



About Ecom Express

Ecom Express (Ecom) is a leading technology-enabled logistics solutions provider to the Indian retail and e-commerce industry. Established in 2013, Ecom now has more than 3,000 delivery centres.

Our gender partnership

We helped Ecom to develop and implement a Gender Action Plan to increase female representation and embed diversity and inclusion as a key pillar of its organisational culture.

Impact highlights

- + Female representation across Ecom's workforce has more than doubled in less than five years
- + Ecom continues to work toward its target of 10 per cent women in the workforce by 2025. Today female representation is 6.7 per cent, up from 1.5 per cent in 2019
- + Increased organisational awareness of diversity and inclusion at all levels
- + Improved workplace experience for women employees through the adoption of 'hard' infrastructure measures in its delivery facilities as well as 'softer' measures to foster a sense of inclusion





Setting the scene



India's e-commerce sector has grown significantly over the past decade and is expected to reach over \$120 billion by 2026. The sector relies heavily on workers transporting goods between warehouses and delivery centres within and across cities. With the

rapid growth of the sector, the demand for reliable staff across a range of roles is further complicated by the need to flexibly increase staffing capacity during busy delivery periods such as festive seasons.

As part of due diligence for our first equity investment into Ecom in 2019, we found several value-add opportunities to support Ecom as part of its expansion plans. These included supporting the roll-out of a comprehensive road safety training programme as well as the introduction of an electric vehicle delivery fleet, and opportunities

for gender-linked technical assistance to ensure female workforce participation was increased as part of the company's projected future job growth.

At the point of our investment in 2019, women represented 1.5 per cent of Ecom's workforce against an industry benchmark of 7 per cent. This case study focuses on how we worked with Ecom to change this.

Ecom recognised that greater diversity could mean an enhanced pool of candidates and wider business benefits. To seize this opportunity, we worked with the company to carry out an in-depth gender diagnostic. This uncovered specific opportunities for increasing female representation and a clear business case. This, in turn, paved the way for a Gender Action Plan, which we co-created with Ecom to support it in becoming an employer of choice for women in the e-commerce sector in India.



Ecom and BII: partnership timeline

2019



Due diligence included benchmarking female representation, identify gender gaps in Ecom's employee base, and determining targets for female employment.

We made a \$35 million equity investment and agreed to gender targets to increase diversity over time.

2019



2020



Before increasing female employment, we worked with Ecom to develop the foundations for a gender-inclusive workplace e.g. developing safeguarding policies and HR procedures to ensure a safe working environment for women.

We carried out an in-depth gender diagnostic of Ecom's workforce and developed a business case for a comprehensive Gender Action Plan.

2020



We made an additional equity investment of \$20 million to continue supporting Ecom's growth plans.

2020-2021



We supported Ecom's implementation of the Gender Action Plan. This included training and gender sensitisation sessions to shift perceptions of women's workforce participation in logistics and refining recruitment practices to attract female talent.

Ecom onboarded a dedicated diversity and inclusion (D&I) team to support the delivery of its Gender Action Plan.

2020-2021



2022



Ecom's employee engagement survey revealed slightly higher trust levels in the organisation among female respondents vs male colleagues. This may be a result of Ecom's efforts to improve D&I for female employees.

At the end of 2022, Ecom had six all-women delivery centres, building on the business case data for gender diversity highlighted in our gender diagnostic.

2022



2023-2024

Ecom has driven its own D&I agenda, while we set up regular touchpoints to provide accountability and ongoing advisory support.

2023-2024



Developing and rolling out a Gender Action Plan

The development of Ecom's Gender Action Plan began with an in-depth gender diagnostic that covered:

- Analysis of gender-disaggregated workforce, leadership data and recruitment data
- Review of HR policies, workplace safety measures and organisational structures for their gender inclusivity
- Developing the business case for Ecom to make investments in advancing gender diversity within the organisation

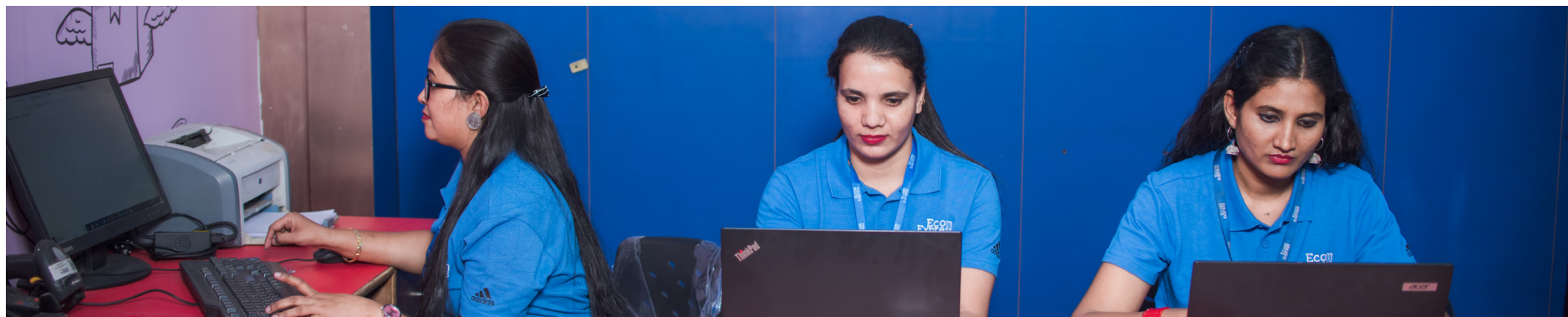
Two key outcomes were central to the business case:

- **Improved productivity:** Based on a pilot to support gender diversity at one of its logistics hubs outside Delhi, women were found to take fewer breaks and have lower levels of absenteeism and casual leave. Using cost estimates provided by Ecom, the diagnostic found Ecom could save an estimated INR 350 million through increased productivity.
- **Reduced attrition:** Gender-disaggregated attrition data revealed lower attrition rates among women compared to men. Applying this to the 2020-25 timeframe, we extrapolated the reduced attrition would save Ecom approximately INR 125 million on hiring, onboarding and training costs over the period.

As a result of the diagnostic and business case, we supported Ecom to develop a Gender Action Plan that covered several objectives:

- Integrate diversity and inclusion into Ecom's overall corporate DNA
- Set time-bound targets to increase representation of women in the workforce and in leadership positions
- Ensure high standards of safeguarding and female-friendly infrastructure to provide a safe and inclusive working environment
- Deepen the impact of training and gender sensitisation sessions to shift perceptions on women's workforce participation in logistics
- Refine recruitment policies and practices to emphasise in-house talent progression and attract external female talent
- Strengthen data analytics to support recruitment and people development
- Enhance the brand image of Ecom as a promoter of diversity and inclusion

Each of these objectives was accompanied by clear, time-bound actions and responsibilities assigned within Ecom.





Sustaining a wider diversity & inclusion agenda

Since the completion of Ecom's initial Gender Action Plan in 2020-21, our partnership has focused on supporting Ecom to sustain its wider D&I agenda independently with some advisory support from us. While COVID-19 posed material setbacks for Ecom in achieving its gender targets, the company remained committed to advancing its efforts, especially because of positive emerging results.

Results from gender initiatives undertaken between 2020–2021 included:

- **Realising business case benefits:** Proactive efforts at Ecom's delivery hub in Bilaspur achieved the highest levels of female representation at delivery centres across the organisation (at 16 per cent). A notable reduction in absenteeism, theft and pilferage was recorded, further advancing the case for greater gender diversity.
- **Higher employee trust:** An Employee Trust Index survey in February 2022 found higher trust levels among female employees than their male counterparts, likely linked to the influence of Ecom's D&I efforts.



Since 2022, Ecom has been accountable for its D&I agenda through regular Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) and D&I Committees that have focused on reporting gender-disaggregated data of its workforce, and updates on three key pillars of its D&I agenda (highlights of which are below).

• Work environment

- Regular infrastructure audits on the gender sensitivity of Ecom facilities across all delivery centres with female employees
- Revision of Ecom's Prevention of Sexual Harassment (PoSH) policy and grievance mechanisms to recognise and address vulnerabilities of all genders
- Regular gender sensitisation sessions, PoSH awareness trainings, and self-defence training for women

• Talent Cycle

- Monthly reporting of gender-disaggregated data, including attrition data shared with Ecom's leadership team
- Leadership and mentoring programmes for women
- Commitment to gender targets for senior management, mid-management and rest of workforce

• Communication and Community Development

- Launch of *Aadhya*, a women employee resource group
- Active marketing on social media platforms to encourage applications from a diverse range of candidates
- Connections with non-governmental organisations to explore opportunities to broaden Ecom's focus on diversity beyond gender to consider LGBTQ+ and people with disabilities

Our gender impact to-date

Our gender-focussed partnership with Ecom is notable for its impact. We started from a low baseline of female representation in the workforce (on both an absolute and relative basis) in a traditionally male-dominated sector, and from there we have supported significant change.

We have addressed critical gender-based risks in the workplace (e.g., provision of safe working conditions and appropriate facilities at delivery hubs) which have unlocked opportunities for women and enabled Ecom to attract and retain female employees. In turn, this has unlocked business and operational benefits (e.g., lower rates of attrition and absenteeism).

Lastly, we are proud of the transition we have overseen in the ownership of D&I, and that our initial Gender Action Plan supported the integration of this agenda within the organisational culture of Ecom.

Impact highlights

Female representation across Ecom's workforce has more than doubled in less than five years. Ecom is committed to employing c. 10 per cent women by 2025

Despite setbacks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, female representation across Ecom has increased from 1.6 per cent in 2019 to around 6.7 per cent at the end of June 2024. It is further encouraging that Ecom continues to pursue a target of 10 per cent women in its workforce by 2025.

As a company that requires significant workforce flexibility to respond to seasonal peaks, contracted workers are an important part of Ecom's business model. Since our first investment, Ecom has shifted its workforce model to a majority-contracted workforce.

As a result, the absolute number of jobs for women has varied considerably over the past five years, but as of June 2024, almost 600 women are directly employed in the formal full-time workforce by Ecom (compared to 340 in 2019). In addition to women directly employed in the permanent workforce, Ecom has more than 1,900 female workers contracted through vendors as of June 2024, compared to 430 back in 2019.

Demonstrated an increase in organisational awareness and accountability for diversity and inclusion

The embedding of diversity and inclusion within Ecom is reflected in both the depth and breadth of initiatives, and the institutionalisation of ongoing accountability mechanisms.

Every month, a 'D&I dashboard', with a full suite of gender-disaggregated data, is provided to Ecom's leadership. A key insight from the dashboard is that female attrition rates continue to be lower than their male counterparts – this is in-line with the business case findings from our earlier gender diagnostic.

Each quarter, Ecom runs sessions on D&I, gender awareness/sensitisation and PoSH. Critically, these training sessions reach off-roll employees employed through vendors as well as on-roll employees. In Q2 2024 alone, almost 3,500 employees received training.

Improved qualitative workplace experience of women employees at Ecom

Ecom has materially improved the gender inclusivity of its workplace. While Ecom continues to operate a few all-women delivery centres and hubs, *all* its large and last mile facilities where women are employed are subject to quarterly safety and infrastructure audits. These assessments, over and above legal requirements, proactively engage women to respond to questions on security measures e.g., whether there are sufficient female security guards to ensure all checks on female employees are carried out by women, and the continued maintenance of separate washroom facilities and locker rooms.

Beyond 'hard' infrastructure measures, Ecom continues to advance 'softer' measures that provide forums for women employees to connect on D&I, and foster a sense of community.

All these measures continue to drive and sustain high levels of female employee satisfaction and position Ecom as an employer of choice for diversity candidates.