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GENDER BUDGET WATCHDOG NETWORK

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GBWN Submission to Lima Work Program on Gender 2025

Transport, Care, and Gender

2026

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 5

WHY GENDER-RESPONSIVE TRANSPORT IS ESSENTIAL FOR JUST CLIMATE ACTION? 7

KEY EVIDENCE 9

CONCLUSIONS 10

CHALLENGES 11

GOOD PRACTICES 11

RECOMMENDATIONS 12

PROPOSED COP DISCUSSION THEMES 13

ELECTRIC MINIBUSES AND LOW-EMISSION RURAL MOBILITY 15

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study, submitted by the Gender Budget Watchdog Network (GBWN), presents evidence from seven countries in the Western Balkans and Moldova demonstrating that unpaid care work is a structural driver of women's mobility patterns and must be integrated into climate-responsive transport policy.

Based on quantitative survey data and qualitative focus group discussions with 100 participants across Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Moldova, and Serbia, the research confirms that women's daily mobility is fundamentally shaped by unpaid caregiving responsibilities. Women's travel patterns are characterized by frequent, multi-stop, time-sensitive "trip chaining" linked to childcare, eldercare, healthcare access, and household management. Yet transport systems across the region are not designed to accommodate these realities.

The research confirms that transport is not gender-neutral infrastructure. It determines access to employment, healthcare, education, markets, and public life. When transport systems fail to reflect care-driven mobility patterns, women are pushed toward private car dependency where possible—undermining emissions reduction goals—or into economic inactivity and social isolation where private transport is unavailable.

The case study advances three core contributions to the Lima Work Program on Gender:

1. Integrating Care Economy Analysis into Climate Policy

Transport mitigation strategies within Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) largely overlook unpaid care work as a mobility driver. Embedding gender-disaggregated mobility data, trip-purpose analysis, and time-use data into NDC baselines would enable more effective and equitable emissions reduction strategies.

2. Use of Gender-Responsive Budgeting in Transport Investments

Current infrastructure investments disproportionately prioritize highways over pedestrian safety, last-mile connectivity, and public transport systems-areas critical for women's mobility. Applying gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) tools to climate-related transport expenditures can ensure alignment with both emissions reduction and gender equality commitments.

3. Electric Rural Minibuses as a Gender-Responsive Climate Solution

Electrification debates focus primarily on urban fleets and private electric vehicles. The study proposes electric minibuses for rural areas as a dual mitigation-adaptation intervention: reducing emissions while addressing women's mobility poverty, improving access to healthcare and employment, and lowering long-term operational costs for municipalities.

The evidence aligns directly with the objectives of the Belém Gender Action Plan (2026–2034), which calls for:

- Integration of care work into climate policy frameworks.
- Strengthened gender-disaggregated and intersectional data.
- Gender-responsive climate finance and budgeting.
- Coherence between mitigation, adaptation, and social policy instruments

A key policy conclusion of this submission is that gender-responsive transport is not a "social add-on" to climate policy. It is a structural precondition for effective mitigation and adaptation. Without addressing care-driven mobility patterns, transport decarbonization strategies risk reinforcing inequality, increasing car dependency, and failing to reach vulnerable populations.

The case study therefore recommends:

- Explicit recognition of unpaid care work in transport and climate strategies.
- Integration of gender and time-use data into NDC and NAP planning.
- Territorial differentiation between urban and rural mobility solutions.
- Investment in climate-resilient and accessible infrastructure.
- Institutionalized participation of women's organizations in transport and climate planning processes.

By linking care, transport, and climate policy, this submission demonstrates that advancing gender equality strengthens climate ambition. A care-sensitive transport transition is both a mitigation strategy and a social justice imperative.

WHY GENDER-RESPONSIVE TRANSPORT IS ESSENTIAL FOR JUST CLIMATE ACTION?

Climate transport policy cannot succeed without integrating unpaid care work. Evidence from seven countries in the Western Balkans and Moldova shows that women's mobility patterns are shaped by care responsibilities. When public transport fails to reflect these patterns, emissions increase and inequality deepens.

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).

About GBWN Lima Work Program Case Study on Gender, Care and Transport

This submission presents evidence from seven countries in the Western Balkans and Moldova demonstrating that unpaid care work is a structural driver of women's mobility patterns and must be integrated into climate-responsive transport policy.

The case study is based on quantitative survey on gendered mobility patterns conducted online in seven countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Moldova and Republic of Moldova. The survey results were cross analyzed using qualitative research methods – focus group discussions in which 100 participants across the case study countries were included. The research had urban and rural representation, as well as inclusion of caregivers, elderly women, women with disabilities, and minority communities, allowing for the analysis to intersect gender, geography (urban/rural), disability and socio-economic status. The research and this study are product of the Gender Budget Watchdog Network - GBWN.

The case study confirms that:

- Women disproportionately perform unpaid care work.
- Women rely more heavily on public transport and walking.
- Inadequate transport systems increase car dependency where possible.
- Climate disruptions exacerbate care-related mobility burdens.
- Rural women face systemic exclusion due to infrastructure gaps.

This submission contributes to the Lima Work Program on Gender by:

- Demonstrating how transport systems shape gendered climate vulnerability.
- Providing evidence-based recommendations for gender-responsive mitigation.
- Proposing integrated care–transport–climate policy approaches.
- Supporting implementation of gender-responsive National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

KEY EVIDENCE

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 travel primarily for caregiving tasks

The case study demonstrates that women's daily mobility patterns are fundamentally structured around unpaid care responsibilities. Across all seven countries studied, women's travel is dominated by school drop-offs and pick-ups, accompanying elderly family members to medical appointments, shopping for household needs, and managing multiple short errands linked to caregiving. These "trip-chained" journeys are frequent, time-sensitive, and multi-stop in nature. Unlike men's more linear commuting patterns, women's mobility is highly complex and constrained by institutional schedules. This confirms that unpaid care work is a primary driver of transport demand and must be explicitly recognized in climate and mobility planning.

• Public transport schedules do not align with care needs

The case study reveals a consistent misalignment between public transport systems and women's caregiving schedules. Bus routes and timetables rarely correspond with school hours, early work shifts, healthcare appointments, or multi-stop travel patterns. In many municipalities, early morning and evening services are absent, and services are reduced during school holidays-precisely when caregivers still need mobility. As a result, women experience increased time poverty, stress, and reliance on private cars when available. This systemic design gap reinforces gender inequality and undermines the emissions-reduction potential of public transport systems.

• Rural women lack reliable transport

The case study highlights stark territorial inequalities. In rural areas across the Western Balkans and Moldova, public transport is either irregular, infrequent, or entirely absent. Some villages operate a single bus per day, while others rely exclusively on informal rides, taxis, or male family members. This lack of reliable transport restricts access to employment, healthcare, education, and social life. Rural women face structural mobility exclusion, increasing economic dependency and reinforcing traditional gender roles. Without targeted rural transport investments, climate and mobility policies risk deepening geographic and gender disparities.

• Women decline jobs due to transport gaps

Transport barriers directly limit women's labor market participation. Participants across multiple countries reported declining job offers due to lack of early morning routes, unreliable bus schedules, or excessive travel time. In rural municipalities, distance to employment centers combined with poor transport connectivity makes formal employment unattainable for many women, particularly single mothers. Even in urban settings, congestion and parking limitations reduce job flexibility. The findings demonstrate that transport infrastructure is not only a climate issue but also a determinant of women's economic empowerment and financial independence.

CONCLUSIONS

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 medica 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.

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.

CHALLENGES

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

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.

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 organizations 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. Organize 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) linking 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 including subsidized municipal minibuses serving remote villages.

→ Maintain services during school holidays to support working caregivers by introducing 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 organizations.

→ **Support green mobility through subsidies for electric vehicles and bicycles (including cargo and child-carrying models).**

→ **Integrate climate adaptation into transport infrastructure upgrades by prioritizing flood-resistant roads and erosion control in rural municipalities; introducing shaded sidewalks, cooling elements, and air-conditioned buses in heat-prone areas.**

PROPOSED COP DISCUSSION THEMES

INTEGRATING CARE ECONOMY ANALYSIS INTO NDC TRANSPORT COMMITMENTS

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) often treat transport primarily as a mitigation sector, while overlooking the care economy - the unpaid and paid work of caring for children, elderly persons, persons with disabilities, and households. Women disproportionately carry this burden, and transport systems shape their time use, labour force participation, safety, and emissions footprint.

What integration would mean?

Embedding in NDC transport baselines gender-disaggregated mobility data (trip purpose, travel chains, time poverty) would reveal the different needs of women compared to those of men and provide for more gender responsive discussions and eventually solutions.

Recognition of multi-stop trip patterns ("trip chaining") which are typical of care-related mobility and including proximity-based planning (15-minute communities, rural service hubs) as both mitigation and adaptation measures to prevent from the tendencies in migration to cities and creating infrastructure gaps (relevant to achieving SDG 11).

What are the policy entry points in NDCs?

- Explicitly referencing care-sensitive transport in mitigation targets (public transport electrification prioritizing routes serving schools, health centers, markets).
- Linking transport commitments to National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) where climate impacts increase care burdens (heatwaves, floods disrupting access to services).
- Including gender-responsive indicators in NDC monitoring frameworks.

How is it relevant to Belém Gender Action Plan (GAP) COP 30?

The Belém Gender Action Plan (GAP) for 2026-2034 explicitly includes care work - among the key thematic areas to be integrated into climate policies, planning, data and action. This means that gender-responsive climate action must look beyond traditional mitigation and adaptation metrics to include the burden and value of unpaid and paid care work.

A core objective of the Belém GAP is improving gender-disaggregated and intersectional data -including identifying multidimensional factors that shape how climate change affects different people and communities.

The Belém GAP emphasizes the need for coherence between gender, mitigation, adaptation, planning instruments (like NDCs/NAPs), and finance mechanisms.

GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUDGETING IN TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

Transport infrastructure investments are often gender-blind. Roads and highways receive disproportionate funding, while pedestrian safety, lighting, last-mile connectivity, and public transport - essential for women's mobility - are underfunded.

What integration would mean?

Employing gender responsive budgeting methodologies allows for systematic gender impact assessments prior to infrastructure investment. The gender relevance of investments can be tracked using budget tagging that can be used also to follow how transport spending addresses gender equality. Typical gender responsive investments in transport are addressing safety concerns thus funding for measures such as lighting, safe bus stops, secure pedestrian paths are prioritized, as well as measures for equal participation in green transport sectors employment.

What are the policy entry points in NDCs?

- Integrate GRB in NDC Implementation Plans and Climate Investment Plans
- Include gender impact assessments in the transport mitigation and adaptation sections
- Commit to gender budget tagging for climate-related transport expenditures.

How is it relevant to Belém Gender Action Plan (GAP) COP 30?

The COP30 outcomes explicitly state that the Belém Gender Action Plan advances gender-responsive budgeting and climate finance - making it clear that climate action must allocate and track resources in ways that contribute to gender equality, not just mention it.

The GAP underlines that all three pillars of implementation in the Paris Agreement - finance, capacity building, and technology transfer - must be gender-responsive. A central GAP priority is coherence - meaning gender equality must be integrated across climate planning, national budgets, and sectoral policies, rather than remaining siloed.

ELECTRIC MINIBUSES AND LOW-EMISSION RURAL MOBILITY

Electrification discussions often focus on urban buses and private EVs. Rural mobility remains fossil-fuel dependent, fragmented, and under-served. GBWN case study identifies electric minibuses as a solution for both climate change mitigation (emissions reduction) and mobility inclusion. They are suitable for dispersed settlements and lower passenger volumes and have lower operating costs over time can improve service sustainability. To this end the electric minibuses are decarbonization measure as it is a gender-responsive climate solution addressing mobility inequality, access to services, and economic participation.

What integration would mean?

Including blended finance models (public subsidy, use of available climate financing opportunities and local municipal funding) in design of the transport service delivery in rural areas ensuring affordability for low-income rural populations.

Development of local EV charging infrastructure integrated with renewable energy sources, considering that the WB has ambitious goals for transition from coal produced electricity to renewable energy production.

What are the policy entry points in NDCs?

- Include a specific rural electrification measure in transport mitigation
- Set targets that will track the use of EV buses for low emission and improved rural mobility such as: number of electric minibuses deployed in rural areas; % of rural public transport fleet electrified by 2030/2035; CO_2 reductions from rural fleet electrification, and etc. as well as gender indicators such as number of women users; number of jobs created / utilized etc.

How is it relevant to Belém Gender Action Plan (GAP) COP 30?

The Belém GAP calls for integrating gender equality across mitigation, adaptation, finance, and implementation. Electric rural minibuses are gender-relevant as they address women's mobility poverty in rural areas; reduce time burdens linked to unpaid care work; and improve safe access to healthcare, education, and markets. In this way investing in electric rural minibuses climate mitigation intervention is transformed into gender-responsive climate policy, which is exactly what the GAP promotes.

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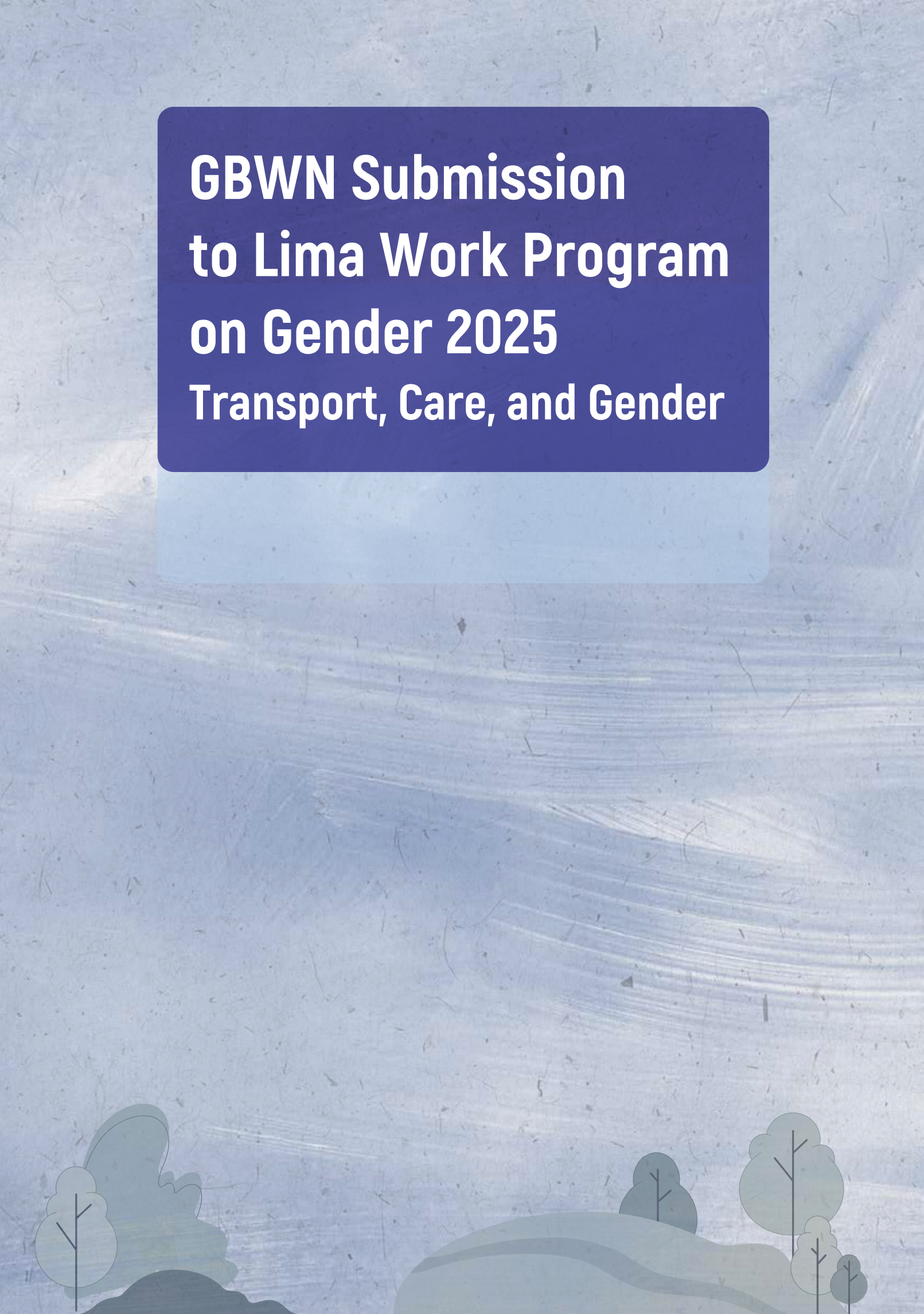
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