



ORGANIZATION OF THE BLACK SEA ECONOMIC COOPERATION

Permanent International Secretariat – The Secretary General

The BSEC PERMIS perspective on gender issues in Transport

The Organization of the *Black Sea Economic Cooperation* (BSEC) and its *Permanent International Secretariat* (PERMIS) attach special importance to the cooperation in the field of Transport, focusing mainly on how to utilize effectively intra-region capacity and the growing transit potential of the Black Sea region.

The issue of effective gender-mainstreaming with an objective of achieving gender equality and of making greater use of the human resources in the region remains in the focus of BSEC's activity.

In their Joint Declarations on the occasion of the 20th and 25th Anniversary Summits of the BSEC Organization, the Heads of State and Government of its Members stressed, in particular, the importance of gender equality and the vital role of women's participation in economic and political processes for achieving sustainable and inclusive development.

To date, however, the Transport sector remains a male-dominated sector: women are under-represented in all modes of transport and at all levels of decision-making; the ratio becomes more disappointing when it comes to senior management positions.

Nevertheless, it is useful to take note of the positive trends we witness today in BSEC. In 2018, out of the twelve BSEC Member States, only one was represented by a female Minister in charge of Transport. However, at the time of drafting the present report, the BSEC Organization has three female Ministers responsible for Transport. One of them, Prof. Dr. Zorana Mihajlovic, is also the head of the Coordination Body for Gender Equality, established by the Government of the Republic of Serbia in 2014 with the aim of promoting gender equality.

The BSEC Organization's institutional capacity in the Transport area has been substantially enhanced as a result of its fruitful cooperation with a number of transport partners, mainly with the *Union of the Road Transport Associations* in the BSEC Region (BSEC-URTA), the President of which is Mrs. Asli Calik.

Undoubtedly, the issue of gender equality, in particular the representation of women and men on equal terms in the decision-making process is a very important issue for reasons of Justice and Democracy, if not for pure economic arguments. Therefore, BSEC PERMIS welcomes the efforts of the ITF in this regard and wishes to contribute to their promotion.

We, in the BSEC *Permanent International Secretariat* firmly believe that the Transport sector should be open to women not only as users, but also as actors.

But the fact is that prevailing conditions in the sector today make the above almost unattainable, at least in the part of the overall transport-economy that refers to drivers. For example: low salaries, long days away from home, poor to unacceptable facilities along the long-haul transport-routes, “inhuman” working hours and days, long delays (sometimes week-long!) at border crossing points, etc.

The above are some reasons because of which women are today present as actors in the transport sector mainly in “office jobs”, providing secretarial or other logistic services.

The introduction of new technologies, innovative solutions, artificial intelligence and 5G in the Transport sector will certainly help alleviate many of the problems mentioned above.

Digitalization will bring-in faster and less cumbersome / confusing procedures; “self-driving” trucks in the future, or the introduction of exclusive driving lanes for trucks will also contribute to transform today’s difficult driving reality of huge truck-goliaths into a much easier – physically and mentally – task, thus, more women could be attracted to finding employment as “digital-age” drivers.

Technological change and innovation are transforming the transport sector, offering employment opportunities for both men and women; it is essential that women gain access to the training and skills needed to use such employment opportunities.

Today we should open local / regional transports more to women: distances are shorter, the days / time away from home are briefer, women know their region best, thus, feel more comfortable in engaging in regional transports, many of the aforementioned serious problems of the long-haul transports do not exist or produce less difficulties.

The employment of women to fill-in the already open gaps for satisfying the e-commerce transport-needs could prove to be very important.

Covid-19 has shown that the need for local / regional transports will intensify as the dramatic increase of e-commerce demonstrates: people are already buying more products / services through e-commerce than ever before and all these goods will have to be delivered regionally / locally. The Coronavirus period, in which we still live in, has accelerated the growth of e-commerce by at least 5 if not 10 years!

In conclusion, today it is an established fact that sustainable development relies on ending discrimination towards women and on providing equal opportunities to them, especially for employment. It has been conclusively shown that gender equality decisively stimulates economic growth, which can be crucial for lower-income countries. All stakeholders in the Transport sector should draw the necessary conclusions and act accordingly.

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Ambassador Michael B. Christides, Secretary General of the *Permanent International Secretariat* (PERMIS) of the Organization of the *Black Sea Economic Cooperation* (BSEC)