



# Executive Summary

## CONTEXT

- **Transportation is a key barrier to women's mobility and labor force participation, globally.** Women are widely underrepresented as transport providers, and as riders, women face disproportionate challenges in accessing affordable and secure transportation. In Sri Lanka, 90 percent of women using public transport have experienced sexual harassment, but only 4 percent of these women sought police assistance. This, and other gaps, contribute to women's low labor force participation rates, which are less than half that of men.
- **Over the last five years ride-hailing has developed into an increasingly prominent branch of the Sri Lankan transportation ecosystem.** Ride-hailing vehicles range from motos (motorcycles) and tuk-tuks (three-wheelers) to various sizes of cars, and vans, encompassing what was previously a largely informal network of transport providers. Despite the increasing importance of the industry, to date no study has captured how women are using ride-hailing, how this service supports women's personal and economic opportunities, and how the industry can best serve this important portion of the market.
- **This study was conducted to determine how ride-hailing services can support opportunities for women, and how the private sector can best respond in meeting women's needs, both as drivers and as riders.** The research combined data from a local ride-hailing platform, PickMe, with surveys of 280 drivers and 782 riders. This is the first study to explore the role that women play in the ride-hailing industry in Sri Lanka, and was undertaken by International Finance Corporation (IFC) and Kantar Public, in partnership with PickMe. This

study was conducted as part of the Women in Work (WiW) Program, Sri Lanka, a partnership between IFC and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

## RIDERS

- **Women who use ride-hailing services are more than 40 percent more likely than men to use it as their primary mode of transport.** Women use ride-hailing to meet basic transport needs as they are less likely to own, or have access to a vehicle, and they have greater need to make multiple stops to shop and drop off and pick up children. However, women account for just 38 percent of riders overall, likely due to national gaps in labor force participation, as well as gaps in digital and financial inclusion.
- **Women use ride-hailing to improve their access to work and mobility overall.** Fifty-one percent of women riders said that they are able to work more frequently thanks to ride-hailing; 64 percent said that they can access more job opportunities or better jobs; and 88 percent said ride-hailing gives them access to new places. These findings suggest that ride-hailing is a contributor to improving women's employment rates. However, men continue to cite these benefits at even higher rates than women.
- **Women riders are price-sensitive and prefer low-cost options.** About two-thirds of all the rides taken by women were in tuk-tuks (three-wheelers), the lowest cost of PickMe's options. Seventy-five percent of women said that the final fare was a key factor when booking a ride. Both findings are consistent with global transport studies showing that women spend a higher portion of their income on transport, and this emphasizes the need to increase affordable options that target women users.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (Continued)

- **Women riders value the key attributes of ride-hailing, particularly price transparency and safety features.** Both male and female riders surveyed ranked price transparency and comfort as the top reasons for selecting a ride-hailing service, however, women ranked most key features slightly higher than men, especially safety features such as knowing drivers' names and their registration details through PickMe's platform. Additionally, ride-hailing was generally perceived as safe: the majority of respondents indicated that ride-hailing provides security for women riders, and it should be acceptable for women to use ride-hailing when traveling alone.

## DRIVERS

- **Women remain significantly underrepresented as drivers, but there is momentum for change.** According to PickMe company data, women make up a small minority of drivers across all the platform's offerings, but their number continues to increase year-on-year. Currently women primarily drive motos making deliveries and tuk-tuks where the take-home income is the highest due to the lower fixed costs for buying or leasing the vehicle and vehicle maintenance. In the case of deliveries, women say that they appreciate having less direct

customer interaction. Most women drivers identified themselves as the chief income earner in their household.

- **Women value the flexibility of platform work, but their limited hours reduce their earning potential.** Flexibility and independence are key draws for women drivers who have significant care responsibilities at home. Thirty percent of women drivers reported earning a higher income after registering to drive with PickMe, compared to 46 percent of men. The need for flexible hours, and particularly working outside of the main commuting hours, and not at night when riders are more numerous and fares are higher, translates into less income for women.
- **Women drivers are highly rated in terms of their skills and safety, especially by women riders.** Riders generally agreed that women drivers perform as well or better than men in terms of safety, courtesy, and comfort. However, women were more likely than men to agree with these attributes, and often by a substantial margin. For instance, 58 percent of women, compared with 39 percent of men, said that it is safer to be driven by a woman, and 60 percent of women, compared to 45 percent of men, said that women are just as good drivers as men.



- **Restrictive social norms reduce women's opportunities to work as drivers.** Although women drivers are rated highly in terms of driving skills, strong stereotypes and restrictive social norms considerably reduce opportunities for women drivers. Women drivers reported that their families have concerns about their working as drivers, and this is a major barrier to entry. One-fifth of all drivers said that the occupation is not suitable for women. Other significant barriers include women's inability to finance vehicles and insurance, and their lack of digital tools and digital literacy.

## BUSINESS IMPLICATIONS

- **Ride-hailing companies could increase their revenues by more than one quarter by closing the gender gap in ridership.** Because women currently spend less on ride-hailing than men, if the number of female riders, and their spending, were to rise to the same level as men, ride-hailing revenues could increase by almost 27 percent per year.
- **Product innovations offer the potential to attract women as both drivers and riders.** Gender-segregated trips in which women drivers and passengers are matched, offer one way to recruit women drivers who might otherwise be hesitant to work. Ninety percent of female riders said that they would prefer a woman driver for at least some trips, and especially those at night. However, a smaller proportion of riders (only 25 percent), were willing to pay more for this feature. Ride-sharing, or ride pooling, could also appeal to women, especially given their greater price sensitivity. However, while prospective female pool users care about the gender of their fellow passengers, they are less likely to care about the gender of the driver. Fifty-eight percent of women who would prefer ridesharing said they would prefer to share with women.
- **Multi-stakeholder action is needed to address barriers to growth and inclusivity.** Most of the barriers to increasing women's use of ride-hailing, or of transportation more broadly, are beyond the ability of any one company to remove. These barriers include: the social norms that restrict women's work, and especially their work in ride-hailing; lack of finance to buy a cell

phone and buy and insure a vehicle; lack of digital literacy to participate in a ride-hailing platform; family care responsibilities that keep women at home; and concerns about safety and harassment that keep women from traveling freely. Resolving these issues will require action from multiple stakeholders.

