

THE GESI NEWSLETTER OF CHENNAI METRO RAIL LIMITED

GENDER AND SOCIAL PLUS



THE VISION OF GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION AT CMRL

MESSAGE FROM MD

At Chennai Metro Rail Limited (CMRL), Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) are central to how we serve the city. Our goal is to make the metro safe, accessible, and welcoming for all women, elderly citizens, children, persons with disabilities, and transgender persons.

We have taken practical steps to improve the travel experience of our passengers. These include gender-friendly coaches, bright lighting, accessible station layouts, and clear signage. Safety has been strengthened with reliable emergency communication, active surveillance, and women security personnel, including the Pink Squad.

Within our team, women make more than 20 percent of the workforce - an encouraging sign in the infrastructure sector. We aim to improve this with thoughtful recruitment, supportive workplace policies, and training. Recognition from institutions like the Greentech Foundation, AIIB, ADB, NDB and the World Bank reassures us that we are moving in the right direction.

Through Gender and Social Plus, our platform for sharing updates and receiving feedback, we will continue to work towards a metro system and a workplace where dignity, safety, and inclusion of all are part of everyday life.



Thiru M.A. Siddique (IAS)
Managing Director
Chennai Metro Rail Limited

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MESSAGE FROM DIRECTOR (PROJECTS)



As we advance Chennai Metro Rail Limited's (CMRL) Phase II with the introduction of driverless trains, the executive priority remains clear: to ensure that safety, inclusivity, and operational excellence are embedded at every level.

We have implemented reserved coaches, designated waiting zones, and facilities such as nursing rooms and gender-inclusive restrooms, aligned with international standards. Comprehensive surveillance and strong lighting provide continuous oversight throughout the environment of all stations and trains. Our Executive leadership receives regular incident and grievance reports that are addressed through structured, evidence-based protocols.

As Director of Projects, I remain committed to ensuring that safety and gender inclusivity are not only design features but lived realities, upheld by strong governance and proactive management.



Shri. T. Archunan, IRSE
Director (Projects)
Chennai Metro Rail Limited

MESSAGE FROM DIRECTOR (FINANCE)



At Chennai Metro Rail Limited (CMRL), we believe an organisation thrives when it embraces diversity and ensures equal opportunities for all. Gender equality is not just a policy but a core value guiding our decisions, workforce strategies, and long-term vision.

In the past year, CMRL has introduced progressive measures to empower women employees. A dedicated creche facility supports working mothers, and our landmark initiative of extending maternity leave to 365 days reflects our commitment to their holistic welfare. Our inclusive recruitment policy promotes fairness in hiring and promotions, complemented by a women-only recruitment drive for Assistant Manager (Civil) posts. This has strengthened gender representation across the managerial workforce.

These initiatives embody our vision of a workplace built on equity, respect, and care.



Shri. S. Krishnamoorthy, IRAS
Director (Finance)
Chennai Metro Rail Limited

MESSAGE FROM DIRECTOR (SYSTEMS & OPERATIONS), CMRL



It gives me great pride to share that Chennai Metro Rail Limited (CMRL) has always placed inclusivity and passenger comfort at the core of its operations. Our gender-focused initiatives are part of a larger vision to make public transport safe, accessible, and welcoming for all.

The introduction of the Pink Squad Security Team, comprising women personnel, ensures a secure environment for women passengers across stations and trains. Women-Specific Coaches further empower female commuters with enhanced privacy and comfort. To improve convenience, CMRL has also provided extended holding ropes and grab handles designed to meet the needs of passengers of varying heights.

Recognizing maternal care, feeding rooms have been thoughtfully set up at major metro stations, offering nursing mothers privacy and dignity. Moving forward, CMRL remains committed to strengthening and innovating measures that create a metro system where all passengers feel respected, secure, and valued.



Shri. Manoj Goyal, IRSEE
Director (Systems & Operations)
Chennai Metro Rail Limited

MESSAGE FROM CHIEF ADVISOR (GESI STRATEGY)

As a modern urban transit system, Chennai Metro Rail Limited (CMRL) is committed to providing safe, efficient, and sustainable mobility while fostering gender equality and social inclusion across all operations. As an equal-opportunity organisation, CMRL empowers all segments of society.

This maiden issue of the newsletter celebrates that vision, showcasing how inclusivity is built into planning, implementation, and daily functioning so that every commuter—regardless of gender, age, ability, or socio-economic background—feels respected and supported.

CMRL organises gender sensitisation programmes for staff and works with NGOs to support trans persons, senior citizens, and economically weaker sections. Initiatives such as inclusive retail kiosks, skill-building workshops, and wellness activities like medical camps and yoga sessions promote empowerment and dignity.

Outreach programmes in schools and colleges raise awareness on metro safety and inclusion, while public art and cultural events at stations celebrate local identity and strengthen community bonds.

This publication offers insights into these initiatives, reflecting CMRL's resolve to ensure safe, inclusive, and dignified journeys for all. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Managing Director for his continued motivation and encouragement.



Dr. Rajeev K Srivastava IFS (Retd.),
Chief Advisor (Environment & Gender)
Chennai Metro Rail Limited

MESSAGE FROM GENDER FOCAL POINT, CMRL



At CMRL, gender equality is approached in a practical and steady manner. As a woman officer, I have observed the organisation ensures equal opportunities at the workplace while supporting work-life balance through measures such as extended maternity leave, work-from-home provisions for those in need. At the same time, we acknowledge this is an ongoing effort, with room for continued progress.

For commuters, initiatives such as women-only coaches, baby-feeding rooms, a 24x7 helpline for women, and the Pink Squad: our women-led security team, have helped enhance safety and confidence across the network. We are now focusing on increasing the percentage of women employees in the project.

These efforts were recognised internationally, winning the 2025 Global GreenTech Gender Equality Award. Yet, our focus remains forward-looking, expanding opportunities for women and persons with disabilities in Phase II and embedding gender equity and social inclusion as part of everyday operations. Steady, consistent action is what will help us achieve lasting change.



Tmt Rajalakshmi S
Gender Focal Point /AGM (Design)
Chennai Metro Rail Limited

CMRL RECEIVES GENDER EQUALITY AWARD



Chennai Metro Rail Limited (CMRL) has been awarded the prestigious Gender Equality Award at the Global GreenTech Environmental and Sustainability Awards 2025, held on 13th June 2025 in New Delhi. This milestone recognition marks CMRL's maiden award on gender equality and underscores its continued commitment to fostering inclusivity, equity, and gender sensitivity in urban transport and workplace practices.

CMRL has taken significant strides to empower women and create equal opportunities within the organisation. Women's only recruitment drives are designed to increase women's participation in technical and operational roles. To ensure women's safety in the workplace, strong mechanisms are in place, including workplace safety protocols, an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC), and structured grievance redressal systems.

Beyond policies, CMRL focuses on capacity-building initiatives such as sensitisation workshops, gender-awareness training, and leadership development programmes, embedding inclusivity into its organisational culture.

For commuters, gender-sensitive measures like women-only coaches, enhanced security, pink squad, CCTV surveillance, improved station lighting, and accessible design features have been introduced. Public outreach campaigns further reinforce confidence in metro travel, particularly for women and vulnerable groups.

This GreenTech Award stands as a strong endorsement of CMRL's efforts to integrate gender equality into both workplace practices and commuter experience. By embedding inclusiveness into every aspect of its operations, CMRL continues to set benchmarks in building a safe, sustainable, and socially responsible urban transport system.





HR INITIATIVES FOR GENDER EQUALITY

- CMRL demonstrated strong human resource practices in 2024–2025 to promote gender equality, including designing and implementing the following policies encouraging women at their workplace:
- CMRL has established a creche facility for its women employees as well as outsourced staff, functioning as a daycare to support working women employees, in compliance with the Tamil Nadu Maternity Benefit Act, 1961.
- The recruitment policy has been established to prohibit discrimination in hiring or promotion, ensuring equal opportunities for all employees.
- Maternity leave has been increased to 365 days for women employees, including those under contractual and regular roles, in accordance with applicable regulations.
- The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016 prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities throughout all employment stages — including hiring, promotions, and dismissals — and mandates reasonable accommodations and workplace inclusivity.
- In a significant move for gender diversity, CMRL launched a women-only recruitment drive for eight Assistant Manager (Civil) posts, with women now making up 21% of in-house staff and 50% of outsourced technical staff. These initiatives underscore CMRL's focus on fairness, inclusivity, and progressive workforce development, setting new benchmarks in the public sector.
- A special session dedicated to women employees was held on 7th March 2025, in celebration of Women's Day. The session focused on women's wellness, personal health, and hygiene, featuring a speaker from the external agency, Genesis Academy.
- Transgender TOM operators at New Washermenpet Metro Station were honoured with certificates and mementos for their contribution to metro operations, reflecting CMRL's commitment to inclusive employment and GESI principles.

Women Leadership Development Workshop

Date: 07/12/2025 | Venue: MetroS, CMRL | Participants: 37 women employees (open voluntary nominations)

CMRL conducted a 3-hour exclusive workshop for women employees focused on leadership development, confidence building, effective communication, work-life integration, wellness, and mentorship. The programme promoted holistic growth among female professionals and received overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants.

Dr. Rajeev K. Srivastava, Chief Advisor (Environment, Social and Gender), delivered the keynote address, emphasising women's critical role in leadership. Interactive quizzes and engaging activities kept the session lively and participatory. This initiative reinforces CMRL's ongoing commitment to gender equality, social inclusion, and women's empowerment in the workplace.



PINK SQUAD: THE PEACE WARRIORS

By: Dr. Gomathy Balasubramanian (Gender Expert)

The Pink Squad of CMRL is one of the most unique Break Through Initiatives for Gender Equality in the world. The Squad are women trained in martial arts, who constantly move across stations and trains to ensure that women passengers in Chennai Metro Rail travel safely.

I was privileged to speak to three members of this squad and was inspired by the stories: Ms. Meena. K., Ms. Dhanushri. D. and Ms. Vazhanthavazhi. N. Their ages varied from 20's to the 40's. Two were from the city while one was a migrant from a district in Tamil Nadu.

Introducing themselves, the squad members said: "We all come from different school of martial arts such as Judo and Karate. But we have all taken the same oath - to not attack anyone, but only use one's strength and training only for defence. We are proud to work in CMRL, which has appreciated this unique quality amongst those of us who are trained in these skills."

This principle of restraint in strength is the raison d'être of the Initiative. Thus one of the members said: "We know how to take down anyone who attacks us and this gives us the strength to carry out our work confidently. But this is only one part of our work. Our more significant duty is to defend the vulnerable people who come to our stations and trains. Vulnerable people in physical and psychological distress must feel safe with us."

When asked about their work, this is what the squad members had to say: "Our primary focus is to ensure the well-being of the women passengers. We make sure that the reservations such as women only coaches and special seats for EWCDT groups are in operation. Now this part of work has become systematised. Regular male passengers have learnt not to enter women only coaches. The only exceptions are those related to travellers from outside the city who are not familiar with the train reservations. We also patrol the station including spaces reserved for women, elevator access points, and isolated points."

Talking about their daily work experiences, the Squad members say: "We deal with many kinds of distress amongst women, children and the elderly including physical and psychological distress. We are in constant communication with the Station controllers to ensure swift responses in real time. On our patrols, we are trained to scan our environments constantly, to be aware of what is happening around us. Thus, we are able quickly identify situations where we need to intervene."

"One young woman from a town in Tamil Nadu had just joined college in Chennai. Her father came to see how his daughter would fare here After speaking with us, he said that he felt more confident about his daughter's stay in the city"

-Chennai Metro User



Sexual harassment and stalking of women passengers remain a critical aspect of the Squad's concern. In these instances, the trust that women passengers have on the Squad is important. Thus, a squad member says: "One of our regular woman passengers approached saying that she was being stalked by her ex-lover. Besides warning the male passenger, we also reported this issue to the station controller. We remained vigilant for the next few days, actively intervening against the stalking. The man desisted and the problem was solved."

A critical aspect of the Squad's work is vigilance to prevent harassment. Illustrating this example, they told the following story: "During the course of their work, it came to their attention that a man assaulted a woman in one of the stations, where the footfall of passengers was low. Following this instance, the Squad members quickly identified such locations and made it part of their daily patrol. Again, the Squad has identified stations (proximal to certain colleges) and timings (peak hours of travel) where harassment is frequent and has redeployed its members to make sure that they are present to prevent any untoward incidents."

One of the squad member went on to say that young women often approach them and tell them that the Squad's presence and carriage gives them confidence in travelling for their studies and work. "One young woman from a town in Tamil Nadu had just joined college in Chennai. Her father came to see how his daughter would fare here. After speaking with us, he said that he felt more confident about his daughter's stay in the city."

The defence against sexual harassment remains the tip of the iceberg of the Squad's. The bulk of their work remains attending to various kinds of crises that vulnerable passengers face. A critical part of their work is the care of elderly passengers. Despite the clear signage, they are often disoriented. In these instances, Squad members accompany them till needed. This is also true for children and women who are mentally disabled. In these instances, Squad members are present with such passengers till the Station Controllers can contact and bring responsible family members, to whom their responsibility can be handed.

Often the Squad's work requires detailed attention. Usually, passengers under distress are emotionally volatile and it is here that the Squad's patience stands out. A story narrated by the Squad member illustrated this principle for me. "There was a couple travelling who were violently fighting and the man was subduing his wife using physical force. She was showering verbal abuse on him."

We intervened thinking it might be a domestic violence incident. When we enquired in detail, we found that the woman was mentally ill and the husband was escorting her from the hospital. To verify these facts, we examined the medical reports in detail and also spoke to the wife's parents."

What stood out for me about the members I interviewed was their calm confidence and courteous behaviour. Over and over again, they commented on the necessity of courage amongst women to handle risky circumstances with strength. Thus, the one message that the Squad members had to give to women passengers of the Metro was this: "Empower yourself by developing the talent of martial arts. It will open you to new worlds of progress." I must say I emerged out the interviews with a sense of strength and inspiration.

"We know how to take down anyone who attacks us and this gives us the strength to carry out our work confidently. But this is only one part of our work. Our more significant duty is to defend the vulnerable people who come to our stations and trains. Vulnerable people in physical and psychological distress must feel safe with us."

-PINK SQUAD MEMBER



GENDER EQUALITY AND LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME: EMPOWERING THE SELF LAB

17th to 19th December, CMRL

The Gender Equality Leadership Programme is aimed to be the first lab in a series of four leadership development programmes in Gender Equality amongst CMRL staff. It is designed to foster leadership to work in a sustained and results based manner. It draws forth four faculties of human nature to develop integral initiatives: the inner wisdom and power of all individuals, the critical, strategic and systems mind, the need for emotional well-being, and the space of action and methods. It focusses on results based conversations as the basis of its work, covering domains of listening and speaking based on inner power and for concrete results.

The inaugural ceremony was graced by Thiru M.A. Siddique, I.A.S., Managing Director, in the presence of Dr. Rajeev K. Srivastava, IFS (Retd.), Chief Advisor (Environment, Social and Gender), and Tmt. S. Rajalakshmi, AGM (Designs). He was invited to plant a seedling, a small symbol of CMRL's commitment to gender equality as part of this ceremony. This was followed by an inspirational speech by him on CMRL's commitment to zero tolerance for gender discrimination and the safety of women.

The Lab was facilitated by Dr. Gomathy Balasubramanian and Ms. Kokila Shetty. The participants went through a series of experiential activities to design their BTIs. These activities focussed on the following aspects of leadership: inner power, generative conversations, and results based action. The first day focussed largely on sourcing inner wisdom and power, and introduced the second dimension of project design towards the end. The second day began with inner wisdom based on insights and reflections and moved significantly in developing the concrete results base of the Integral initiatives. The third day consolidated the learnings followed by an inspirational film aimed to evoke daily practice in empowerment and gender equality.

At the end of the three days, 80% of the participants had identified key areas of their initiatives (in alignment with GESI and Funder requirements). Three or four of the initiatives had completed work on the first level of the design and were ready to develop their operational outputs. Process-wise, almost all participants have identified the seeds of gender equality they want to plant in CMRL, and a few have found their pots and soil. In the closing ceremony, a participant gave a vote of thanks to the facilitators and the organisers. Participants exchanged certificates in the presence of the Chief Advisor: Dr. Rajeev Srivastava



RESPECTING HERITAGE, REALIGNING PROGRESS: A STORY OF COMMUNITY, CULTURE, AND COMMITMENT



-Ishana (Social Expert)

Large infrastructure projects often intersect with spaces that hold deep cultural and emotional value. Building new infrastructure requires carefully balancing urban advancement with respect for the cultural and spiritual values cherished by communities. The Chennai Metro Rail Project Phase II provides a compelling example of this balance in action.

During the early planning stages of Phase II, the proposed alignment for the metro viaduct along Kalyamman Koil Street brought to light a critical challenge. The route, according to initial design plans, intersected the land occupied by the revered Kali Amman Temple, a spiritual and cultural landmark central to the daily lives and traditions of the local residents. Beyond being a place of worship, the temple embodies the identity and heritage of the neighbourhood.

The community's concerns and objections were immediate and heartfelt. Recognising the temple's profound significance, the Chennai Metro Rail Limited (CMRL) management engaged deeply with the issue. In a hands-on approach, the Managing Director of CMRL personally visited the site to assess the situation, exploring possible alternatives that could respect the temple's sanctity while advancing the metro project.

Following the site visit, CMRL undertook a careful technical evaluation and reviewed the design thoroughly. This process led to a critical decision to modify the alignment in the Detailed Project Report (DPR). The revised route ensured that the Kali Amman Temple would remain untouched, preserving its heritage and spiritual importance. At the same time, the project's progress was maintained without significant delay.

This decision was not just about avoiding a structure, it was about showing that big projects can listen, adapt, and respect the people they serve. It proved that development and heritage can walk side by side, if we choose to make space for both.

In realigning the Metro's route, CMRL reaffirmed a simple truth: cities don't just grow with concrete and steel, they grow strongest when they carry their history forward with them.

(In conversation with the Land Department, Chennai Metro Rail Limited)



Kali Amman Temple, Kalyamman Koil Street — preserved through the realigned metro viaduct route



The revised Phase II alignment ensures the temple remains untouched while metro construction progresses

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Thank You for Reading

Volume 2 of Gender and Social Plus is coming soon.



For feedback, queries, and submission of articles for the next edition of the newsletter, kindly contact Dr. Rajeev K. Srivastava, Chief Advisor (Environment, Social and Gender), or write to srivastava.rajeev@cmrl.in / rajalakshmi.s@cmrl.in.