboration with 80 to 100 stakeholders, including drivers, unions, police forces, the British Transport Police, charities, and advocacy groups, alongside a review of existing materials and policies. This was followed by the design of the training modules, incorporating interactive activities, case studies, scenarios, practical exercises, and adaptable resources. The training was then piloted to support refinement and evaluation; it is now being rolled out nationally through a 'train the trainer' approach, enabling operators to deliver the content internally.

A key theme across the research was the **difficulty of identifying VAWG in practice**, given its often subtle or normalised forms. The training, therefore, stresses that **drivers are not expected to act as enforcers**, but to take proportionate, low-risk actions such as noticing, documenting, and reporting. **Personal safety remains central**, particularly given the constraints of operating large vehicles in live traffic conditions.

The programme also addresses **workplace culture**, highlighting how everyday behaviours such as sexist 'banter', dismissive remarks, or normalised jokes can contribute to

'We are asking drivers to notice, respond safely, and understand that even small actions can help create safer journeys.'

—Quainton



The Four Ds

The Four Ds are small, practical ways bus drivers can step in safely to help prevent violence against women and girls:

1

DISTRACT



Interrupt or shift focus without confrontation using **neutral prompts**, signalling **awareness** and **support**, or **creating safe space**.

2

DIRECT



Set boundaries with calm authority by **making an announcement**, reminding passengers about **CCTV**, or **pulling over**, if safe.

3

DELEGATE



If it does not feel safe to handle alone, pass it on: call control for guidance, or ask for help from a colleague or a passenger.

4

DOCUMENT



Record what you see. Note key details, preserve CCTV, and use the internal reporting systems to record the incident properly

These can also be applied to passengers:



Create a 'break'



Address behaviour



Ask for help



Record everything

REMEMBER:
Everyone has a role to play in challenging unwanted behaviour!

environments where harassment is tolerated and replicated in public space. This continuum between workplace culture and public behaviour is treated as a key structural driver of VAWG.

The course itself is structured into **six modules over approximately 3.5 hours**. It begins with defining VAWG and its spectrum, then explores perspectives of both victims and perpetrators to build understanding and empathy. It introduces **active bystander principles** and then applies them specifically to the **role of bus drivers in operational settings**. Further sections focus on responding to disclosures and supporting victims, and conclude with **'allyship in action'**, emphasising the role of male drivers, who make up the majority of the workforce, in reinforcing safer environments.

Practical tools include an **escalation framework**, which maps behaviours from low-level harassment through to severe violence, including femicide. This is used to demonstrate how normalised behaviours at the base of the pyramid can contribute to more extreme forms of violence if left unchallenged. The training also surfaces **behavioural adaptations by women**, including route planning, clothing choices, and safety strategies, contrasting sharply with male passengers' unconstrained mobility patterns. **Barriers to reporting** were also addressed, including perceptions that drivers may be unapproachable or that incidents are not 'serious enough' to report. Here, reassurance and clarity in signalling that reporting is welcome and taken seriously are essential.

The Four Ds

—POLIS and Understood



Gender equality in Roman mobility

Maria Isabel Duran, from [Roma Servizi per la Mobilità](#), presented how **gender equality is being integrated into mobility governance** and transport planning in Rome through institutional structures, data, and policy tools.

Women's mobility patterns differ significantly from men's, shaped by caregiving roles, daily routines, and safety concerns. Recognising these differences is essential to building inclusive, safe, and equitable transport systems. At Roma Servizi per la Mobilità, this approach was formalised through a **Gender Equality Committee** established in November 2023. Initially composed of women from across departments, it was renewed in December 2025 for three years and expanded to include men. Within ten months, the organisation achieved [UNI certification](#), with objectives including equal opportunities, pay equity, work-life balance, and non-discrimination.

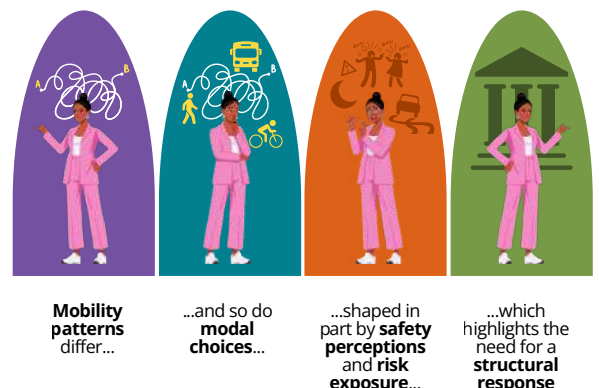
The committee has implemented a wide set of measures, including **staff training**, the **use of inclusive language** in internal and external communication, and **redesigned visual materials and project iconography**. It has also **introduced family support measures** such as summer camp bonuses, flexible working arrangements, and **remote work options**, alongside initiatives to support women's career progression. In parallel, it has organised internal and public-facing events, including the 2025 conference **'Women, Gender Equality and Mobility'**, and contributed to wider dissemination activities in Rome and Milan.

'Designing mobility systems around women's needs leads to safer, more accessible and more equitable cities for everyone.'

—Duran

The four layers of gender-sensitive mobility in Rome

From data to design, Rome is building a mobility system that reflects real urban lives and includes women's experiences:



Rome's approach to gender-sensitive mobility

—POLIS

March 2026

REPORT



A key output of this work is the **annual Rome Mobility Report**, which, for the first time, introduced a **systematic gender-based analysis of mobility behaviour**. The data reveal consistent differences in travel patterns. Men rely more heavily on private cars and undertake more trips related to work or study, while **women make more diverse and non-systematic trips**, including shopping, errands, and caregiving-related journeys. Women also account for 57.6% of trips accompanying children under 14. Modal choice further reflects these differences: **women walk more** (27% compared to 19% of men in Rome) **and use public transport more frequently**, while men dominate car and two-wheeler use. Women are also more often car passengers. In terms of child mobility services, women represent only around 30% of users. Road safety data highlight gender disparities in risk exposure, with men accounting for 80% of road fatalities and 65% of pedestrian deaths.

Moreover, there is even a persistent gender gap in transport professions. In Rome's public transport operator **ATAC**, **only 257 of nearly 5,500 drivers are women**. Taxi licensing shows a similar imbalance, with approximately 644 women compared to 7,000 men. Against this backdrop, **Roma Servizi per la Mobilità stands out as an exception with near gender parity in its own workforce**.

A major institutional output of the committee has been the development of a **Women's Mobility Charter**, co-produced through a





participatory process involving institutions, experts, and stakeholders. The charter, presented in Bologna, is structured around four strategic pillars.

First, the recommendations call for **better gender-disaggregated data** and **stronger integration of gender perspectives into mobility planning**. Second, they emphasise **safer and more accessible public spaces** through improved infrastructure and proximity services. Third, they propose more **flexible, affordable, and safer public transport services**, including anti-harassment measures. Fourth, they encourage **greater participation of women in transport professions** through targeted recruitment, equity measures, mentoring, and flexible working conditions.

Rome acts within a broader set of Italian initiatives. Examples include anti-harassment campaigns in Bergamo, participatory mapping of night safety in Milan, reserved parking schemes for pregnant women and parents, on-demand rural mobility services, discounted night-time taxi schemes, and corporate and educational programmes aimed at increasing women's participation in transport and maritime sectors.



Q1

on *safety* and *caregivers in public transport*

What evidence emerged on women's safety experiences in public transport, particularly in relation to travelling with children?

Reijnders' response:

Reijnders noted that safety was not the primary research focus, but it emerged repeatedly in discussions on mobility of care. Women's perceptions of safety were strongly influenced by lighting, crowding, and the presence of other passengers. She highlighted that in Amsterdam, the lack of designated stroller spaces on metro systems often forced caregivers to improvise in crowded carriages, increasing discomfort and feelings of insecurity. Broken lifts and escalators were also frequently mentioned as barriers and moments of vulnerability. She added that night-time travel was not part of the study.

Q2

on *gender-sensitive research design*

Why did the research focus specifically on mothers rather than all caregivers?

Reijnders' response:

Reijnders explained that the focus stemmed from a gender-sensitive planning framework and the concept of mobility of care. Since caregiving responsibilities are still predominantly carried by women, this shaped the scope of the research. She stressed, however, that the findings apply broadly to all caregivers, including those supporting elderly or disabled people. She added that the focus on mothers was mainly a methodological choice linked to the constraints of a thesis project.

Q3

on *cycling gaps*

To what extent can infrastructure gaps limit the impact of cycling empowerment initiatives?

Krüger's response:

Krüger acknowledged that infrastructure gaps can significantly affect confidence and participation.



Q4

on *barriers* in *public-space cycling programmes*

Many participants initially expressed fear of cycling in traffic, so training was first conducted in safe, controlled environments. She described the use of parks and other quiet locations near shelters, where participants could build skills before progressing to longer routes and real traffic situations. Krüger emphasised that this gradual approach is essential for building confidence and maintaining safety.

What are the practical barriers to running cycling empowerment sessions in public space?

Krüger's response:

Krüger explained that obtaining formal permissions was often difficult, leading the project to adopt a flexible approach. When access was denied, sessions were relocated rather than escalating conflict. She noted that clear communication with local communities helped reduce resistance and that growing visibility increased acceptance over time. She also highlighted strong support from residents, particularly older women who connected the initiative to historical restrictions on women's cycling.

Q5

on *gender-sensitive mobility policy tools*

Which policy mechanisms are most critical for embedding gender-sensitive mobility planning?

Reijnders' response:

Reijnders identified gender-disaggregated data collection as the foundation of gender-sensitive mobility planning. Without it, differentiated mobility patterns cannot be properly understood or addressed. She contrasted cities such as Vienna, where gender-sensitive analysis systematically informs infrastructure design, with approaches that rely on general accessibility frameworks, where specific needs such as those of caregivers with strollers can be overlooked. She also emphasised the importance of visible design features, such as priority spaces, which improve functionality while reinforcing inclusion.



Q6

on *immediate responses to harassment*

If drivers or other passengers provide immediate support to women, what else can be done until the police arrive?

Quinton's response:

Quinton explained that while police hold legal authority, immediate support from drivers and passengers remains highly important. This includes listening to the victim, validating their experience, offering reassurance, and remaining calm. She added that the waiting period can be used to document evidence, including driver notes and witness statements. In some cases, a supportive group presence can help de-escalate the situation.

Q7

on *gendered safety and workforce gaps*

Did the Rome mobility analysis include gendered safety patterns, and is there any link to the gender gap among drivers?

Duran's response:

Duran explained that the study did not yet produce specific findings on gendered safety patterns, but that this remains an important area for future analysis. She noted that although a significant gender gap exists in transport professions, no direct link has yet been established between driver representation and safety indicators. She added that this may be explored in future reporting cycles.

Q8

on the *Equality Committee evolution*

How did the Equality Committee evolve from being women-only to including men?

Duran's response:

Duran explained that the Committee initially included only women in order to focus on perspectives across different departments and ensure women's voices were fully captured. Male participation was introduced later after male colleagues themselves requested to join and contribute.



Q9

on *applying driver training* in practice

Following this, men were formally included after the first three-year cycle. She emphasised that this shift increased engagement and strengthened participation in the committee's work.

How can it be ensured that bus drivers actually apply the training in practice?

Quinton's response:

Quinton stated that full enforcement cannot be guaranteed, as implementation lies beyond the training provider's control. Their role is to develop content, support operators, and provide implementation guidance. She acknowledged that not all drivers will act with confidence after training. However, the expectation is that reporting, awareness, and supportive responses will improve over time as training becomes embedded.

Q10

on *underreporting* in policy design

What is the risk of designing policy based only on reported incidents?

Quinton's response:

Quinton explained that relying solely on reported incidents can significantly underestimate the scale of the problem, as many cases go unreported. She emphasised that improving reporting is a key objective, supported by better communication, visibility measures, and staff engagement. She added that while surveys help reveal underreporting, important knowledge gaps remain.

Q11

on implementing the *Women Mobility Charter*

How will the Women Mobility Charter be followed up and implemented?

Duran's response:

Duran explained that the current focus is on promoting the Charter and encouraging institutions to adopt its recommendations. She added that the next step is supporting implementation and turning its principles into practical measures.



From gender-sensitive urban planning and cycling empowerment to VAWG-focused transport safety training and institutional mobility governance, eight key insights for more equitable and inclusive mobility systems emerged:

1 Address caregiving in mobility.

Transport systems must reflect caregiving trips such as escorting children and daily errands, not only commuting patterns.

2 Prioritise lived safety experiences.

Lighting, crowding, infrastructure failures, and spatial design directly shape perceived safety and access.

3 Design for diverse users.

Clear spatial allocation, barrier-free access, and priority systems reduce uncertainty in shared transport.

4 Strengthen VAWG response roles.

Transport staff should be equipped to recognise, de-escalate, document, and report incidents while supporting victims.

5 Treat underreporting structurally.

Harassment is widely normalised, and low reporting reflects trust, visibility, and accessibility barriers.

6 Embed gender-disaggregated data.

Planning must be based on gender-disaggregated evidence on travel behaviour, access, and safety.

7 Scale peer-to-peer empowerment.

Cycling initiatives show that training becomes more effective when participants become trainers themselves.

8 Combine institutions and culture change.

Formal frameworks must be matched with shifts in workplace and everyday transport culture.

Together, these insights show that equitable mobility systems depend on combining care-sensitive planning, safety-aware design, robust data use, participatory approaches, and community-led empowerment to address both structural barriers and lived experience.





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AUTHORS:

Alessia Giorgiutti, POLIS

Laura Babío Somoza, POLIS

WITH THE CONTRIBUTION OF:

Lotte Reijnders, Ipsos I&O

Annette Krüger, #BIKEYGEES/YallaFAHR

Francesca Brecha, #BIKEYGEES/YallaFAHR

Carolyn Quinton, Understood

Maria Isabel Duran, Roma Servizi per la Mobilità

Contact

POLIS

Rue du Trône 98

B-1050

Brussels, Belgium

Tel +32 (0)2 500 56 70

polis@polisnetwork.eu

www.polisnetwork.eu