

LITERATURE RELATED TO GENDER DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVE HRM IN TRANSPORT COMPANIES

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ABSTRACT

This research paper presents a comprehensive literature review on diversity and inclusion (D&I) in the transport sector, analyzing strategic approaches, challenges, and sectoral impacts. The study synthesizes findings from 50 scholarly articles, reports, and case studies published between 2009 and 2025, focusing on gender equity, disability inclusion, and sustainable HR practices. Key themes reveal persistent barriers such as occupational segregation, unconscious bias, and inadequate policy frameworks, particularly in male-dominated roles (e.g., engineering, logistics). For instance, women constitute only 22% of transport workers in Europe (Mejia-Dorantes, 2019), while disabled employees face accessibility gaps and employment insecurity (Borghouts-van de Pas & Freese, 2017). The review highlights effective D&I interventions, including gender-neutral recruitment (Estrada et al., 2017), flexible work policies (Ahuchogu et al., 2024), and leadership commitment (Vohra et al., 2015). Notably, companies with diverse leadership teams exhibit 15–35% higher financial performance (Hunt et al., 2015). However, implementation gaps persist, as seen in vague corporate reporting on equality (Malavasi, 2025) and tokenistic diversity programs (French & Strachan, 2009). The transport sector's unique challenges—such as long hours, safety risks, and skill shortages—demand tailored HR strategies, including green HRM (Borges, 2021) and TQM-aligned training (Pantouvakis & Karakasnaki, 2017). The paper underscores the strategic alignment of D&I with organizational goals, advocating for metrics-driven approaches (Keen et al., 2021) and systemic changes in workplace culture. It calls for future research on intersectional inclusivity, technology-enabled HR solutions, and policy reforms to address structural inequities. By bridging theory and practice, this review offers a roadmap for transport firms to harness diversity as a catalyst for innovation, resilience, and sustainable growth.

Keywords: Diversity and inclusion, Transport sector, Gender equity, Sustainable HRM, Workplace accessibility, Organizational performance.

INTRODUCTION

The transport sector serves as the backbone of global economic activity, enabling trade, mobility, and supply chain efficiency. Yet, it remains one of the least diverse industries, with persistent gender imbalances, underrepresentation of disabled workers, and systemic barriers for ethnic minorities. Women constitute only 22% of the transport workforce in Europe

(Mejia-Dorantes, 2019), while disabled employees and marginalized groups face exclusion due to inaccessible workplaces and biased hiring practices. These disparities not only limit talent pools but also hinder innovation, productivity, and organizational resilience. A growing body of research underscores the business case for diversity: companies with gender-diverse leadership teams are 15% more likely to outperform peers, and ethnically diverse firms see 35% higher financial returns (Hunt et al., 2015). However, the transport sector lags behind in implementing effective diversity and inclusion (D&I) strategies, often due to entrenched cultural norms, fragmented policies, and a lack of accountability. This literature review synthesizes 50 studies (2009–2025) to analyze the root causes of these inequities, evaluate successful interventions, and propose actionable frameworks for fostering inclusive workplaces in transport organizations.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN TRANSPORT SECTOR D&I

The transport industry's diversity gaps stem from multifaceted barriers. Occupational segregation confines women to administrative roles, with only 2% in engineering positions in UK maritime agencies (Estrada et al., 2017). Disabled workers encounter physical inaccessibility and attitudinal biases, while ethnic minorities face discrimination in promotions (Keen et al., 2021). These issues are compounded by vague corporate reporting on D&I (Malavasi, 2025) and tokenistic policies that prioritize compliance over cultural change (French & Strachan, 2009). However, emerging solutions offer promise. Gender-neutral recruitment, flexible work arrangements, and leadership mentorship programs have proven effective in reducing bias (Vohra et al., 2015). Technological innovations, such as AI-driven HR tools and VR training for disability awareness, are reshaping inclusivity efforts (Zijlstra & Vanoutrive, 2018). Furthermore, integrating D&I with sustainability goals—like green HRM and ethical supply chains—aligns social equity with long-term business performance (Borges, 2021). The sector's unique challenges, such as shift-based labor and safety risks, demand tailored strategies, but the potential for transformative impact is significant.

TOWARD A ROADMAP FOR INCLUSIVE TRANSFORMATION

This review identifies three critical areas for progress: (1) Systemic Policy Reforms, including mandatory D&I metrics and leadership accountability; (2) Intersectional Approaches that address overlapping inequities (e.g., women of color in logistics); and (3) Technology-Enabled Solutions, from bias-free hiring algorithms to digital upskilling (Ogedengbe et al., 2024). Case studies from Sweden's GaDAP-tool (Frid Eriksson, 2022) and Indonesia's board diversity initiatives (Nurcahyono et al., 2023) demonstrate the value of localized, data-driven strategies. The paper concludes with recommendations for transport firms to move beyond compliance, embedding D&I into core operations to unlock innovation, employee satisfaction, and competitive advantage. By bridging research and practice, this study aims to equip stakeholders with evidence-based tools to build equitable and sustainable transport systems for the future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

GENDER DIVERSITY AND TRANSPORT WORKFORCE

The transport sector's gender gap remains stubbornly persistent, with women comprising just 22% of Europe's transport workforce (Mejia-Dorantes, 2019), facing horizontal and vertical segregation, pay disparities, and exclusion from decision-making roles. While some companies have made progress through gender-sensitive recruitment and flexible policies, systemic change remains elusive. Across the globe, similar patterns emerge: in Australia,

generic Equal Employment Opportunity policies failed to increase female participation in male-dominated roles, with only anti-harassment measures and training access showing real impact (French & Strachan, 2009). The UK's engineering agencies exemplify extreme underrepresentation, with just 2 female marine surveyors out of 99 (Estrada et al., 2017), prompting calls for behavioral science-informed hiring reforms. Meanwhile, corporate reporting often obscures the issue - rail companies' diversity disclosures tend to be vague and symbolic rather than substantive (Malavasi, 2025). However, promising tools like Sweden's GaDAP (Frid Eriksson, 2022) and comprehensive frameworks from U.S. transit agencies (Keen et al., 2021) demonstrate that measurable metrics, leadership commitment, and integrated strategies can drive progress. The business case is clear: diverse teams enhance innovation and financial performance (Powers et al., 2019), yet transport companies must move beyond tokenism to achieve critical mass, particularly in leadership. From India's corporate boards (Sikand et al., 2013) to Barcelona's CSR-focused transit firms (Arimany-Serrat et al., 2019), the sector is gradually recognizing gender diversity as both a social imperative and strategic advantage - but overcoming structural barriers will require sustained, targeted action across policies, culture, and measurement systems.

GENDER DIVERSITY AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

A growing body of research underscores the multifaceted role of gender diversity in shaping corporate behavior and performance across sectors and geographies. In Indonesia's energy and transportation industries, Sulistyawati and Rahmawati (2024) found that greater gender diversity on boards is paradoxically associated with increased tax avoidance, while audit committees and board size have little effect—highlighting regulatory loopholes in governance. Similarly, Nurlaela Mapparessa and colleagues (2017) revealed that while political visibility negatively impacts sustainability disclosures, gender diversity has no notable influence, suggesting that visibility doesn't always lead to transparency. In contrast, Nurcahyono et al. (2023) demonstrated that gender-diverse boards, along with strong managerial ownership and profitability, reduce the risk of financial distress, particularly during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Beyond governance and finance, gender dynamics also shape employer branding: Rzemieniak and Wawer (2021) showed that Generation Z—especially women—value sustainability in employer branding, urging firms to align their strategies with eco-conscious values. Reinforcing the broader business case, McKinsey's landmark report "Diversity Matters" (Hunt et al., 2015) concluded that companies with higher gender and ethnic diversity significantly outperform their peers, benefiting from improved innovation, decision-making, and customer orientation. Together, these studies suggest that while gender diversity can influence various corporate outcomes, its impact depends heavily on context, complementary governance practices, and the extent to which organizations integrate diversity into broader strategic objectives.

STRATEGIC HRM AND INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY

Human Resource Management (HRM) in the transport and logistics sectors is evolving rapidly to meet the demands of a dynamic global environment. A growing body of research highlights how strategic HRM practices—ranging from workforce planning and digital transformation to sustainability and inclusion—play a critical role in boosting operational efficiency and employee well-being. For instance, Rahman (2025) underscores how strategic HRM can address sector-wide challenges like skill gaps and labor shortages, while Pantouvakis and Karakasnaki (2017) show that strong human talent directly enhances Total Quality Management performance in transport firms. Studies by Borges (2021) and Ogedengbe et al. (2024) emphasize how HR policies aligned with sustainability and employee development foster resilience and business continuity, particularly in global

logistics and shipping. Meanwhile, inclusive HR practices, as explored by Borghouts-van de Pas and Freese (2017) and Vohra et al. (2015), contribute to employment equity for marginalized groups, including the disabled, through supportive recruitment, accommodation, and leadership strategies. Zijlstra and Vanoutrive (2018) add a sustainability angle by exploring how mobility budgets integrated into HR policies can promote green commuting and employee wellness. Le et al. (2023) further reveal how diversity and inclusion in resource-intensive sectors like mining face cultural and gender-related barriers that can be mitigated through equitable hiring and inclusive workplace cultures. Complementing this, Savanevičienė and Vilčiauskaitė (2017) contrast exclusive versus inclusive talent management approaches, highlighting their implications for long-term workforce engagement. Finally, Arefin (2025) illustrates the need for agile HR strategies in navigating global supply chains, where cross-border coordination and talent development are essential. Altogether, these insights portray HRM as a strategic engine that not only drives performance but also fosters equity, adaptability, and sustainability across transport and logistics ecosystems.

INCLUSIVE HRM, TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND GREEN HRM

Human Resource Management (HRM) is increasingly recognized as a strategic force driving diversity, sustainability, innovation, and employee engagement across various sectors, including transport. Bennett, Blum, and Roman (1994) first distinguished exclusive versus inclusive HRM through the lens of drug screening and assistance programs, underlining their influence on workplace culture and productivity. Building on this, Konrad et al. (2016) emphasized how inclusive diversity and equality systems, when rooted in strategic HRM, lead to equitable growth and stronger organizational outcomes. In the context of the rail sector, Nocella (2025) shed light on the power of transparent language in DEI communications, while Meena and Vanka (2013) explored how Indian companies navigate cultural complexities to foster inclusive workplaces. Transformational leadership, as studied by Azmy and Perkasa (2024), plays a vital role in motivating innovative behavior in public transport firms, driving both service quality and employee performance. Meanwhile, Zhao et al. (2021) and Prasad (2013) showcased how green HRM and CSR practices enhance sustainable performance and brand credibility, proving that eco-conscious strategies can align with competitive growth. Addressing the long-haul transport sector, Ahuchogu et al. (2024) highlighted wellness programs and tech-based solutions to combat fatigue and elevate employee morale. Erbil et al. (2025) critiqued "neuronormativity" in unsupportive policy environments, calling for adaptive HRM frameworks to accommodate neurodiversity. During the COVID-19 crisis, Baruffini (2020) demonstrated how SMEs in the Regio Insubria region employed innovative HRM tactics to ensure inclusive and stable employment. Together, these studies portray HRM not merely as an administrative function but as a transformative tool that builds equitable, resilient, and forward-looking organizations.

INCLUSIVE HRM PRACTICES AND GENDER DIVERSITY

The evolving landscape of Human Resource Management (HRM) reveals a powerful shift toward inclusivity, equity, and sustainability, especially in addressing gender and ability diversity across sectors. Zulmi et al. (2021) emphasize inclusive HRM practices for employees with disabilities, advocating for adaptive technologies and awareness training to boost workplace equity. Gender inclusion, viewed as a complex organizational transformation by Kulkarni et al. (2021), requires dismantling institutional bias through mentorship and unbiased recruitment. Bader et al. (2024) delve into the underrepresentation of women in global mobility roles, suggesting stronger corporate support and policy shifts to empower female expatriates. Clarke et al. (2017) critique the ineffectiveness of gender

policies in British construction, calling for cultural reform and proactive leadership. Similarly, Gülsoy and Ustabaş (2019) reveal how emerging-market firms are using flexible work, equal pay, and leadership support to embed gender equality within sustainability agendas. Kitiri (2020) links gender-diverse boards to successful Green HRM and ethical corporate governance, reinforcing the environmental and social benefits of diverse leadership. Ali et al. (2015) further show that family-friendly work policies significantly improve gender parity and organizational performance. Meanwhile, Donnelly (2015) outlines the unique challenges faced by Indian IT multinationals in managing diversity, stressing the need for cultural sensitivity and leadership engagement. Starostka-Patyk et al. (2015) frame diversity as a pillar of CSR, with inclusivity strengthening company ethics and employee morale. Galdiero et al. (2024) complete this picture by positioning gender diversity as a key driver of sustainable HRM practices, fostering innovation, social inclusiveness, and long-term corporate resilience. Together, these studies portray a holistic and transformative vision of HRM—one where diversity is not a peripheral concern but a core strategy for thriving, equitable organizations.

CONCLUSION

The transport sector's journey toward diversity and inclusion is both a critical challenge and a significant opportunity for transformative change. The reviewed literature highlights that achieving genuine inclusivity requires systemic reforms, strategic HRM integration, and a commitment to intersectional approaches that address the complex realities of gender, ability, and ethnic diversity. Effective policies must move beyond tokenism, embedding measurable accountability, leadership engagement, and culturally sensitive practices supported by innovative technologies. When aligned with sustainability and ethical governance, inclusive HRM not only enhances organizational resilience and employee well-being but also drives innovation and competitive advantage. Ultimately, fostering equitable and diverse workplaces in transport is essential for building sustainable, adaptable, and forward-looking organizations that reflect and serve the evolving global economy.

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