

**ECF Contribution to FEMM Committee ‘Women in Cycling - How to contribute to an inclusive women-friendly cycling environment**

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# Towards an inclusive women-friendly cycling environment

Cycling is beneficial in numerous ways. It helps people stay active, increases quality of life, and enables people to personally reduce their transport emissions, crucial to fighting climate change. Cycling changes lives by granting individuals of all ages and genders mobility freedom.  However, not everyone has an equal opportunity to enjoy these benefits. This includes women, who are often disregarded or invisible in cycling.

In the majority of European countries, and just like in most other modes of transport, a gender gap is present in cycling. Data from several different countries show that the overall number of women cycling is substantially lower than for male cyclists. On average, and across most regions of the world, there are three to four times more men cycling on the road than women[[1]](#footnote-2). To overcome this gender divide, we need to understand why this phenomenon is occurring and what we can do to combat it.

The European Cyclists’ Federation is grateful for the opportunity to submit cycling-focused recommendations to the European Parliament FEMM committee Own Initiative Report focused on women and transport. The recommendations here if implemented by governments at all levels of responsibility, would make an enormous difference for women who already cycle or are waiting for the right opportunity, topics include:

1. Safety as a major factor in deterring women and girls to cycle
2. Convenience and comfort as a secondary major barrier
3. More cycle-friendly places of work, schools, and businesses
4. Public authorities should require gender-based analysis and data collection for cycling safety and promotion
5. Education and training to help overcome the gender gap in cycling
6. Gender and the ‘mobility of care’
7. Safety as a major factor in deterring women and girls to cycle

Research shows that a prominent reason why women are cycling less than men is safety[[2]](#footnote-3). Pucher and Buehler's (2008) overview[[3]](#footnote-4) showed that women's participation is at 30% or less in several countries who are not investing in safe infrastructure[[4]](#footnote-5). Furthermore, 41% of women from the UK surveyed by bike insurance provider Laka express safety concerns and vulnerability of cycling as their main apprehension over cycling [[5]](#footnote-6).

In contrast, countries that heavily invest in safe cycling infrastructure, such as Netherlands and Denmark, have women accounting for 55% of people who cycle [[6]](#footnote-7). A significant gender gap in the number of cyclists in a country is a strong indicator of the cycling infrastructure not being safe enough to accommodate everyone, and a high percentage of women cycling is an indicator for safe cycling in general. In fact, the number of women cycling is a good indicator of the liveability of cities, “It is understood women are catalysts for safe pedestrian and bicycle friendly design, thus bicycling women help progress of the liveability of a place” says the Association for Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals.

Moreover, the number of female cyclists increases when separate protected bike lanes are added to roads according to a study conducted by People For Bikes, a pro-cycling organisation in the United States[[7]](#footnote-8). Another study in New York City, shows that men are three times more likely to be cyclists than women in the city, yet a bicycle count found that an off-street bike path in Central Park had 44% female riders.[[8]](#footnote-9) Again, this puts into perspective how important feeling of safety and security is for women.

Research also shows that cycling lanes away from motorized vehicles are more important for women during their decision-making process than for men[[9]](#footnote-10). However, men would benefit from it as well and tend to prefer these types of lanes despite this not being a significant factor in their decision to cycle.

Wide, separate, and continuous infrastructure is necessary for people who cycle to feel safe on roads that are otherwise busy with high volumes of motorised traffic. This kind of infrastructure would also enable the use of large cycles to transport children and goods, the absence of which is currently a barrier to many women when deciding to cycle[[10]](#footnote-11).   The provision of clear markings and signs to legitimize the cycling roads are necessary to increase women’s feeling of safety in traffic.

Security is also a crucial element in creating spaces for women and girls to feel comfortable cycling. Sufficient lighting at night helps create a sense of security for women, adding lighting alongside cycling lanes and bike parking areas is a simple solution that would highly increase women’s comfort when it is dark outside.

Interestingly in those countries that do have good infrastructure and do have high levels of women participating in cycling, cycling is often seen as their “Safe Place”, away from possible confrontations or assaults around the pavement[[11]](#footnote-12).

ECF general recommendations for better and safer infrastructure at the national and local level[[12]](#footnote-13):

* To provide streets filtering out motor traffic as much as possible, with low-speed limits
* To provide physically protected space along those remaining roads with higher motor vehicle speeds and dense traffic
* To provide as many routes as possible entirely away from motor traffic that are safely lit and not enclosed, integrated within the wider cycling network, to promote feelings of security
* To provide clear markings and signs to legitimize the cycling roads
* Provide lighting in dark sections of cycling infrastructure
* To Provide secure and well-lit bicycle parking to improve the feeling of security as well as safety

At the European level ECF would recommend

* In the current revision of the TEN-T guidelines, updating the TEN-T network to better include cycling[[13]](#footnote-14), including
  + Integrating EuroVelo, the European cycle route network into the TEN-T network
  + Addressing the barrier effect of TEN-T, whereby large TEN-T infrastructure projects cut-off or isolate cycling infrastructure
  + Exploiting opportunities to create new cycling connections along rail, road, or inland waterway transport projects in the TEN-T
  + Improving the Commission proposal on interactions with urban nodes in the TEN-T
  + Improving the number of bicycle parking facilities within the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive.

Integrating good infrastructure into large infrastructure projects, such as TEN-T, can be useful particularly in rural areas where lighting and less secure cycling conditions are not found.

1. Convenience and comfort as a secondary major barrier

Aside from not feeling safe in the current cycling infrastructure, women also often feel like cycling is inconvenient. This is because infrastructure currently caters more to men’s needs. Ideally, the infrastructure should be an interconnected network that facilitates multiple types of trips such as chain-trips (short-distance trips with multiple stops). Women are more likely to make chain-trips which is related to them taking care of family members and household activities more frequently than men[[14]](#footnote-15) (schools, shops, as well as work etc.). Therefore, it is necessary to include cycling in infrastructure planning from the start with women’s commuting behaviour in mind. This means a more thoughtful adaptation on the human level, rather than the useful commuting routes alone.

Besides implementing cycling infrastructure in new plans, existing roads and rights of way will also need to be managed with cycling in mind. New links within the existing cycling network will have to be created to close current gaps that prevent cyclists from reaching their destinations. The priorities in an interconnected cycling network should be cohesion and directness[[15]](#footnote-16).

Cohesion in a cycling network means that cyclists find the way and reach their destination without minimal interruption. All common trips and destinations should be accessible for cyclists and connected to the city’s network. Without proper cohesion there is no cycling network, but merely single cycle routes[[16]](#footnote-17).

Directness of routes, which relates to how long the cycling trip takes, is also important especially in urban areas. In urban areas it is preferable for cycling to be quicker than cars to prevent congestion. This could be achieved by providing more direct routes with minimal detours for bicycles instead of cars. The ability to maintain constant speeds is also important to make cycling routes faster[[17]](#footnote-18).

1. More cycle-friendly places of work, schools, and businesses

Women frequently experience a strong social pressure to look good in the workplace which can prevent them from cycling as they fear it will interfere with their image at work. In general, women tend to view cycling as inconvenient for multiple reasons including the social pressure.[[18]](#footnote-19) More facilities to make cycling attractive for commuting would help with establishing cycling as a viable alternative to car trips or public transport.

Cycle-friendly places of work, school and business should at least provide bicycle parking for both regular bikes and e-bikes. Additionally, bicycle lockers would enable women to store their bicycle and cycling gear somewhere secure. This would add to the perceived convenience and take away possible concerns. Bike lockers are especially attractive for electric bicycles as these are expensive and owners typically want to take diligent care of them.

Showers and lockers should also be available in workplaces to make the home-to-work commute attractive by bike. Showers could help with taking away women’s concerns about showing up to work unprofessionally by giving them the opportunity to freshen themselves up. Lockers would provide a place to store your cycling clothes and gear.

Similarly, sufficient parking space should be provided by commercial properties. This includes bike racks or secured bike parking to make essential trips from home-to-work or in the domestic sphere such as grocery shopping more accessible by bike. Regular bike racks do not take up a big amount of space and can easily house many bikes at once. These are practical small solutions that can make a world of difference for women who would love to cycle more but feel it is not practical or suitable for their lifestyle.

Currently work is ongoing at the European Union level in the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive, ECF has advocated for specific targets of bike parking spaces in all new and renovated residential buildings, and all non-residential buildings. Increasing and improving bike parking across the EU can be an important accelerator of the use of the bicycle by women and girls, by reducing feelings of insecurity, and increasing comfort and ease of access to amenities.

ECF Recommendations for national and local level;

* To develop national or local technical requirements for safe and secure bicycle parking
* To develop national and local level technical requirements for cycling friendly amenities in all public, non-residential and new residential buildings

ECF Recommends at the European level

* In the current recast of the Energy performance of Buildings directive, improving safe and secure bicycle for European Non-residential and residential buildings[[19]](#footnote-20) by requiring specific numbers of bicycle parking spaces

1. Public authorities should require gender-based analysis and data collection for cycling safety and promotion

Collecting and analysing more gender aggregated data is necessary to ensure women’s needs and concerns are integrated in transport. Gender mainstreaming describes the concept of assessing different consequences (resulting from planned policies or programs) for people of different genders in all areas. Gender mainstreaming and assessments are absolutely necessary during the process of transport related plannings. This is necessary because when gender is not explicitly part of the planning, plans are more likely to primarily benefit men according to a report on gender and mobility by Ramboll[[20]](#footnote-21).

This necessary data can be collected through online surveys, in person focus groups and other means to get quantitative and qualitative results from the different target groups. Ideally, this should be conducted on a European, national and regional level to paint an accurate picture for each area. This would shed light on women’s preferences, cycling or general commuting habits and how this compares to men’s. The results that would come out of the data analyses will show what needs to change in transport to make cycling accessible and comfortable to everyone instead of only a small section of the population.

Gender mainstreaming should become a required step in transport planning to ensure equality. It is essential to make sure no gender bias is present in the results as this is unfortunately often the case with data. It would go a long way if the sample size of the research included at least as many women as men. Finally, the research team itself should also include more women to incorporate a woman’s point of view.

ECF Recommendations at the national and local level

* Better data collection on the use of the bicycle by women and on their safety
* To run a full check on gender bias within all data collection services run by the authority

ECF Recommends at the European level

* Improved data collection of women's participation in cycling in Eurobarometer reports
* Improved data collection of cycling safety for women by the European Road Safety Observatory
* Include share of women cycling in the obligatory data collection for TEN-T urban nodes[[21]](#footnote-22)

1. Education and training to help overcome the gender gap in cycling

There is an undeniable gender gap in cycling in many European countries and this issue should be addressed. Local governments must take responsibility and invest in efforts to raise awareness on the topics. Efforts to raise awareness could include women-based cycling groups, training for cyclists, training for car drivers, cycling events, campaigns, etc.

Women based cycling groups and in-person support groups could help encourage more women to cycle and provide a stronger feeling of comfort. Support groups have many benefits including helping women realize others share the same concerns and experiences. Especially since a staggering number of women in London (49%) in general say they feel like cycling is not for them (2019, The Guardian). Many women do not identify with the image they have of cyclists. More often than not, people in low-cycling countries are likely to associate cycling with young fit white males while cycling is for everyone.

Besides cycling groups, accessible training would help establish basic cycling etiquette to make everyone’s journey safer and more comfortable. Training should be available for cyclists to take insecurities away and provide a higher level of comfort. It should include tips on how to navigate busy roads, important traffic rules, common signs, or signals and how to pick a safe comfortable route. Also, basic skills such as fixing a flat tire are helpful topics for trainings that could help encouraging women to cycle more.

Other elements that trainings should cover, especially for women, are for example how to deal with difficulties related to commuting with your children. There are many helpful tools to enable people to commute with their children such as child seats on the rear or even in the front of a bicycle. Some parents even use a tandem bike with their children or similarly a trailer that can be attached to a regular bike. Cargo bikes are an increasingly popular solution for bringing along children and bags on cycling trips.

Car drivers can be more aggressive to female cyclists[[22]](#footnote-23), as well as engage in risky driving behaviours more often with them[[23]](#footnote-24). The training and education of motor vehicle drivers should be updated to stop aggressive and risky driving interactions. Indeed, bringing extra attention to cyclists in general during driving lessons would also be a great way to stimulate a safe cycling culture and etiquette. The European Union is soon to be reviewing the Driving License[[24]](#footnote-25), and this should be included as a mandatory element in driver training.

Recommendations at the national level

* To include interaction with cyclists and pedestrians for driving license testing and training
* To introduce cycle training for children as part of the school curriculum to introduce girls to cycling

Recommendations at the European level

* To update the Driving License Directive to include as mandatory training, educating, and testing to improve interactions with female cyclists, as well as cyclists and pedestrians generally
* To increase subsidies for purchasing cargo bikes to make these more accessible for female cyclists

1. Gender and the ‘mobility of care’

Finally, it should be recognised that still today the role of women is often found as caregiver and homemaker, this while also becoming more involved within the labour market. Although men’s involvement in the home and caregiving duties is rising it is still predominantly the women that provides these duties.

This has an impact on the type of transport and mobility journeys that women undertake. Instead of the majority of journeys taking place in the public realm such as commuting, for women many of the mobility trips are undertaken in the role as caregiver and housemaker in the private realm, such as the school run or shopping trips. In today’s job market women participate much more, but evidence shows that women still take care of house and care duties while also working[[25]](#footnote-26).

What is the impact for cycling? Many families are now attempting to give up the use of a car and are substituting the journeys that require ‘carrying’, carrying the children to school, carrying the shopping for daily living. These require a different kind of bicycle such as cargo bike and electric bicycles. It is a normal sight in Dutch and Danish cities to see children being transported to school on cargo bikes in the mornings, and if we are to minimise as much as possible the use of the motor car in our lives then we will need bicycles to be able to adapt to the way women live their lives.

We would recommend that the cargo bike and the electric bicycle be seen as an important way for women to be able to switch to sustainable modes of transport that reflect the modes of activities in their daily lives. Subsidies, loans and grants for these bicycles should be supplied at the national and local level, while careful regulation of the vehicles at European, single market, level should be administered to make sure they are safe for carrying children and not too over-regulated that that their costs are onerous.

Recommendations at national and local level

* Financially subsidise and support the increasingly popular use of cargo bicycles and electric bicycles

Recommendations at European Level

* Make sure the upcoming changes to L-category and micromobility legislation is rigorously safe while not overburdensome for consumers of cargo and electrically assisted bicycles
* To increase subsidies for purchasing cargo bikes to make these more accessible for female cyclists

## Further information

**ECF’s SCAP report on Dutch and Danish Infrastructure**

<https://ecf.com/projects/scap>

**ECF on recommendations for changes to the TEN-T revision**

<https://ecf.com/system/files/TEN-T-ECF-Amendments-2022.pdf>

**ECF Women in Cycling Group**

<https://ecf.com/community/women-cycling>

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2. [Full article: Does More Cycling Mean More Diversity in Cycling? (tandfonline.com)](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01441647.2015.1014451) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292752103_Making_cycling_irresistible_Lessons_from_europe> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01441647.2015.1014451> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. [Road safety remains the biggest barrier to getting more women cycling | Cycling Weekly](https://www.cyclingweekly.com/news/road-safety-remains-the-biggest-barrier-to-getting-more-women-cycling) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. ['If there aren’t as many women cycling as men … you need better infrastructure' | Cities | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/jul/09/women-cycling-infrastructure-cyclists-killed-female) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. <https://www.peopleforbikes.org/statistics/economic-benefits> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. [How to Get More Bicyclists on the Road - Scientific American](https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/getting-more-bicyclists-on-the-road/) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. [Cycling lanes, not cyclists, lower road fatalities - CU Denver News (ucdenver.edu)](https://news.ucdenver.edu/cycling-lanes-not-cyclists-lower-road-fatalities/) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. <https://ramboll.com/-/media/files/rgr/documents/markets/transport/g/gender-and-mobility_report.pdf?la=en> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. https://ramboll.com/-/media/files/rgr/documents/markets/transport/g/gender-and-mobility\_report.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. ECF has a document on the best in Dutch and Danish cycling infrastructure design as part of our SCAP project <https://ecf.com/projects/scap> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. More details on how the TEN-T can improve the European cycling network can be found here <https://ecf.com/system/files/TEN-T-ECF-Amendments-2022.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. <https://ramboll.com/-/media/files/rgr/documents/markets/transport/g/gender-and-mobility_report.pdf?la=en> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. [Basic quality design principles for cycle infrastructure and networks (europa.eu)](https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-themes/clean-transport-urban-transport/cycling/guidance-cycling-projects-eu/cycling-infrastructure-quality-design-principles/basic-quality-design-principles-cycle-infrastructure-and-networks_en) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. CROW (2017) Design manual for bicycle traffic. Chapter 4 <https://www.crow.nl/publicaties/design-manual-for-bicycle-traffic> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. <https://www.crow.nl/publicaties/design-manual-for-bicycle-traffic> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. <https://provelo.cdn.prismic.io/provelo/05472aa2-c1af-4a21-9890-8c6a44d024af_RESUME-FemmesVelo-VERSION-FR.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. <https://www.ecf.com/what-we-do/making-buildings-fit-cycling> [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. <https://ramboll.com/-/media/files/rgr/documents/markets/transport/g/gender-and-mobility_report.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. To amend article 40 (b) (ii) of the European Commission proposal on the revision of the Trans-European Transport Network Regulation <https://ecf.com/system/files/TEN-T-ECF-Amendments-2022.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. <https://researchonline.lshtm.ac.uk/4646867/1/Predictors%20of%20the%20frequency_GREEN%20AAM.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. <https://genderpolicyreport.umn.edu/bicycles-gender-and-risk/> [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. <https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12978-Revision-of-the-Directive-on-Driving-Licences_en> [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/epidemiology-health-care/news/2019/nov/women-still-doing-most-housework-despite-earning-more> [↑](#footnote-ref-26)