

Greek Hub

Public Transportation in Thessaloniki's Metropolitan Area

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Executive summary

The Greek Hub aims to support gender mainstreaming into areas of policymaking and planning in the local and regional public transport sector. This objective will be achieved through two sub-objectives in relation to 1) Enhancement of safety and security in public transport 2) Enhancement of comfort and/or improvement of customer service for pregnant or foreign women or elderly women in public transport.

With a focus on public transportation and more specifically on Safety and Security as well as Comfort and Customer Service with emphasis on vulnerable groups, the Greek hub conducted a Gender and Diversity Action Plan (GaDAP) along with surveys, focus groups, discussions and stakeholder interviews. These activities have led to the formulation of recommendations and conclusions regarding the Metropolitan area of Thessaloniki.

- **Purpose:** Thessaloniki's Metropolitan area relies solely on public bus transportation for the city's activities. The latter along with limited staff and fleet shortages, result in problematic experiences for the public. In this regard a baseline assessment regarding the level of service and more specifically:

- Comfort and customer service and
- Safety and security

has been conducted and the results have been published and communicated to the local network of actors and stakeholders.

- **Audience:** The current policy briefs are targeted to public transportation actors and stakeholders as well as researchers interested to acquire relevant data.

- **Vulnerable groups:** The groups defined as vulnerable in the case of the Greek hub were: elderly people; pregnant women; people with disabilities as well as teenagers that travel to and from school.

- **Stakeholders:** Numerous actors and stakeholders are operating within the hub's catchment area such as: TheTA; OASTh; four different Joints Bus Receipts Fund (KTEL); 14 Municipalities; the Region of Central Macedonia;; other organisations such as Pedestrian Union, Cyclists Union and more.

Overview

The Vision of the Greek hub is to improve and enhance safety and security for the predefined social groups throughout the public transportation network, bus stops and stations included, as well as the levels of service and comfort for the users. This vision will be achieved through the objectives:

- a) Enhancement of Safety & Security,
- b) Establishment of Reliability for the public transport system,
- c) Increase of Comfort and the provided Level of Service,
- d) Consistency regarding the timetables and the bus routes,
- e) Monitoring,
- f) Transparency,
- g) Culture cultivation.

Gender Smart Mobility in the context of the Greek hub is characterized by:

- Ease of boarding on and off the buses for vulnerable groups, for example women, especially those in pregnancy or with accompanying children, the elderly and people with disabilities.
- Creation of both a safe environment and a sense of safety and security for passengers from vulnerable groups. Safety and security are two of the most important factors identified, for users in vulnerable groups to choose public transportation over other modes.
- Smooth and unobstructed travel experience, i.e., connectivity among different transportation modes as well as between buses in Thessaloniki's transportation system.

Research overview

To obtain and analyze information and data in order to provide concrete conclusions and policy guidelines, Lever has completed a set of actions. These actions are:

- 1) Discussions and interviews with local and regional stakeholders as well as an online GaDAP workshop,
- 2) Analysis of the aforementioned data and provision of feedback to local stakeholders,
- 3) Promotion of design ideas to stakeholders and feedback from them,
- 4) Complete formulation of the GaDAP
- 5) Communication and dissemination of the results.

Additionally, Lever conducted a mystery shopping survey to assess Thessaloniki's bus transportation system. Comfort and customer service as well as safety and security were the main components to be evaluated and analysed. Moreover, the needs of the elderly, pregnant and immigrant women were highlighted.

Lever designed the survey and the methodology to be implemented. Indicative bus lines were selected in order to achieve significant coverage of the city's area and mystery shoppers were assigned to specific bus lines. The mystery shoppers behaved as normal passengers while travelling around the city using the city's buses, while additionally identifying and filling their evaluation forms.

Approximately 20 bus lines were selected, and the mystery shoppers travelled throughout the city for four weekdays among three different weeks during peak hour periods both at morning as well as during the evening (08:00-11:00, 15:00-18:00). The evaluation form includes information such as:

- General information (time, date, weather conditions, etc.)
- Information on the bus station/bus stop (cleanliness, vandalism, bus schedule, etc.)
- Information regarding the bus operation (arrival latency, route comfort, bus cleanliness, etc.)

TInnGO's Gender Smart Indicators and their connection to the Greek hub's Policy Brief

TInnGO has developed a set of five Gender Smart Indicators. This is how they link to the Greek hub's policy brief and Thessaloniki's Public Transport:

Affordable: Needs to become more affordable for all people to be able to use it.

Inclusive: All vulnerable groups need to be included in terms of planning and operation.

Attractive: Buses need to improve in terms of cleanliness, time schedule and enhancement of comfort in order to become more attractive.

Sustainable: Improvement in identified parameters will lead to increased Public Transport use and thus a more sustainable local and regional environment.

Effective: Thessaloniki's public transportation needs to become more effective both currently as well as maintain this in the future.

Challenges and difficulties

The main challenge that needs to be highlighted is that Gender and Diversity Action Planning is time consuming and requires proper allocation of resources.

The challenges that the Greek hub has encountered while implementing all previously mentioned activities:

- a) Covid-19 related difficulties such as workshop organisation and stakeholder communication and networking. Activities initially planned as physical meetings, etc. were transferred online.
- b) Initial workplan was considered too ambitious and became specialised and specific. GaDAP specified the work on bus stops and shelters.
- c) Actors and stakeholders found it difficult to cooperate in the desired degree, mainly because they had to face new challenges due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, local challenges such as lack of bus fleet, staff deficit, etc., were increased. This resulted in gender equality issues not being prioritized.
- d) Lack of relevant data collection in order to supplement and support the set objectives through evidence-based decisions.

Through the mystery shopping evaluation form certain parameters were identified and assessed in order to analyse the level of comfort, customer service, safety and security. The results of the survey were further used to highlight the issue of gendered equal accessibility in the city of Thessaloniki and initiate discussions with relevant stakeholders.

Following discussions with local stakeholders, a number of indicators have been identified in the context of the GaDAP for an initial assessment of safety and security issues among vulnerable groups. These indicators are presented below:

Condition of bus stops and their surroundings: Percentage of bus stops that include bus shelters / seats; ranking system of lighting conditions at bus stops; of accessibility of each bus stop; stations of bus stops in terms of comfort and customer service such as cleanliness, condition of seats and stops, etc.; obstruction of bus stops mainly due to private vehicles temporary parking.

Safety and security on trips: Correlation between over crowdedness and safety & security issues; number of seats for vulnerable users in each bus.

Quantitative indicators are advanced by quality data on mobility patterns and needs of vulnerable groups. A combination of quantitative and qualitative data can result in the development of indicators that show the correlation between these patterns and Safety & Security. Such qualitative data to be used for such an evaluation could be: a) Interviews with vulnerable groups; b) focus groups and discussion with relevant actors and stakeholders; and c) observations at different times of day and night, etc.

Furthermore, the stakeholders involved are eager to implement such measures so further collaboration with the TInnGO project, along with assistance from Lever as head of the Greek Hub, is needed and thus further planned. The initial Action Plan for Gender and Diversity, focused on Thessaloniki's public transport, is the first step to initiate further actions and explore local and regional potential for improvement in the issues we have highlighted.

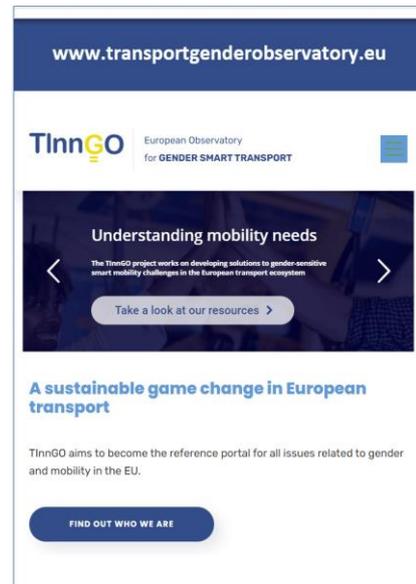
Conclusions and recommendations:

Follow-on actions

- A) Steps must be taken involving all stakeholders of planning, implementation, and operation for the public transportation system in Thessaloniki.
- B) The number of involved stakeholders signifies the complexity for processes such as planning and operation. Coordination of 14 municipalities is a major challenge which highlights the need for a unified channel of communication between all involved actors and stakeholders.
- C) Crucial for a proper implementation of actions is the collection of gender and diversity sensitive data. An analysis of these data will provide a baseline assessment as well as a foundation for proper actions towards meeting the transport needs of various vulnerable groups.
- D) Regarding bus stops, the design criteria need to be redefined. This includes the lighting and the streetscape surroundings. Ensure proper cooperation between different stakeholders in order to simplify public space interactions.

Conclusions

The Metropolitan area of Thessaloniki faces numerous problems and challenges at the operational level regarding public transportation. The gender and diversity dimensions are certainly topics of interest that require provision of solutions through actions and measures.



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