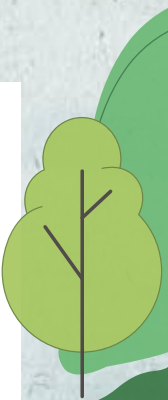


# Care, Climate and Mobility: Why Gender-Responsive Transport Is Essential for Just Climate Action?





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# INTRODUCTION

## WHY GENDER MATTERS FOR POLICY-MAKING



When we talk about gender and why it matters for public policies, we start from everyday life. Gender roles shape daily routines, responsibilities, and expectations of women and men, and as a result, **needs are gendered**. Consequently, policies do not affect everyone in the same way: their impacts are experienced differently by women and men.

This is particularly evident in relation to **care responsibilities**, which remain deeply rooted in gender norms. Women continue to carry a disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work, which directly influences their time use, economic opportunities, and participation in public life. These gendered care responsibilities shape not only the demand for **care services**, but also patterns of **daily mobility**, as care-related tasks require frequent, short, and multi-purpose trips.

Transport systems and mobility patterns are therefore also gendered. Evidence, including findings from the **Gender Budget Watchdog Network (GBWN) survey conducted in six Western Balkan countries and Moldova**, shows that women tend to use and drive private cars less than men and rely more heavily on public transportation. As a result, **accessible, affordable, safe, and reliable public transport is particularly important for women's mobility**, enabling access to employment, education, social and cultural life, and opportunities for personal development.

Transport policies and services can thus play a significant role in **women's empowerment**. At the same time, public transport is

widely recognised as more environmentally sustainable than private car use. Well-designed transport policies therefore have the potential to deliver **dual benefits**: advancing **gender equality** while contributing to **environmental protection**, including the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. When narrowed to the achievement of **SDG 5**, it is particularly relevant for reducing and redistributing unpaid care work. By improving public transport and aligning it with daily care-related mobility needs, such policies can help reduce the time women spend on unpaid work. (This of course, only complements measures that promote a more equal division of care responsibilities between women and men, as well as by the expansion of accessible and affordable care services.)

In order to inform sustainable and gender-responsive transport policy measures, particularly at the local level, the GBWN survey was expanded through qualitative data collection focusing on women's transport patterns and care-related mobility needs. Across six Western Balkan countries and Moldova, a total of xx focus group discussions were conducted, engaging xx participants in both urban and rural settings. The discussions explored women's daily mobility patterns, transport needs linked to unpaid care responsibilities, and existing barriers to access, while also identifying good practices and opportunities to strengthen gender-responsive and environmentally sustainable transport policies. The findings are intended to directly inform policy dialogue and advocacy efforts at local and national levels.

# THE NEXUS BETWEEN CARE, TRANSPORT, AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES

The intersection of care responsibilities, transport systems, and environmental sustainability has increasingly attracted attention in social science, gender studies, and public policy research. This nexus highlights that mobility, care work, access to infrastructure, and ecological resilience are deeply interdependent, and that policy interventions in one domain often have significant effects in others - particularly for women and other primary caregivers. Gender is central to this discussion because women disproportionately perform unpaid care work, are more reliant on public and active transport, and often reside in areas with weaker infrastructure and heightened environmental vulnerability.

Care work, encompassing unpaid domestic labor such as childcare, eldercare, and household management, sustains families and societies but remains undervalued in economic systems. Scholars such as Nancy Folbre (2006) and Razavi (2007) describe care as a public good that generates significant social and economic returns. The Care Economy Framework emphasizes the redistribution of care responsibilities through public services, institutional support, and recognition of time use. Transport equity research similarly highlights how mobility shapes access to employment, education, healthcare, and social networks. Women's travel patterns are often more complex, involving multi-purpose, trip-chained journeys that correspond with their care roles, requiring frequent stops and flexible schedules (Gordon et al., 1989; Hanson, 2010). Inadequate public transport-whether infrequent, unsafe, or poorly connected-reinforces gendered mobility disadvantages.

Environmental policy frameworks further underscore the importance of sustainable transport systems, reduced emissions, climate-adaptive infrastructure, and ecosystem protection (European Environment Agency; IPCC). Transport emissions are a major contributor to climate change, making the promotion of public and active transport modes, alongside reduced car dependency, central to sustainability goals. Adopting a nexus approach that links care, transport, and the environment allows for a holistic perspective on wellbeing, gender equality, and sustainability. This approach aligns with intersectional policy analysis, recognizing how gender, class, and geography intersect to shape service access and exposure to environmental risks.



Research demonstrates that women's unpaid care responsibilities increase travel frequency and complexity, often in the absence of reliable transport (Black et al., 2002; Lucas, 2012). In low-density and rural areas, lack of safe and affordable transport reduces women's participation in the labor market (Pojani & Stead, 2015) and contributes to time poverty, limited access to healthcare and education, and constrained social engagement (Shaw, 2001; Blumenberg & Manville, 2004). Sustainable transport policies, such as the EU's Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy and UN SDG 11, shape urban planning, emissions reduction, and climate resilience. Gender-inclusive transport planning can improve access while advancing environmental objectives by prioritizing public transit, active travel, safer pedestrian environments, and transport subsidies for low-income and care-dependent populations (Lovelace et al., 2014).

Climate disruptions, including floods, storms, and heatwaves, disproportionately affect households reliant on informal employment, precarious transport routes, and limited care support (Schwanen et al., 2021). Women in rural and low-income communities face compounded vulnerabilities due to poor infrastructure, increased care responsibilities during crises, and restricted mobility (Nelson et al., 2002). Globally, women perform two to three times more unpaid care work than men, limiting time for paid work and leisure (ILO, 2018). Transport barriers intensify care burdens by consuming time and energy without generating economic returns. Inaccessible, unsafe, or costly transport restricts women's access to essential services—even when these exist geographically - while rural and peri-urban women face amplified service gaps, including fewer transport options, limited care facilities, poorer roads, and greater distances from employment centers, challenges often worsened by climate variability (Mattson & Lyckebo, 2006).

EU policies increasingly recognize the gender dimensions of transport planning, care economy frameworks, and sustainable mobility, though implementation remains uneven. The European Commission's Gender Equality Strategy and the European Pillar of Social Rights call for gender-sensitive transport and care services. Investments in childcare, eldercare, and community care services reduce the unpaid care burden, enabling greater mobility and labor market participation. Experiences from Nordic and Franco-American care models illustrate how institutional care services can enhance both gender equality and transport efficiency. When designed with gendered travel patterns in mind, climate and transport policies can be synergistic, with green infrastructure investments simultaneously improving environmental outcomes and women's mobility.

# OVERALL SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS FINDINGS

In addition to the survey, linkages between care work and transport—including in the context of climate change and environmental concerns—were explored qualitatively through focus group discussions across the Western Balkans and in Moldova. **In total, 100 participants from seven countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Serbia) took part in the FGDs.** The findings confirm and reinforce literature on the connection between care work and transport, showing that the lack of transport services adds a burden to care responsibilities, such as childcare, or in remote areas, elderly care and household management.

Despite contextual differences, the focus groups revealed a shared reality: the central role of transport in accessing employment, services, and daily activities and **inadequate transport systems significantly increase the unpaid care burden and deepen exclusion for elderly people and persons with disabilities.** While large cities struggle with implementation and accountability, smaller municipalities face compounded challenges of availability, accessibility, and isolation.

**The focus group discussion revealed that mobility is a critical enabler-or barrier-to women's autonomy.** While urban women face challenges related to efficiency and congestion, rural women experience systemic exclusion due to the absence of transport services altogether. In both contexts, limited mobility amplifies unpaid care burdens and restricts women's participation in public life.

Women's use of transport across the Western Balkans and in Republic of Moldova is closely linked to their care and work responsibilities, shaping not only when and how they travel, but also the modes they rely on and the stress associated with daily mobility. Across urban and rural contexts, women travel primarily to transport children to schools, kindergartens, and extracurricular activities, accompany elderly family members to healthcare appointments, and manage multiple errands—from shopping and caregiving to essential household tasks.

Transport for leisure, personal development, sports, or social activities is far less common, as time constraints and the demands of care work dominate their daily schedules. These tasks often require careful coordination with work hours, institutional schedules, and transport availability, leaving little room for rest or personal time. For many women, private vehicles are essential for maintaining independence and fulfilling responsibilities efficiently, enabling them to manage complex, multi-stop journeys that public transport or walking alone cannot accommodate.

In rural contexts, care-related transport often involves frequent trips to doctors and healthcare facilities for elderly family members, while in urban areas, transporting children to schools, kindergartens, and extracurricular activities is more common.



The availability and quality of transport vary sharply between urban and rural areas but also availability of services, especially medical services or activities for children. In cities, traffic congestion, limited parking, and overcrowded buses create delays that disproportionately affect women juggling care and work. For many women, this combination of logistical, infrastructural, and social obstacles reinforces dependence on private cars and family support networks.

Climate and environmental conditions further shape women's mobility, particularly in rural areas and smaller municipalities, and are especially pronounced in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Flooded or eroded roads, damaged infrastructure, and extreme weather events can make travel dangerous or impossible, limiting access to schools, healthcare, and markets. Even in urban areas, heat, poor road conditions, and the lack of shade on sidewalks influence whether women can walk or cycle, especially while managing multiple care-related tasks. Climate-friendly mobility options, such as electric cars or electric buses, remain largely unaffordable, particularly for single-headed households or elderly women.

### Key challenges converge around several themes

- **transport infrastructure often fails to match women's needs:** bus schedules, routes, and stops rarely align with work, school, or care commitments.
- **accessibility is limited for people with disabilities, parents with young children, and elderly passengers,** with ramps, sidewalks, and boarding assistance frequently absent or non-functional.
- **urban congestion, limited parking, and unsafe pedestrian environments increase stress and reduce the efficiency of travel,** while in rural areas, the **absence of services and long distances isolate women from social, economic, and cultural life.**
- **financial constraints-particularly for single mothers or women without personal vehicles-restrict access to private or green transport alternatives.**

Good practices and potential solutions emerged clearly across the region. These include expanding and adapting public transport to cover both urban and rural areas, ensuring evening and early morning services to match care and work schedules, and introducing accessible vehicles for people with disabilities and parents with strollers. Investments in safe infrastructure, including sidewalks, protected bike lanes, and well-lit bus stops, could encourage walking and cycling, particularly in urban areas. Subsidies for green mobility, air-conditioned buses, and reliable scheduling were also highlighted as ways to reduce time burdens and environmental impacts. Innovative local solutions, such as community minibuses, scheduled transport to schools or health centers, and small-scale electric mobility options for isolated or historic areas, show promise when integrated with broader service planning.

Ultimately, the evidence underscores that women's mobility cannot be understood in isolation from their care responsibilities, household management, and social roles. Improving transport for women requires a gender-responsive, territorially differentiated approach—one that links public infrastructure, care services, and employment opportunities while accounting for environmental risks. Where urban women may adapt through private vehicles or proximity to services, rural women face structural barriers that demand public investment, inclusive planning, and policies designed to reduce time poverty and expand autonomy.

**Summary from focus groups from countries is provided below:**

## ALBANIA

In Albania, women's daily mobility and access to services are deeply shaped by the urban-rural divide. In Tirana, public transport exists, but it is frequently overcrowded, unreliable, and perceived as unsafe. Many women manage these challenges by relying on private cars, taxis, or by choosing housing close to workplaces and schools. In contrast, women in smaller municipalities such as Elbasan face a far harsher reality. Public transport is extremely limited, sometimes operating only once a day, and long distances to bus stops combined with poor road infrastructure severely restrict mobility. For women with care responsibilities, this often means staying home or relying entirely on family members for transport, reinforcing social isolation.

Care services illustrate another sharp contrast. In Tirana, nurseries and kindergartens exist, but they are insufficient, expensive, and subject to long waiting lists. Women frequently depend on informal family networks to fill these gaps, juggling paid work alongside substantial unpaid care. In Elbasan, the picture is starker: care services are largely absent, particularly in rural areas. The lack of childcare and healthcare facilities dramatically increases women's unpaid care burden, leaving them little time for employment or social engagement.

Employment opportunities follow a similar pattern. In Tirana, women have relatively greater access to paid work, yet they continue to face inflexible workplaces, minimal employer support for caregiving, and limited social protections. In contrast, women in Elbasan encounter a constrained labor market dominated by informal, low-paid, or agriculture-linked jobs, with few contracts or social benefits. The disparity means that while urban women struggle with balancing work and care, rural women often face near-total exclusion from stable employment.

Household dynamics and gender norms further deepen these differences. In Tirana, some gradual shifts in attitudes were noted, though women still carry the bulk of domestic and care responsibilities. In Elbasan, patriarchal norms are more rigid: men rarely participate in caregiving, and women's financial dependence is more pronounced, leaving them with limited autonomy or flexibility.

Environmental factors also play a critical role. While climate impacts in Tirana are noticeable, they rarely prevent women from reaching workplaces or accessing services. In Elbasan, however, floods, erosion, and damaged roads frequently disrupt transport and isolate communities, exacerbating the daily challenges women face. A woman trying to travel for work or to take children to school may find the journey impossible or dangerous during heavy rains, further highlighting the vulnerability of rural populations to climate change.

Across Albania, the common thread is that women in smaller municipalities experience compounded disadvantages. The lack of reliable transport, accessible care services, and formal employment opportunities creates structural barriers that urban women can sometimes mitigate through personal strategies or private resources. Rural women, in contrast, confront systemic obstacles that require public investment and policy intervention. Addressing these inequities demands gender-responsive, territorially differentiated policies that expand rural transport, develop childcare infrastructure, create climate-resilient services, and broaden formal employment opportunities, ensuring that women outside major urban centers are not left behind.

## BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The focus group discussion in Bosnia and Herzegovina highlighted the central role of unpaid care work, agriculture, and household management in shaping women's daily lives, as well as the decisive impact of transport availability on their autonomy and participation in public life. While women in both rural and urban contexts face mobility-related challenges, the nature and intensity of these challenges differ significantly.

Across the focus group, women described care responsibilities as the organizing principle of their daily routines. In rural areas, women's days start at dawn and combine physically demanding agricultural labor with domestic work and caregiving for children and elderly family members. Tasks include working in fields and greenhouses, caring for livestock, preparing food, managing households, and producing homemade goods for sale.

### One participant explained:

*"After working in the greenhouse, I go home and start preparing jams and fruit wines. My husband then delivers them to customers. There is no rest—just a change of work."*



Another rural participant described balancing childcare, school responsibilities, and elder care, emphasizing that these activities leave little room for personal time or social engagement.

Urban participants, primarily based in Sarajevo, reported more structured daily routines linked to formal employment. Their days typically begin with commuting to work, using public transport, walking, or driving. However, even in urban settings, care responsibilities-particularly for elderly parents-significantly shape women's time use. One participant who had moved from a village to the city reflected on the contrast:

*"In the city, everything feels close. But when I was caring for my father in the village, I gave up travel, leisure, and my social life completely because there was no transport and the care was constant."*

## Transport and mobility constraints

Transport emerged as a defining constraint for rural women. With public bus lines discontinued in many villages, women rely entirely on husbands, neighbors, or taxis for mobility. Some described standing by the roadside hoping someone would offer a ride. Trips to nearby towns occur once or twice a week at most and depend entirely on others' availability.

### As one participant noted:

*"In the village I am from, more frequent buses would mean a lot. There were two lines during the day, and one of them was canceled recently."*

The unpredictability of transport arrangements makes planning beyond immediate responsibilities nearly impossible. Rural participants consistently reported sacrificing personal time, rest, and social activities due to their dependence on others for transport:

*"The time I spend on care and other responsibilities is very limiting, along with the lack of transportation options. I can't go for a coffee with my friends, can't plan anything for myself, as I depend on others."*

In contrast, urban women enjoy greater autonomy over their mobility. Public transport, walking, and private cars offer more flexibility, and services are physically closer. However, urban participants also highlighted persistent challenges, including inefficient public transport scheduling, overcrowding, traffic congestion, and parking difficulties. While access exists, reliability and comfort remain concerns.



## Impact on autonomy, wellbeing, and participation

Across both rural and urban contexts, limited mobility directly affects women's autonomy, wellbeing, and ability to participate in social, economic, and civic life. In rural areas, transport barriers lead to isolation and reinforce women's confinement to care and household roles. In urban settings, mobility constraints manifest more as stress, time pressure, and reduced quality of life rather than complete exclusion.

The discussions underscored that transport is not merely a logistical issue but a structural factor shaping gendered divisions of labor and access to opportunities.

## Needs, priorities, and proposed solutions

Rural participants were clear about their priorities: regular public transport and basic infrastructure improvements, such as paved roads, would significantly change their daily lives. One participant stated:

*"When it comes to care and my everyday activities, what would make my life easier is if the road to my home was paved and if there were any local buses to the location."*

Several women suggested community-based or municipal transport solutions, such as a local minibus serving remote villages, financed through small user fees and municipal support.

Urban participants emphasized improving the efficiency and frequency of public transport, particularly during peak hours. They also raised safety concerns and proposed practical measures, such as installing cameras on buses to deter theft and improve passenger security.

Across both settings, participants highlighted the need for better access to childcare services, particularly in rural areas where facilities are concentrated in cities:

*"For women living in rural areas and in care roles, it would be crucial to have regular and efficient public transportation. Also, access to childcare should be improved-it should be closer to their local communities."*

## REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

In both localities, residents rely on a mix of personal vehicles, public transport, walking, and family support. Proximity to nearby urban centers (Bălți and Orhei, respectively) enables relatively quick access to services, with travel times ranging from 10 to 15 minutes. Public transport is generally available and affordable, with buses or minibuses operating at regular intervals; however, perceptions of adequacy vary. Women tend to walk more frequently or rely on family cars, while men are more likely to own and use personal vehicles. When private transport is unavailable, residents depend on public transport or informal family support.

People with disabilities and caregivers, including parents with strollers, face major challenges due to the lack of accessible vehicles. Public transport is not equipped with ramps, requires climbing steps, and is often overcrowded during peak hours. In some areas, large buses have been replaced by minibuses due to reduced demand, further limiting accessibility. Long distances

between households and main roads (up to 2 km in some cases), lack of air conditioning, and congestion during peak commuting hours further exacerbate these difficulties.

Transport constraints directly affect participation in employment, training, and administrative activities. The absence of early morning routes limits access to jobs with early start times, and participants reported having declined job opportunities due to inadequate transport options. While some residents work locally and commute on foot, others depend on private cars to reach employment in nearby cities. Accessing administrative services often requires travel to district centers located significantly farther away than nearby municipalities, increasing time and cost burdens.

Walking is generally perceived as feasible and safe in areas with sidewalks and street lighting, particularly on main and secondary streets. Interest in cycling exists, especially among younger residents; however, the absence of bicycle lanes, narrow roads, and unsafe traffic conditions discourage its use. Older participants expressed little interest in cycling, citing safety concerns and infrastructure limitations.

While basic education services (schools and kindergartens) are available locally, access to banking and administrative services remains uneven. Limited availability of ATMs and specialized services forces residents to travel to nearby cities. Although card payments are common, cash withdrawals and certain administrative procedures still require travel, adding to mobility demands.

Participants across both focus groups emphasized the need to increase the frequency of public transport, introduce early morning routes, and better align schedules with commuters' needs. Key priorities include modernizing road infrastructure, equipping vehicles with ramps and air conditioning, and developing safe infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists where feasible. Participants noted that residents would be more willing to shift away from personal car use if public transport, walking, and cycling options were faster, safer, and more comfortable.

Electric buses and trolleybuses were cited as positive examples from other localities, though participants acknowledged that their introduction would require substantial investment in infrastructure and technical adaptations. Ongoing and planned road projects, including those supported by European funding, were seen as opportunities to improve safety and connectivity.

The focus group discussions in Elbasan and Tirana reveal that women across Albania experience significant constraints due to the unequal distribution of unpaid care work, inadequate transport systems, and limited access to formal care services. While these challenges are present in both urban and rural contexts, their **intensity, form, and coping mechanisms differ**.



In both settings, women remain primarily responsible for childcare, eldercare, and household work, which restricts their participation in paid employment, education, and public life. Inadequate public transport and insufficient care infrastructure further reinforce women's dependency on informal solutions and personal sacrifice. Climate-related impacts, such as floods and erosion, exacerbate these challenges, particularly outside major urban centres.

However, the discussions highlight **clear urban-rural disparities** in service availability, mobility options, employment opportunities, and exposure to climate risks. Women in cities tend to adapt through individual coping strategies (e.g. relocation, private transport), while women in smaller municipalities face more **structural and absolute barriers** with fewer alternatives.

## MONTENEGRO

In Podgorica, public transport is relatively developed, with 27 bus lines serving the city. Most participants noted that services functioned well primarily during the period 2022–2024, though a few considered transport still mostly reliable today. Since July 3, 2025, pensioners, people with disabilities, and tenants living in the capital benefit from free public and suburban transport, a measure that has been widely welcomed. Among the women in the focus group, five use public transport frequently, two occasionally, and two never, reflecting a mix of reliance and preference for alternative modes. Public and suburban transport is most often used for routine errands such as visiting markets, attending health appointments, caring for grandchildren, or going to cultural events like the theater or cinema.

Despite these services, participants highlighted persistent challenges in daily mobility. Heavy traffic congestion in key streets such as Džordža Vašingtona, Moskovska, Dalmatinska, Vuka Karadžića, Bratstva i Jedinstva, and Ivana Crnojevića Boulevard, combined with a lack of parking and insufficient bicycle infrastructure, creates stress for both drivers and pedestrians. Taxi fares were considered high by two-thirds of respondents, and the limited availability of taxis during peak hours further complicates travel. Commuting times ranged from one to three hours, and while three participants attempt to walk for short trips, summer heat often makes this impractical. Only two women reported using bicycles, one for college and leisure, the other for commuting with her child or running errands.

Car ownership remains central to mobility in Podgorica, particularly for visiting elderly family members, shopping, or traveling to cottages. Four women regularly use cars, though only two own them. Even when a car is available in the household, women sometimes rely on a spouse to drive due to bureaucratic or financial barriers to transferring ownership. Transportation, combined with housework and caregiving responsibilities, occupies much of their time, with three participants reporting they do not have a daily rest. Owning a personal car, or having sole access to one, was seen as a critical solution by over half of participants.

Participants proposed practical solutions to improve transport in the city. They emphasized the need for more bus lines, new and better-lit bus stops, reliable schedules even during school holidays, air-conditioned buses, and free transport for unemployed residents and women. Some also highlighted the importance of increasing parking and offering subsidies for green transportation, including bicycles.

In contrast, Berane presents a starkly different picture. There is currently no functioning city or suburban transport, and the city lacks even a proper bus station. A temporary bus stop was recently established, but this is considered only marginally safer than waiting on the street. As a result, all women in Berane rely on private cars or taxis for everyday mobility. Four of them drive, though only one owns a car in her own name. The others depend on male family members or taxis for travel. Taxi fares are widely regarded as high, and routine trips—such as to school, kindergarten, work, shopping, visiting family, or children’s activities—consume at least an hour and a half each day. Walking is attempted for short distances, but none of the women reported using bicycles.

Housework and transportation dominate their daily lives, leaving little to no time for rest, leisure, or vacations. Owning a personal car was viewed as essential by the majority, mirroring the sentiment in Podgorica but with even greater urgency due to the complete absence of public transport. Participants noted that establishing a city bus station and introducing suburban bus lines would dramatically improve access to health services, schools, shopping, and markets for agricultural and handicraft products, significantly easing the burden on rural women.

Overall, the comparison between Podgorica and Berane highlights the profound impact of infrastructure and service availability on women’s mobility. While Podgorica offers multiple modes of transport, reliability and congestion remain challenges, and women’s responsibilities shape how they navigate these systems. In Berane, the lack of public transport forces nearly all women into dependence on private cars or taxis, intensifying the demands of everyday life and limiting access to social, economic, and cultural activities. Both contexts underscore the need for targeted interventions—ranging from infrastructure improvements to affordable, reliable, and inclusive transport solutions—to enhance mobility and autonomy, particularly for women balancing work, care, and household responsibilities.

## NORTH MACEDONIA

Across both settings, care responsibilities are highly gendered and fall predominantly on women. Daily childcare (school, kindergarten, healthcare, extracurricular activities) is performed almost exclusively by women, with men stepping in only when women are unavailable. In both focus groups, women also shoulder elder care responsibilities, often in addition to paid work and household tasks.

A notable similarity across contexts is the growing number of elderly people living alone, driven by internal migration and family members relocating to larger cities or abroad. In Ohrid, many elderly people migrate to spend retirement years there but lack social networks; in Skopje and surrounding rural areas, caregivers described institutional neglect and the absence of long-term support, particularly for adults with disabilities over the age of 26. In both cases, care is individualized and informal, increasing women’s time poverty and emotional strain.

In both urban and small-municipality contexts, public transport was identified as the weakest link in enabling care-related mobility. Participants in Skopje and Ohrid reported that buses and minibuses are largely inaccessible for people with disabilities, parents with strollers, and elderly persons. Ramps are either non-functional or poorly designed, vehicles are overcrowded, and there is no assistance for boarding or disembarking.

Across both contexts, women rely more on walking and cycling, while men are more likely to use cars or scooters. However, when caregiving is involved - especially transporting elderly people or persons with disabilities - the car becomes the default option, reinforcing gendered dependence on private vehicles.

Transport barriers directly limit access to employment, healthcare, education, and social participation in both settings. Participants from both focus groups reported having skipped personal needs, declined job opportunities, or experienced isolation due to transport constraints. Stress, exhaustion, and reduced opportunities for personal development were recurring themes.

Safety concerns further compound these challenges. Women reported feeling unsafe in traffic and public spaces, experiencing harassment, stalking, and verbal abuse - particularly when traveling alone or from peripheral areas. In Ohrid, reliance on informal or unregulated taxi-sharing raised concerns about personal safety, especially for elderly users.

Both focus groups highlighted a persistent gap between legal frameworks and implementation. While accessibility standards exist on paper, participants consistently noted that budget cuts and weak accountability result in inaccessible streets, malfunctioning elevators, and poorly planned infrastructure-especially beyond main roads.

Participants in both contexts emphasized that solutions must go beyond traditional public transport models. Shared priorities included:

- **Predictable and transparent transport schedules (GPS tracking, marked stops, digital timetables)**
- **Accessible vehicles and trained drivers**
- **Subsidies for mobility aids and caregiving-related transport needs**
- **Stronger consultation with people with disabilities and caregivers in planning processes**

In smaller municipalities, participants proposed **innovative, low-cost solutions** such as electric tricycles for elderly people, scheduled transport to hospitals and cemeteries, and the use of electric carts in inaccessible historic areas. In the urban context, emphasis was placed on institutional accountability, enforcement of accessibility standards, and long-term support systems for people with disabilities.

Examples of good practices-from Red Cross delivery services to international models such as Japan's community-based elder care - were cited as inspiration, highlighting the need for integrated care and mobility systems rather than isolated interventions.



## KOSOVO

In Kosovo, FGD were organized in North Kosovo - Mitrovica and in Pristina with in total 16 participants.

Across northern Kosovo, participants described relying on a limited mix of transport options - primarily private cars, public buses, minibuses, and taxis. Bicycles and electric scooters were not mentioned, reflecting both infrastructure gaps and safety concerns. For many, especially outside urban centers, mobility choices are constrained rather than freely chosen. People with disabilities face the most restricted options. With adapted public transport largely absent, many have no alternative but to depend on personal vehicles, family members, or electric wheelchairs. One participant with a disability explained bluntly: *"In our area, there isn't a single car, van, or transport adapted for people with disabilities... I am forced to use my electric wheelchair or my own car."*

Occasionally, moments of resilience emerged. One woman shared that she had learned to drive at the age of 62, prompting admiration from others in the group - *"Bravo!"* - underscoring how access to driving can radically change independence later in life. At the same time, participants were aware of the environmental costs of car dependency, noting that reliance on private vehicles contributes to pollution, even though alternatives remain scarce.

In Pristina, participants navigated a denser transport ecosystem that included buses, taxis, private cars, and walking. Yet mobility was shaped less by availability and more by the complexity of daily logistics, particularly for women combining paid work with caregiving. One participant explained: *"I stop at the kindergarten, the school, and work. For that reason the car allows me to arrive a bit faster - maybe up to half an hour for the whole process."* Another added that without her husband's support, she often had no choice but to miss work hours to manage childcare: *"Sometimes I have to miss an hour or two of work... If my husband isn't available, no one can pick up the kids."*

One of the few consistently mentioned positive aspects in northern Kosovo concerned travel to Raska (Serbia) to collect pensions, social benefits, or medications, which participants highlighted as free and critical support for older residents and low-income households. Similarly, Pristina participants acknowledged the affordability of public transport, noting that the introduction of an all-day ticket for €0.80 increased flexibility and reduced costs. However, this benefit was tempered by overcrowding and long waits, which limited its practical value.

Transport challenges emerged as a defining feature of daily life. In villages such as Zubin Potok, Banjska, and surrounding areas, minibuses operate irregularly and often wait to fill before departing. As one participant noted: *"The bus waits to fill completely, so if you need to go from point A to B quickly, you might get stuck waiting."* Overcrowding is common, particularly during the school year, leaving older passengers standing. Costs fluctuate unpredictably, adding stress to everyday life: *"Older people cannot sit, the buses are crowded... taxi and minibus prices fluctuate, making it harder for people to manage daily obligations."* Evening mobility is especially limited, effectively excluding residents from social and cultural life. One woman remarked: *"The last bus leaves Banjska at 6. How am I supposed to go to a show?"*

In Pristina, challenges were less about absence and more about capacity and reliability. Buses were described as overcrowded, with long waits during peak hours. One participant recalled: *"Just this Wednesday... I had to wait about half an hour to get on an urban bus... they just closed the doors, no space at all."* Concerns were also raised about driver behavior and accountability, with some drivers reportedly skipping stops. Complaints were rarely acted upon: *"The driver pretended not to see me and sped off."*

Infrastructure gaps compound these issues: sidewalks frequently disappear, crossings feel unsafe, lighting is poor, and speeding cars ignore zebra crossings. Parents described navigating streets with strollers as particularly stressful: *"You're walking on a sidewalk and suddenly the sidewalk disappears - you have to walk in the street, watching for speeding cars like crazy maneuvering the stroller."*

Safety concerns were strongly shaped by social and political context. In northern Kosovo, changes in license plates and local tensions altered participants' sense of security. One woman shared a frightening experience with an unregulated taxi driver that escalated into panic: *"Once you're on the road, there's nothing you can do."* In Pristina, safety concerns took different forms, with pregnant women standing, reserved seating ignored, and passengers with strollers sometimes denied access: *"Even when the bus has the facilities... I've been there with a stroller and they shut the door on me."*

People with disabilities experience profound exclusion across both contexts, though the intensity differs. In northern Kosovo, the lack of adapted vehicles and long distances to services make independent mobility nearly impossible. Daily activities such as education or medical visits require careful planning or total dependence on family. One participant described an improvised solution: *"If he [her father] isn't around and she [mother with disability] needs transport, we call a larger taxi so the wheelchair can fit into the trunk."* In Pristina, formal transport exists but is often functionally inaccessible. High steps, blocked boarding areas, and non-functioning ramps deter wheelchair users and older people. One participant summarized: *"If you're in a wheelchair you're basically imprisoned at home-it's very, very hard."* Another recounted how a person with a spinal injury had to be examined outside a hospital due to lack of access: *"He said it hurt more to be examined in the street than the condition itself."*

Discrimination and intersecting inequalities were particularly highlighted in Pristina. Several participants described how Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian passengers face exclusion, with drivers passing them by or making derogatory remarks. One woman explained: *"Sometimes I sit next to the person so the driver has to accept it."* These experiences reveal how transport inequities intersect with ethnicity, poverty, and social stigma.

Gendered norms emerged as a cross-cutting issue, particularly in Pristina. Women carry the mental and logistical burden of household management-shopping, cooking, caregiving-making them heavier users of transport and more vulnerable to its shortcomings: *"Men don't have the stress of cooking lunch, collecting laundry, ironing... He can go have a coffee while you're racing to pick up kids, cook, host guests, buy groceries - all in one."* Younger couples are beginning to share responsibilities more equally, but women remain the primary coordinators of daily mobility.

Participants across locations proposed practical solutions. They suggested expanding bus lines to cover urban and rural areas, reintroducing evening services, aligning schedules with household routines, and providing accessible minibuses or adapted vehicles. Improving taxi safety and regulation, surveying households to determine peak travel times, investing in environmentally friendly options like electric minibuses, and enhancing infrastructure-safe sidewalks, lighting, and protected bike lanes - were emphasized. One participant summarized the need succinctly: *"Start an initiative to reinstate urban public transport and cover the villages and surrounding areas."* Another added, *"Without infrastructure, no way. It's not worth preaching without fixing roads everywhere."*

## SERBIA

In Serbia, women's daily mobility is shaped by a complex mix of urban infrastructure, rural limitations, and household responsibilities. In bigger cities like Novi Sad, participants described frequent traffic jams that make travel across the city time-consuming, even for short distances. While some settlements benefit from schools and kindergartens located close to homes, this proximity is not always enough. The operating hours of these institutions often do not align with parents' working hours, and when combined with transport time, families frequently require additional childcare support.

Parking emerged as a major challenge in Novi Sad, where limited spaces in both residential and commercial areas increase the stress of car travel. Public buses are available, but accessibility remains inconsistent. Some buses can accommodate people with disabilities or parents with strollers, but the service is limited, and specialized transport options for people with disabilities—though well-organized—tend to be isolating, restricting independence. The flat terrain makes the city ideal for cycling, and some residents use bikes for commuting or short errands. However, high-quality bicycles, especially those suitable for carrying children, remain expensive, and not all streets or bike lanes are safe or continuous.

For many women, practical considerations make private cars preferable. Carrying groceries, accompanying young children, or managing multiple errands simultaneously—particularly in winter—makes driving the most convenient mode of transport. As one participant explained, managing a combination of shopping, childcare, and other responsibilities often leaves little time for waiting on buses or walking long distances.

In rural areas near Lazarevac, mobility is far more restricted. Limited transport options force residents to travel to Belgrade or larger towns for essential services such as shopping, healthcare, or administrative needs. For women, this challenge is magnified when it comes to children. Transporting children to extracurricular activities or medical appointments is difficult, particularly for single mothers who may not have access to a car. Many rely on parents or extended family for help, highlighting the interdependence created by mobility constraints.

The lack of local social and cultural opportunities in rural villages compounds these difficulties. Women often report that there is little to do locally, and children have limited access to recreational or educational activities. Trips to larger towns or the capital are necessary, yet costly and time-consuming. For specialized healthcare, women must frequently travel to Belgrade to take a parent or child to a doctor, emphasizing gaps in local medical services and the strain this places on caregivers.

Financial barriers further restrict mobility. Many women cannot afford cars—particularly electric or family-oriented vehicles—placing those who live alone with children in particularly difficult positions. Public transport, while sometimes available, rarely meets the needs of rural households, and taxis are prohibitively expensive for routine trips.

Despite these challenges, some urban infrastructure improvements in cities like Novi Sad offer solutions for mobility. Accessible schools and kindergartens close to housing reduce travel time for families, and flat streets make cycling feasible if equipment and safety are addressed. However, the need for flexible, reliable transport that aligns with work schedules, childcare responsibilities, and urban congestion remains critical.

Across both urban and rural contexts, participants highlighted how mobility is intertwined with caregiving, household management, and access to social life. Women's autonomy often depends on private vehicles or family support, and gaps in public transport, infrastructure, and local services reinforce inequalities - particularly for single mothers, women with disabilities, or those caring for children and elderly relatives. Improving accessibility, expanding public and rural transport options, and aligning services with the realities of women's daily responsibilities were repeatedly cited as essential steps toward greater independence and participation in public life.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance the accessibility, efficiency, and inclusiveness of transport and care services, policies should be designed with an integrated approach that mainstreams gender considerations across all relevant sectors. Gender impact assessments need to become a standard component of transport, climate, and care policies to ensure that the specific needs and constraints of women, particularly caregivers, are adequately addressed. Coordination between care and transport investments is essential, including measures such as subsidies for public transport for caregivers, prioritizing service routes that connect to care facilities, and aligning transport schedules with employment and caregiving responsibilities.

Strategies should be tailored to the distinct needs of urban and rural areas. In dense urban zones, transport planning must focus on safe, frequent, and reliable services, while rural areas require flexible, demand-responsive solutions supported by resilient infrastructure. Expanding road quality and mobility options in rural areas is crucial to ensure equitable access to care services, employment, and social participation.

Climate resilience should be embedded in both transport and care infrastructure. Investment in all-weather roads, elevated transit corridors, and disaster-resilient care facilities can safeguard accessibility during extreme weather events. Additionally, contingency plans for alternative transport during climate disruptions, such as emergency access to healthcare, are essential to protect vulnerable populations.

Finally, empowerment and participation of women and caregivers should underpin all planning efforts. Women's organisations should be actively engaged in transport and climate adaptation planning, ensuring that policies reflect lived experiences and priorities. Expanding public data on gendered mobility patterns and the impacts of climate change can support evidence-based policy-making, enabling more targeted and effective interventions.

→ **Explicitly recognize unpaid care work as a mobility driver in national and municipal transport strategies. Organise trainings for local urban planning experts and governance**

→ **Integrate gender analysis and time-use data into transport planning and budgeting and institutionalize consultation with women, caregivers, persons with disabilities, and minority communities in transport planning.**

→ **Apply territorially differentiated approaches** (urban vs. rural; capital cities vs. small municipalities).

→ **Link transport policy with social policy, employment policy, and care infrastructure planning.**

→ **Ensure predictable, transparent timetables** (GPS tracking, digital boards, mobile apps).

→ **Reintroduce or expand bus lines to underserved rural and peri-urban areas.**

- **Maintain services during school holidays to support working caregivers.**
- **Establish subsidized municipal minibuses serving remote villages.**
- **Introduce scheduled transport to health centers, markets, and administrative hubs including the assistance to elderly – potentially in cooperation with local community groups.**
- **Pilot community-based transport systems** (e.g., small electric minibuses, shared mobility schemes) **including car sharing or transport services provided by women's organisations.**
- **Support green mobility through subsidies for electric vehicles and bicycles** (including cargo and child-carrying models).
- **Prioritize flood-resistant roads and erosion control in rural municipalities.**
- **Integrate climate adaptation into transport infrastructure upgrades.**
- **Ensure shaded sidewalks, cooling elements, and air-conditioned buses in heat-prone areas.**
- **Expansion of childcare facilities in rural areas, including extracurricular activities in schools** (in both urban and rural areas).

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