
The story of Egypt's first female bus driver

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Gender equality is not only about the notion of parity between men and women – it is also about accepting and respecting people for who they are and what they believe in. Letting go of stereotypes and tolerating each other's differences is key in enabling an equal world.

A few years ago, I heard the incredible story of Umm Abdalla, a mother of five kids who wanted to make a living for herself after her husband passed away. This was not an easy task but she persisted and is currently roaming Cairo's chaotic traffic as Egypt's first female bus driver. Umm Abdalla had to overcome huge barriers to get where she is today and never gave in to prejudices and intolerance. With her bravery and love for her job, she has inspired many people all over the world and I am one of them. She became my hero.

While the average percentage of women working in the transport sector is extremely low – only 3% of the truck drivers in Europe are female, the industry is making efforts to reverse this trend. IRU is proud of being a founding member of the Women in Transport Platform which was launched by the European Commission and brings together stakeholders committed to increasing and improving female employment in the sector and exchanging good practices.

In order to change the image of the sector and recruit more women, it is also of great importance to showcase success stories and role models such as Umm Abdalla. IRU therefore also initiated the Women in Transport Talks, and industry-wide action to promote transport as an attractive field for women to work in and giving visibility to those already active in the sector by organising events and providing network opportunities.

International Women's Day is a great way to celebrate women's achievements and challenging bias, but here's the thing: building equality, mutual understanding and tolerance should be a daily task. If we work on breaking down the barriers together, every day, we can reach equality and let our economies and communities thrive.

(Esther Visser,

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