

Eur Ing Miguel-Angel Serrano Santos

MEng (Hons) CEng MICE CMgr MCMI FCIHT FSoRSA FASEVI

Senior Road Safety Specialist, UNOPS and IRF Lead Trainer
Chartered Civil Engineer, Global Road Safety Leader and International
Trainer & Speaker



When people hear or see ‘equality, diversity and inclusion’, they often think about protected characteristics or organisational policies. What does EDI mean to you in the context of professional practice?

EDI, for me, is about recognising that safer transport systems emerge when we understand the full diversity of people who use them. Early in my career, I saw inclusion mainly through the lens of compliance and organisational policy. Over time — particularly through international work — I realised that inclusion is a technical discipline in its own right. It shapes how we diagnose problems, how we design solutions, and how we evaluate risk. Today, I see EDI as a core component of professional competence, not an add-on.

Over the course of your career, how have you seen the road safety profession evolve?

The profession has become more evidence-driven, more collaborative, and more global. We've moved from focusing primarily on infrastructure to recognising the importance of behaviour, culture, and context. There is also a growing appreciation that technical excellence must be paired with empathy and curiosity. Opportunities for growth lie in strengthening multidisciplinary practice and ensuring that diverse voices shape our decisions.

Innovation often comes from seeing a problem differently. How has exposure to different communities, cultures and user needs influenced your thinking and approach to road safety?

Working across Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia taught me that 'typical road users' do not exist. I had to unlearn the idea that standards alone guarantee safe outcomes. Exposure to different cultures and transport realities showed me how powerful local knowledge is. In Tanzania, for example, listening to community perspectives helped us understand pedestrian behaviour patterns that were not captured in any manual — and that insight improved the Ten Steps Project. Diverse perspectives don't complicate technical work; they strengthen it.

Transport and road safety professionals are trained to apply standards and guidance consistently. How do we balance technical consistency with the need to respond to diverse local contexts and user needs?

A design can meet every technical requirement and still fail people. Inclusion forces us to ask: Who is not being served by this solution? It encourages us to test assumptions, challenge defaults, and consider lived experience alongside standards. Technical consistency is important, but it must be balanced with responsiveness to context. Inclusive thinking helps us avoid blind spots and produce solutions that work in the real world, not just on paper.

Has there been a moment, project or experience that changed the way you thought about inclusion in transport and road safety?

Delivering training in Tanzania and India had a profound impact. Seeing how different communities interact with infrastructure — often in ways that standards do not anticipate — reinforced that inclusion is not theoretical. It is practical, measurable, and essential. Those experiences taught me that listening deeply is one of the most powerful tools a road safety professional has.

Some people see EDI as an additional consideration once the technical work is complete. Why do you think that's an increasingly outdated way of thinking?

Because transport systems are only effective when they work for everyone. When inclusion is treated as an afterthought, we create risks, inequities, and inefficiencies. Assuming a solution works equally well for all users is a form of professional complacency. Modern practice recognises that inclusion is integral to safety, performance, and public trust.

People often think of inclusion as an organisational responsibility. What does inclusion look like at an individual professional level?

Inclusive professionals are curious, reflective, and willing to challenge assumptions. They actively seek perspectives beyond their own experience. They ask who might be disadvantaged and why. They adapt their approach when evidence or lived experience suggests a different path. Inclusion becomes visible through behaviour — not just through organisational statements.

Road safety audits are often viewed as highly technical exercises. Where does inclusion fit within technical excellence?

Road safety audits are technical exercises, but they are also human exercises. A scheme can be fully compliant and still exclude certain users — for example, older pedestrians, women travelling at night, or

people with mobility impairments. Inclusion strengthens audits by broadening the lens through which risk is identified. It helps us see hazards that standards alone may not reveal.

Having worked internationally, have you seen examples of inclusive thinking leading to more innovative or effective transport solutions that could inspire UK practice?

Yes — particularly in contexts where design guidance was imported without considering local behaviour. Conversely, I've seen inclusive thinking lead to innovative solutions. In Qatar, adapting crossing designs to reflect cultural walking patterns improved safety. In Tanzania, community-driven insights shaped interventions that later received international recognition. These examples show that inclusive practice is not just ethical — it is effective.

We often talk about designing for people. In reality, who are the people most likely to be unintentionally overlooked in transport projects? e.g., disabled people, older people, children and young people, women and girls, minority ethnic communities, rural communities and non-drivers

All of these groups frequently experience transport differently, and their needs must be intentionally considered.

What does inclusive professional practice look like in practice?

It looks like professionals who:

- Ask better questions
- Seek diverse input
- Challenge assumptions
- Adapt designs to context
- Prioritise safety for those at highest risk

Organisations can set direction, but individuals create culture.

Have you ever challenged a design assumption, established practice or professional consensus because you felt a different perspective needed to be considered? What happened?

Yes — many times. In several international projects, I challenged design defaults that did not reflect local behaviour or user needs. The outcome was always positive: better solutions, stronger collaboration, and safer infrastructure. Courage and professional responsibility are essential parts of inclusive practice.

Professional institutions are often influential in shaping standards, guidance and culture. What responsibility do membership bodies have in advancing inclusion across the profession?

Institutions shape standards, guidance, and culture. They have a responsibility to embed inclusion into professional expectations, training, and leadership. They can amplify diverse voices and ensure that inclusion is seen as a marker of professional excellence.

How can regional committees help create a stronger sense of belonging for members at different career stages?

By creating spaces where members at all career stages feel valued. Regional committees can champion mentorship, encourage diverse participation, and ensure that local perspectives inform national conversations.

The transport profession faces major challenges around recruitment, retention and skills. Why is inclusion fundamentally a professional and business issue, rather than simply a social issue?

Because inclusive practice leads to better solutions, stronger teams, and improved recruitment and retention. It enhances innovation and reduces risk. Inclusion is not just socially important — it is strategically essential.

What perspectives or lived experiences do you think the profession most needs to hear more from over the next decade?

We need to hear more from people whose transport experiences differ from the norm: women, young people, disabled users, rural communities, and those who rely on walking and public transport. Their insights reveal risks and opportunities that technical data alone cannot.

If we were discussing this again in five years' time, what changes would convince you that the profession had genuinely progressed?

Progress would mean seeing inclusion embedded in standards, training, and everyday practice. It would mean fewer assumptions, more evidence, and more diverse voices shaping decisions. Success goes beyond statistics — it is reflected in safer journeys, more equitable outcomes, and a profession that listens.

When you think about the future of transport and road safety, what gives you the greatest optimism?

The growing recognition that inclusion is central to safety. The profession is becoming more reflective, more collaborative, and more global. When we design with people in mind — all people — we create transport systems that are safer, fairer, and more resilient.

Drawing on your experience as a road safety specialist, trainer and professional leader, what advice would you give transport professionals who want to challenge assumptions, embrace different perspectives and contribute to a safer, more inclusive transport system for everyone?

Be curious. Listen deeply. Challenge assumptions respectfully. Seek out voices that are not usually heard. Inclusion is not about benefiting particular groups — it is about creating transport systems and professional cultures that serve society more effectively. When we

embrace diverse perspectives, we produce better solutions and safer outcomes for everyone.

