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## Breaking barriers: Women delivery partners make their presence felt

Logistic companies are also launching multiple initiatives to increase the participation of women

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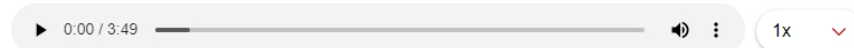
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33-year-old Santoshi, who works at Ecom Express and has always had a field job, believes in greeting her customers before handing them their parcels. She says it makes them and her feel good.

36-year-old Hemlata, on the other hand, says that her customers have been very supportive and even want to click pictures when they see a woman delivering their parcels.

And this is how women are making their presence felt in the otherwise male-dominated logistics industry. According to Neelesh Gupta, Director, Deloitte India, the current female workforce participation in blue-collar space is at nine per cent, whereas, for the logistics industry, it is less than one per cent.

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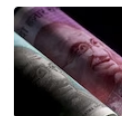
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than one per cent.

Commenting on why there are fewer female delivery partners than men, Rashi Rao, director at Even Cargo, said that ignorance and stereotypes are the primary reason for women not entering the field. She added that "most women from poor resource communities were unaware of job opportunities in the logistics sector."

Whereas, Mehernosh Mehta, chief human resources officer at Gati Ltd, believes that not owning a vehicle is a primary roadblock which stops women from entering the industry. Some other constraints include - a lack of supporting infrastructure at the workplace, such as women-only restrooms and secure and hygienic accommodations.

Even though the number of women joining the industry is low, their participation in the field steadily grows. The sentiment was echoed by Liju Thomas, director of people experience and technology (PXT), India operations, Amazon, who said, "With an increasing need for manpower, efficiency, discipline, and a focus on improving diversity, companies have taken on the responsibility to hire more women across all areas of the organisation."

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Logistic companies are also launching multiple initiatives to increase the participation of women. From Amazon's "I Have Space" and "Flex Partner" programmes to Ecom Express' "all women delivery centres" and BlueDart's "Each One Refer One" programme, companies are now putting the onus on gender diversity to create a shift in the industry.

Apart from this, Ecom Express has onboarded nearly 1,500 women delivery partners in the last five years and has the highest number of women bikers in five metro cities- Delhi, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Kolkata. Even Cargo, on the other hand, is an all-women e-commerce logistics company which has employed nearly 170 women delivery partners since its inception in 2016.

With the steady increase in the number of women in the logistics sector, organisations are now also focusing on creating a safe working environment to ensure no gender biases or discrimination. Sonia Nair - National Head of Customer Service at Blue Dart, said that they try to set examples of inclusion by providing equal opportunities, awarding women delivery partners, and giving them a chance to be brand ambassadors.

Manju Dhawan, co-founder of Ecom Express, stated that they conduct regular training on road safety, fire safety, self-defence, prevention of sexual harassment (POSH), and gender sensitisation to provide a comfortable working environment for our associates.

Dhawan added, "As a practice, the company regularly conducts quarterly audits across facilities to evaluate the physical infrastructure provided to female staff. The audit includes questions on safety and surveillance, security checks, transportation services, personal care and hygiene, and training and awareness."

In order to ensure more women's participation in the logistics sector, Rao said, they engage with male family members of the delivery associates to create a more conducive and supportive environment. She further said the company also interacts with the companies to curate more inclusive policies, including- flexible work hours for daycare facilities for women.

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