

EBRD: Supporting women's employment in the passenger transport sector in Kazakhstan



**European Bank**  
for Reconstruction and Development

# Lessons on equal opportunity from Almatyelectrotrans

## Key points

### EBRD is committed to supporting equal opportunity for women and men in transport

- EBRD aims to support the development of safe, secure and sustainable public transport systems, which provide equal benefits for women and men, including equal access to job opportunities in the sector.
- To promote good practice on equal opportunity in the transport sector in Kazakhstan, EBRD worked closely with one of its clients, Almatyelectrotrans (AET) in Almaty, in 2013-2015 to strengthen its capacity to ensure equal opportunity for its workers and to introduce women drivers into its bus operations.

### A focus on equal opportunity makes business sense for AET and other transport operators

- Women make safe and responsible drivers. At a time when Almaty is expanding and modernising its public transport system, AET wants to make sure that it attracts the best workers into its operations – women and men alike – and does not miss out on the skills and potential of half the population.
- Given that around 60% of AET's passengers are women (according to municipal government estimates), it makes sense to ensure that the company's workforce is representative of its customer base. More women drivers can help to demonstrate that AET is a modern company attuned to the needs of all of its passengers – female and male.
- Studies suggest that workplaces with a more even balance of women and men tend to be more productive and enjoyable for everyone, strengthening team dynamics and reducing staff turnover.

### Women need particular support and encouragement to enter the transport sector

- For many of AET's existing women drivers, becoming a driver was a lifelong goal: many were inspired by family members who already worked in the transport industry. For these women, driving represents a steady job, with access to regular wages and social security benefits.
- However, other women face many barriers to working in transport, including widespread perceptions that driving is not a suitable profession for women. In addition, legal restrictions on women's employment in Kazakhstan make it more difficult for women to attain the licenses needed for passenger transport vehicles.

### AET's strategies for promoting equal opportunity in transport

- **Proactive outreach and recruitment strategies:** AET changed its advertising to make it clear that 'women are welcome to apply' and conducted an Open Day to provide the opportunity for women and men job-seekers to have face-to-face contact with AET managers and staff.
- **New company policies and procedures:** AET has allocated management responsibility for equal opportunity, introduced a written company policy on equal opportunity and started collecting sex-disaggregated workforce data.
- **Improved facilities for women and men:** AET conducted an audit of toilets, common areas and other facilities on all of its routes and upgraded facilities that were in need of refurbishment.

### Positive outcomes on equal opportunity at AET

- AET hired its first woman bus driver in 2015, resulting in positive press coverage for the company, and now has plans to recruit more. The company has also seen an increase in the proportion of women in management (from 19% to 28%) and the recruitment of women into previously all-male teams, such as technical maintenance.

## I. EBRD and AET: Working together to promote equal opportunity in the transport sector

- Transport is a key enabler of economic and social development, providing women and men with the infrastructure they need to access jobs, education and health and other services. EBRD aims to support the development of safe, secure and sustainable transport systems, which provide equal access for women and men to decent job opportunities in the sector.
- To promote good practice on equal opportunity in the transport sector, EBRD worked closely with one of its clients, Almatyelectrotrans (AET), from October 2013 to June 2015. The twin goals of the project were to:
  1. Strengthen AET's capacity to ensure equal opportunity for women and men in its operations; and
  2. Support AET to increase the number of women bus drivers in its bus operations.
- AET welcomed the project as an opportunity to make further progress on the company's existing commitment to equal opportunity.

### Almatyelectrotrans (AET): Company profile

AET is the City of Almaty's public transport operator and provides services across three modes of transport: buses, trolleybuses and trams.

As of May 2015, AET employed a total of 2367 employees, of which just over half (54%) are drivers. The majority of AET's drivers (81%) are in its bus operations.

As is the case with many other transport operators across the world, women are underrepresented in AET's workforce, particularly in operational positions. Overall, women account for 20% of AET's total workforce and only 7.1% of its drivers. Women account for 32% of trolleybus drivers and 66% of tram drivers, but less than 1% of bus drivers.

## 2. Why equal opportunity makes sense for a transport operator like AET

### Equal opportunity means attracting – and retaining – the best workers

- Almaty is in the process of expanding and modernising its public transport system, which involves attracting and retaining motivated workers who will help the organisation to grow and improve over time.
- In this context, a focus on equal opportunity makes sense: AET needs to consider how to attract women and men alike into its operations, ensuring that it is not missing out on the potential and skills of half the population.

### More women drivers can help to enhance AET's public profile and improve customer relations

- AET provides a key public service to the citizens of Almaty and AET's drivers are its 'public face'; that is, the people who deliver services to its customers on a daily basis.

**"Female passengers are always pleased to see me. They say, 'We will show those men that we can drive and we are strong!'"**

Ludmila Molokovskaya, AET's first woman bus driver



- It is estimated that around 60% of AET's passengers are women: a higher proportion of women drivers could help to improve its public image by making its 'public face' more representative of its customer base. In the same way, more women drivers could also help to heighten the quality of engagement with passengers and ensure that its services are more attuned to the needs of all of its passengers – female and male.

**“Ludmila [AET's first woman bus driver] helps to attract positive attention to AET – a bit like an advertisement ... AET has a new modern fleet and we now have women who work for us – these things help to show that we are a modern company.”**

Bolat Abaideldinov, Managing Director, AET

### Women make safe and reliable drivers

- According to AET supervisors and managers, women are just as capable of driving buses, trolleybuses and trams as men, without any need to adapt vehicles or equipment: AET's modern fleet, including the new EBRD-funded buses that have automatic gearboxes and run on compressed natural gas (CNG), makes driving easier than ever for all drivers – women and men alike.
- AET managers and supervisors say that women are safe and responsible drivers and pay careful attention to the maintenance of their vehicles.

### Women are loyal employees

- At AET, staff turnover rates amongst women drivers are less than half those of men. Given the time and effort needed to recruit and train new drivers, the low turnover rate amongst women drivers helps AET to retain valuable driving expertise and save money.

### A more even balance of women and men makes for happier, more productive workers

- Workplaces with a more even balance of women and men are more productive and enjoyable for everyone. International studies suggest that this can help to strengthen team dynamics and create higher levels of employee satisfaction.



## 3. What inspires women to become drivers for AET?

- AET already employs a number of experienced women drivers who are positive role models for other women and ambassadors for the company. In Soviet times, trolleybus and tram driving was perceived to be a female occupation, so women have been working in these operations for many years.
- AET's women trolleybus drivers say that one of the most enjoyable parts of the job is passenger interaction, as well as the satisfaction involved in mastering a heavy vehicle. For many, becoming a driver was a lifelong

goal: some were inspired by family members, including husbands and parents, who already worked in the transport industry.

**“I like to drive and I like to have contact with people.”**

Valentina, trolleybus driver

**“It has always been my dream to be a bus driver! ... I like the communication aspect. You stop, start, go and talk to people along the way.”**

Ludmila, bus driver

**“The salary is stable, I don’t have to worry about unpaid wages. Plus, it’s interesting for a woman to be a driver.”**

Irina, trolleybus driver

**“I like driving a big vehicle; it has good visibility and I like the responsibility. I was a conductor on my father’s bus when I first started working for the company.”**

Iana, trolleybus driver

**“I like driving and I like communicating with people. My mother-in-law was a conductor. I saw women trolley bus drivers when I was young and wanted to be one too.”**

Madena, trolleybus driver

## 4. What are the barriers that women face to working in the transport sector?

- In order to encourage and support women to join the sector, it is important to identify and understand the types of barriers that women face to entering the sector.

### Common (mis)perceptions about ‘women’s work’

- One of the greatest obstacles to increasing the number of women workers in transport relates to popular ideas about what constitutes a ‘suitable’ job for women. In many countries, including Kazakhstan, transport has traditionally been a male-dominated field, offering jobs that are considered ‘inappropriate’ or ‘too dirty or difficult’ for women.
- These kinds of fixed ideas influence women’s willingness to train and apply for certain jobs in transport, particularly operational or technical positions (compared with office jobs), as well as the encouragement they receive from others to pursue careers in transport.
- These attitudes also affect the type of roles that women are more likely to hold within the sector. In Kazakhstan, some jobs in transport are traditionally seen to be more suitable for women, such as trolleybus and tram driving, administration and dispatch, but not others, such as bus driving or maintenance. However, these attitudes are increasingly outdated, as AET has new vehicles that are easy to drive and maintenance is carried out by dedicated teams at each depot.

**“My mother didn’t encourage me and still doesn’t think that driving is a good job for a woman. She was happier when I was working in a garment factory [because she thought it was more appropriate]. I tell her that bus driving is a good job – I work for two days and then get two days off to spend with my family.”**

Ludmila, AET’s first woman bus driver

## Legislative barriers

- In Kazakhstan, legal requirements for licensing represents a further obstacle to women's ability to become drivers in the passenger transport industry. One of the prerequisites for gaining a bus driver's licence (Category D) in Kazakhstan is a heavy goods vehicle (HGV) licence (Category C), accompanied by 12 months' experience driving a HGV. However, at the same time, women are prohibited by Kazakh law from driving HGVs, effectively barring them from driving buses as a profession. In the past, authorities have waived the Category C requirement for some women – such as Ludmila, AET's first woman bus driver – but there is no formal government policy and so the number of women with bus licences remains very low.
- There has been some headway on addressing these barriers: in 2014, the Government introduced an administrative order that permits trolleybus drivers to sit the test for the Category D licence, without the need for previous HGV experience. This resulted from concerted engagement by EBRD, on AET's behalf, with the Ministry of the Interior.
- However, important obstacles still persist: as a result of other legal reforms in 2014, the requirement for Category C licences and experience now also applies to trolleybus and tram driving: this presents a new barrier to women's employment at AET and for other companies.

## 5. Strategies for promoting equal opportunity – examples of good practice from AET

### Proactive recruitment and outreach to women

- One of AET's first initiatives was to **change the wording of its job advertisements for drivers** to specify that 'women are welcome to apply'. This change aimed to raise awareness that the company was actively seeking to recruit more women drivers and to dispel any preconceptions that these advertisements were targeted at men.
- The company sought to improve its outreach to women (and men) by holding its first **Open Day for job-seekers** in February 2014. This provided the opportunity for potential applicants to visit the company's headquarters, have face-to-face contact with AET staff and ask questions about what it involves to work at AET. Journalists were invited to attend, resulting in **media coverage** of AET's quest to encourage more women to apply for its driving jobs.
- AET is also considering how it might use **video screens inside its vehicles** in the future to run advertisements to publicise its recruitment campaign and further target women (and men) job-seekers.



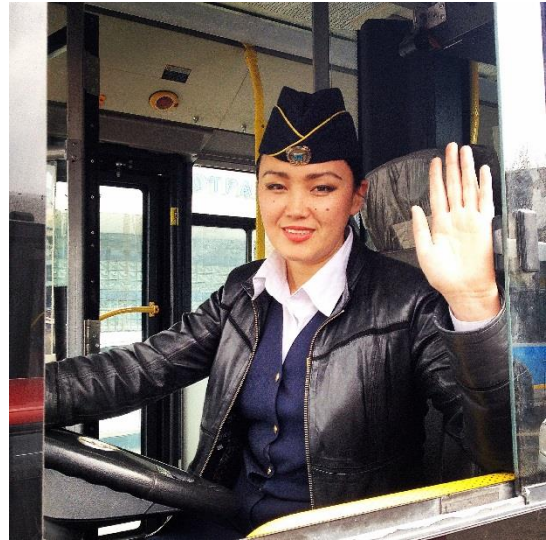
### Stronger company framework and policies on equal opportunity

- Strengthening approaches to human resource management can help to deliver better outcomes for women and men alike. AET reviewed its company policies and procedures to ensure that it had the right formal structures in place to support equal opportunity in the company. As a result of this review, AET introduced:
  - ✓ **A clearer allocation of management responsibility for equal opportunity**, with a formally designated 'focal point' for gender;
  - ✓ **A new policy on equal opportunity** that clearly states the company's commitment to equal opportunity at all stages of the employment relationship and a zero tolerance approach to sexual harassment;

- ✓ **A new monitoring system to collect sex-disaggregated workforce data** so that there is a clearer picture of the position of women and men within the company; and
- ✓ **A new company grievance mechanism for workers**, providing workers with a clear channel for raising issues of concern.

### Audit of facilities

- In parallel with its efforts to recruit more women, AET knew that it would need to provide adequate facilities for women (and men) across all of its routes, including separate toilets and changing areas. As a result, AET undertook an audit of facilities – toilets, canteens and rest areas – on its routes in early 2014 to identify whether there were any gaps in facilities available to women.



### New channels for women workers' voices

- AET has plans to launch an enterprise level **women's committee**, comprised of representatives from different parts of the company (e.g. human resources, management, supervisor, drivers), in order to ensure that women have a channel to voice their ideas and concerns.
- It is hoped that the committee will provide input into and support for future interventions on equal opportunity at AET.

### Capacity building and training

- Training is a powerful tool for supporting new initiatives and raising awareness of equal opportunity concerns. As part of the EBRD project, consultants provided training and workshops on different aspects of equal opportunity to:
  - AET's senior management;
  - AET's human resources department; and
  - Senior managers at the Almaty Vocational Training College for Passenger Transport, the training provider for new AET drivers.

## 6. Positive outcomes on equal opportunity at AET

### AET's first woman bus driver

- In May 2015, AET was proud to recruit Ludmila Molokovskaya, its first woman bus driver. Prior to working at AET, Ludmila worked as a minivan driver for a hotel in Almaty. She also worked as a trolleybus driver for AET at one point, but her ultimate goal was to become a bus driver. She said, "I never wanted to be a star, I just dreamed of getting this job."
- Ludmila is already providing a positive role model for colleagues and passengers, quietly dispelling commonly held ideas about women's capabilities on a daily basis. She says that male passengers are surprised to see her: "Sometimes [male passengers] say to me: 'Wow, your driving is great. I never would have thought that a woman could drive so well'."

**"I don't ask to be treated differently: I'm just another person on the road, just like everyone else ... There's talk of organising a whole crew of women bus drivers in Almaty, but, while I'm the only one, I'm going to try and become part of the team."**

Ludmila, AET's first woman bus driver

- When asked what advice she would give to other women who want to become bus drivers, Ludmila said that persistence was crucial. According to Ludmila, “If you want it, you need to fight for it.”
- AET is keen to find more women to drive its buses, although it knows that this will be a challenge as a result of licensing requirements (see above). The company has already recruited a second woman bus driver, who is scheduled to start work in the second half of 2015.



### Increased representation of women in management and technical maintenance

- Since the start of the project, AET has also seen an increase in the proportion of women in other areas of the company where they have been historically underrepresented.
  - **Women in management:** The number of women in management positions increased from 19% in February 2014 to 28% in May 2015. According to AET’s Human Resource Department, the project has helped to raise awareness of equal opportunity and increase women’s confidence to apply for promotion.
  - **Women in technical operations:** In 2015, AET recruited a woman to fill the post of Senior Road Safety Engineer, as well as two female engineers to work in technical maintenance. Previously, these teams had been all-male.

### Improvements in facilities for women and men

- As a result of AET’s route audit, it upgraded the facilities at two of its terminuses, where bus drivers start and finish their routes and take their breaks during their shifts.
- These improvements benefits women and men alike, including the painting and cleaning of common areas, the introduction of canteen facilities and better access to toilets for women and men.

### Increased awareness of gender and equal opportunity within the company

- AET managers and staff report that there is an improved awareness of equal opportunity within the organisation, as a result of the project and the new equal opportunity policy.

**“Many people believe that women are not capable of driving a bus, but Ludmila has coped very well. When she did her training, she showed everyone that she was very capable.”**

Zhazira Ensabayeva, Head of Route Management and Scheduling and Gender Focal Point, AET

**“This project has been very successful from our point of view and needs to be pursued further, as women can find fulfilling jobs in this sector. The Akimat will continue to support this initiative into the future.”**

Talgat Abdrakhmanov, Head of Urban Passenger Transport Department, Akimat of Almaty

**“This project made us think. Prior to this, we would never have thought about the representation of women in the business. As for women driving buses, I had never really imagined it.”**

Bolat Abaideldinov, Managing Director, AET

**“It’s not hard for women to drive buses. We used to think that women shouldn’t drive cars; now lots of women drive cars. Why shouldn’t they drive buses?”**

Yusupov Rashid Khakimovich, Director of Bus Depot #1, AET