

Driving Toward Equality:

WOMEN, RIDE-HAILING, AND
THE SHARING ECONOMY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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Executive Summary

Women across the world face higher barriers to accessing paid work and transportation compared with men. They are less likely to participate in paid work, not necessarily because they are less educated or qualified, but often because women tend to shoulder a disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care, or because their ability to work in certain industries—or outside the home at all—is restricted. They tend to work fewer hours, in less senior roles, and in less well-paid industries.

Women also face more constraints than men on their ability to travel. These include affordability, access to vehicles, personal security concerns, and, in some countries, social norms around independent movement. This not only limits women's income-generation opportunities but it also restricts development and social mobility by curbing their access to health, education, and other services—both for themselves and for children or other relatives they care for.

This report explores the potential of the sharing economy, and the ride-hailing industry in particular, to address these gender gaps. Sharing economy business models can increase the utility of productive assets and lower costs for users while reducing the consumption of scarce resources. However, technological progress—especially the proliferation of smartphones and ever-increasing digital connectivity—has supercharged these models and the effects are increasingly visible at the global level.

The impact of sharing economy business models has been felt around the world. Globally, approximately two-thirds

of consumers would be willing to participate in the sharing economy, with interest highest in emerging markets (Nielsen 2014a).

This wide reach makes it increasingly necessary to consider how the sharing economy can open new economic opportunities. However, to date, one subject has been notably absent in the research: a better understanding of the differences in how men and women participate in the sharing economy, and whether and how it has helped to close gender gaps. The opportunities and risks of sharing economy models are perhaps particularly important for women because they have both more to gain from increased participation, and more to lose if they are excluded from new forms of work, income, or assets.

Ride-hailing is a pioneer of the modern sharing economy: an estimated 18 percent of people globally have used a ride-hailing service in the past 12 months (Holmes 2017), and current estimates anticipate an eightfold increase in ride-hailing by 2030, with total trips approaching 100 million a day (Burgstaller et al. 2017).

In many ways, ride-hailing is an ideal industry in which to examine the opportunities and barriers that women face in the sharing economy. Women have embraced ride-hailing as riders, yet little work has been done to understand how it serves their complex transportation needs. Filling this knowledge gap can not only expand the ride-hailing market, but also offer new pathways to improve women's limited mobility—a persistent barrier to closing gender gaps in economic, social, and civic participation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY *continued*

Driving for a living also remains heavily male-dominated: for example, 98 percent of London's taxi drivers are men (Gov. of U.K. 2017). Early evidence suggests that ride-hailing platforms do lower barriers to jobs as drivers: about 20% of drivers who use the Uber app in the United States are women. However, numbers of women drivers are lower across the six countries examined in this report. Identifying ways to recruit and retain more women as drivers could open doors to new and nontraditional sources of income and asset ownership for them, and help the industry grow by addressing user demand for more women drivers.

This research answers the following questions:

- How do women currently engage in the ride-hailing industry as drivers and riders?
- What are the opportunities for women in ride-hailing, and what are the barriers?

- How will serving women support growth and innovation?
- How can relevant stakeholders draw on these findings to ensure that sharing economy business models offer opportunities for both men and women alike?

This research was undertaken by IFC and Accenture, using data from the global ride-hailing company Uber. It combines anonymized, aggregated company data with a detailed literature review; focus groups and surveys of over 11,000 men and women who use the Uber app; and consultations with more than 40 global experts on gender, transportation, and the future of work. The literature review and expert interviews considered both the global and local context of ride-hailing and the wider sharing economy, while the surveys and company data analysis covered six diverse economies: the Arab Republic of Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa, and the United Kingdom. The report brings together findings and recommendations for both ride-hailing stakeholders and companies across the sharing economy.



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TOP 10 FINDINGS

Drivers

1. Women choose to drive using the Uber app for a wide variety of reasons, but they particularly value the flexibility it offers.

- Women identify the ability to work when they want to as the key benefit of using ride-hailing apps: across the six markets studied, three-quarters of the women drivers surveyed rank it among their top three benefits. It helps them juggle other commitments: for example, 91 percent of mothers driving with the Uber app are also the primary caregivers for their children. Men also cite flexibility as the key benefit of driving, which highlights the sharing economy's potential to help shift the existing household and care work paradigm.
- Approximately one-third of women drivers surveyed rely on ride-hailing for all their personal income, a rate similar to that of men. But many women combine driving with other activities, such as working part-time for an organization, running their own separate businesses, or studying.
- Women tend to drive more selectively than men: on average, they drive fewer hours than men and are less likely to drive at night or sign in daily to the app. By reducing their hours and not driving at times of peak demand, women could be limiting their earnings or ability to earn volume-based incentives. Still, the women surveyed are just as likely as their male peers to turn a robust profit from driving, despite being less likely to own their own vehicle outright.

2. Ride-hailing apps reduce barriers to entry for women to work as drivers in this traditionally male-dominated industry and, in many cases, boost women's average incomes.

- Low barriers to entry via the app make it relatively easy for women to enter an occupation few have traditionally pursued. However, the proportion of women drivers

remains low, reflecting other barriers such as the regulatory requirement for a commercial license in some markets, including the United Kingdom, social mores, and low rates of financial and digital inclusion.

- Women drivers report a higher income boost than men when they take up ride-hailing work: average earnings achieved by all women who drive using the Uber app increased across each market studied, ranging from 11 percent in Mexico to 29 percent in Egypt. In contrast, men in the markets studied see an increase in average earnings of between 4 percent in Indonesia and 15 percent in Egypt.
- The premium women earn over men likely reflects their previous income and employment status. When analyzing the earnings of only those drivers in paid work prior to driving with Uber, women tend to receive a greater boost to their earnings than men do when they sign up—even those previously employed, ranging from between zero percent in Indonesia to 11 percent in the United Kingdom.

3. Some women drivers use ride-hailing income and contacts to support other entrepreneurial activities.

- Fifteen percent of women drivers run businesses separate from their ride-hailing activities—broadly the same rate as men (12 percent). Some of these entrepreneurs use ride-hailing income to smooth the cash flow of their operations and to build their credit profiles, while others recruit riders as potential advisors, investors, and customers.
- The findings do not suggest that ride-hailing increases overall levels of entrepreneurship among women. Instead, it allows some women to start new businesses and a similar number to close existing ones, enabling better matching of women and business opportunities.
- Women's use of sharing platforms to support other businesses is consistent with other literature on women's engagement with online platforms and suggests that the sharing economy can help support their entrepreneurial ambitions.

4. Social norms limit the extent to which women participate in ride-hailing as drivers.

- Overall, 11 percent of women drivers surveyed say their family or friends disapproved of their decision to sign up, but attitudes toward women drivers vary widely by market. More than half of current male drivers surveyed in Egypt and Indonesia would be unhappy if a woman in their family wanted to sign up; in contrast, more than half of men say they would be happy in India, Mexico, and the United Kingdom. The top concern among men who would be unhappy is the perceived security risks for women, but some also question the suitability of driving as an occupation for women.
- Women may also face discrimination once on the road: 14 percent of all women drivers surveyed believe some riders have canceled on them due to their gender, rising to approximately a quarter in Egypt and Indonesia.
- The extent of these restrictive norms reveals both the scope of the challenge of recruiting women into ride-hailing and the pioneering nature of the women who have chosen to drive.

Riders

5. Ride-hailing helps women meet complex transportation needs driven by household management responsibilities.

- Women represent a large portion of the existing user base globally, and the majority in Indonesia.
- Women's ride-hailing usage patterns mirror their diverse transportation needs: they tend to make shorter, more frequent, and more types of trips compared with men. Women are more likely than men to use ride-hailing to go shopping, travel to health services, and visit relatives.
- Ride-hailing helps mothers manage the complexity of traveling with children: 30 percent of women, compared with 22 percent of men, travel with children. Almost two in five mothers (39 percent) surveyed strongly believe that ride-hailing helps them move around with their children.

6. Ride-hailing increases women's mobility and sense of independence as riders, helping them reach previously inaccessible places or travel at night.

- Women riders are more likely than men to say ride-hailing increases their mobility. Almost a quarter of women surveyed say that ride-hailing increases their sense of independence—compared with 18 percent of men. This figure climbs to over a third of women in India and South Africa.
- Similarly, 24 percent of women surveyed across the six markets identify getting to places not served by public transport as a major benefit of ride-hailing.
- For some women, ride-hailing fills a transportation gap: going out at night is the third most popular use of ride-hailing among women globally, and 7 percent of women say they were previously unable to make these trips, rising to 9 percent in Indonesia and 10 percent in South Africa.

7. Women riders are affluent—although less so than men riders—and while they value cost transparency, overall expense remains a barrier.

- Cost is a key consideration for women: they tend to spend a higher proportion of disposable income than men on meeting travel needs, especially in emerging markets. Information about the price they will pay when booking is identified as the biggest benefit of using the Uber app by the women riders surveyed—especially in Egypt and India—while men primarily cite the ease of booking through the app.
- Women riders tend to be less affluent than men: 61 percent live in above median income households, compared with 74 percent of men. However, expense emerges as the top barrier preventing all riders from taking more trips. This suggests the least affluent groups may be excluded from standard ride-hailing options.

- Lower-cost ride-sharing models could help more women access ride-hailing. Women spend less money for each trip compared with men. And in locations with multiple options, women are more likely than men to choose lower cost trips such as ride-sharing (UberPOOL) or motorcycle (UberMOTO)—except where security concerns or social mores override the cost benefits.

Drivers and Riders

8. To attract women as riders and drivers, the ride-hailing industry needs to continue to enhance security features and minimize perceived threats.

- Personal security is a determining factor in women's choice of transportation options. They are more likely than men to be attracted to ride-hailing because of security features such as the data trail that the app creates for every ride and the ability to receive information about their driver in advance. These features may increase not only women riders' own sense of security but also those of their family members.
- Security is a concern for drivers and emerges as a key barrier to the recruitment and retention of women drivers: 64 percent of women drivers surveyed cite security concerns as a reason more women do not sign up to become drivers, and 26 percent cite security concerns as a reason they do not drive more.

9. Financial and digital exclusions remain barriers to women's participation in ride-hailing and in the sharing economy more broadly.

- Financial exclusion means women are less likely to have a bank account and own assets that enable participation in the sharing economy. Women surveyed across the six countries studied are less likely than men to own the car they drive, and identify getting the money to buy or access a vehicle as the biggest sign-up barrier they face, ranging from 17 percent in Egypt to 40 percent in South Africa.
- Gaps in digital inclusion disproportionately affect women, but access to the Internet and mobile phones remain prerequisites for participation in the sharing economy. As the surveys conducted did not cover potential drivers and riders, it is likely that the financial and digital barriers noted throughout the report are understated.

10. Recruiting more women drivers into ride-hailing could create a virtuous cycle by attracting more women riders.

- Seventeen percent of women riders surveyed identify the lack of women drivers as a reason not to use the Uber app more often, and 40 percent would prefer a woman driver when traveling alone or at night. Attracting more women drivers could therefore encourage more women to ride, thereby further increasing demand for women drivers, creating a virtuous cycle.
- The demand for women drivers is further evidenced by the 44 percent of women riders surveyed who say they would be more likely to use the Uber app if they had the option of selecting a women driver.

40%
OF WOMEN WOULD PREFER A WOMAN DRIVER
WHEN TRAVELING ALONE OR AT NIGHT

Figure ES.1: Countries At a Glance



- Women drivers in the United Kingdom see an average uplift in earnings of 22 percent when they sign up with Uber—compared with just 6 percent for men.
- Women drivers face fewer barriers to driving more, compared with peers in the other markets studied.
- 66 percent of women riders use ride-hailing to go out at night, and are attracted to ride-hailing for the convenience and ease of using the app.



- 60 percent of women drivers rely on income from ride-hailing to meet their basic needs, well above the average across the countries studied.
- Security is a concern for one-third of women drivers surveyed, and almost a quarter say friends or family disapproved of their decision to sign up.
- Just over a third of women riders (36 percent) say Uber enables them to travel more—and 28 percent identify getting to places not served by public transport as a major benefit of ride-hailing.



- Women drive the most hours of the six countries surveyed, and 73 percent of those surveyed log on every day.
- However, 51 percent of women drivers say security concerns limit the number of hours they spend on the road, compared with 26 percent on average across the six markets studied.
- Women riders are attracted to ride-hailing for the convenience and security that the data trail provides: 52 percent of women were attracted by knowing the driver's name and registration in advance.



INDIA

- There are few women drivers using the Uber app in India, but those who have signed up often report that driving has helped them “build an identity” in a society where driving is not seen as a career choice for women.
- A lack of financial resources as well as administrative barriers challenge women to sign up.
- Women riders are the most frequent users of ride-hailing in the six countries studied—many believe it offers improved mobility, convenience, and independence.



EGYPT, ARAB REP.

- Women receive an average income boost of 29 percent when moving into ride-hailing, nearly double the increase of men.
- The data trail is important for women riders: over half say they tried the app because they could see the driver's name and registration in advance.
- Cultural barriers limit the recruitment of women drivers: 57 percent of male drivers surveyed say they would be unhappy if a woman in their family wanted to sign up.



INDONESIA

- Women's ability to participate in ride-hailing is limited by cultural barriers: 56 percent of male drivers would be unhappy if a woman in their family wanted to sign up.
- Flexibility is key: 82 percent of women drivers cite “I can work when I want” as ride-hailing's main attraction.
- 66 percent of women riders use ride-hailing to commute, compared with 55 percent of men.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This report finds that the ride-hailing industry can boost economic and social outcomes for women as riders and drivers. However, several barriers prevent women from fully realizing this opportunity. Some—such as those related to personal security, cultural and social norms, or licensing requirements—require concerted efforts from multiple stakeholders to be overcome. Nevertheless, these challenges must be factored in when crafting new policies and practices in the industry.

Women Drivers

To attract more women drivers, and to support them better once they sign up, ride-hailing companies could redesign their outreach, onboarding, and engagement efforts with both women's and men's needs in mind. Possible options include the following:

- Simplify the sign-up process and use better signposting for existing support
- Help women build formal and informal peer support structures to mitigate the lack of organic, traditional structures available to men
- Build a broader ecosystem for drivers to enable them to access both personal and professional development opportunities and tailored insurance and benefits products

Women Riders

While women drivers remain relatively rare, women already account for a large proportion of the rider base. However, affordability remains a key challenge. Ride-hailing companies could address this issue through the following:

- Develop additional lower-cost models to bring services to less affluent populations and expand those that already exist to more locations
- Build support for women's use of affordable options, like motorcycles, that they might not access for cultural reasons

Personal Security

Personal security concerns are major barriers that limit the participation of women as drivers and riders. Ride-hailing companies alone cannot solve the security challenges facing women when traveling, especially alone or at night. However, by working closely with other stakeholders, such as law enforcement and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), they could continue to reduce threats for women. Possible options include the following:

- Better educate both drivers and riders regarding the security features already embedded in their apps
- Continuously innovate to bring the latest security technology to their apps
- Engage more closely with app users to better understand the nature and impact of security incidents

Internal Operations

Finally, ride-hailing companies could examine their own operations through a gender lens to assess whether their internal commitments to a diverse and inclusive workforce are strong enough to drive external change. Examples include:

- Tailor marketing communications to be more inclusive
- Consider how to collect sex-disaggregated data to understand how to better serve women
- Work with third parties to formulate industrywide best practices and recommendations

Ride-hailing companies need to take the lead on building services and operations that would allow women and men to benefit equally from their apps. However, many of the recommendations will be best realized through cooperation with other companies and stakeholders on a precompetitive basis.

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