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BOOST-IN

Uptake of innovative and circular solutions for water

Gender and Ethics plan

Deliverable 7.2

WP7

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ABSTRACT	This document serves as a comprehensive guide to implementing gender equality measures within the BOOST-IN project, ensuring that all activities contribute to the advancement of gender equality in the water management sector and beyond.		

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TABLE OS ACRONYMS

Acronym	Definitions
CDP	Communication and Dissemination Plan
EC	European Commission
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
FP7	7th Framework Programme
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEPs	Gender Equality Plans
GPG	Gender Pay Gap



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The BOOST-IN project is dedicated to advancing gender equality and integrating gender perspectives across all its activities, from research and innovation to communication and dissemination. This document outlines the comprehensive Gender Equality Strategy designed to ensure equal opportunities, participation, and benefits for all genders within the project.

Gender mainstreaming is a key priority throughout the project's implementation. The strategy includes adopting gender-neutral language guides to ensure all communications are inclusive, committing to gender balance in speakers, panels, and participants at BOOST-IN events, and highlighting gender equality and women's entrepreneurship through strategic social media campaigns and storytelling. Regular assessments by BIOAZUL will monitor gender balance in project teams and event participants, ensuring that gender representation remains equitable.

A Gender Committee, composed of representatives from all partners, will ensure that gender dimensions are integrated into all project activities and will propose necessary actions. The committee will meet regularly to discuss assessments and take contingency measures if needed. Dissemination of gender activities and results, combined with advocacy campaigns, will support gender equality within the project sector.

Ethical standards will be maintained, ensuring informed consent, data privacy, transparency, non-discrimination, and environmental ethics. Diverse stakeholder engagement will be fostered, promoting community involvement and educational outreach initiatives.

The BOOST-IN consortium recognises the importance of gender mainstreaming for the project's success and is committed to innovative, inclusive research methods that consider sex, gender, and intersectionality. Regular assessments and Gender Committee meetings will ensure continuous monitoring and integration of gender-sensitive approaches. Project partners will be supported through capacity building and the implementation of gender mainstreaming practices, maintaining a balanced and inclusive approach throughout the project lifecycle.

This document serves as a comprehensive guide to implementing gender equality measures within the BOOST-IN project, ensuring that all activities contribute to the advancement of gender equality in the water management sector and beyond.



1.0 INTRODUCTION

The BOOST-IN project, funded by the Horizon Europe program of the European Commission, is dedicated to fostering the uptake of innovative solutions in the water and circular economy sectors. As part of the European Commission's commitment to promoting gender equality and ensuring ethical standards in research and innovation, the gender and ethics plan for the BOOST-IN project plays a crucial role in aligning the project's objectives with broader EU policies and frameworks.

1.1 Gender Equality in Horizon Europe

The European Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 underscores the EU's commitment to equality across all policies, including research and innovation. Gender equality is not only a fundamental value of the EU but also a key driver of economic growth and societal well-being. Achieving gender equality can lead to significant economic benefits, including potential increases in GDP per capita and productivity.

The Horizon Europe program reaffirms this commitment by making gender equality a cross-cutting priority and introducing strengthened provisions. Gender equality in Horizon Europe is addressed at three main levels:

- **Gender Equality Plans (GEPs):** For certain categories of legal entities, having a GEP in place is now an eligibility criterion for participation in Horizon Europe projects. This ensures that institutions are committed to gender equality from the outset.
- **Integration of the Gender Dimension:** The integration of a gender dimension into research and innovation content is a requirement by default. This is evaluated under the excellence criterion, ensuring that gender considerations are embedded in the core of research activities.
- **Gender Balance:** Increasing gender balance throughout the program is another objective, with a target of 50% women in Horizon Europe-related boards, expert groups, and evaluation committees. Gender balance among research teams is also a ranking criterion for proposals with the same score.

1.2 Gender Mainstreaming in BOOST-IN

The BOOST-IN project's primary goal is to implement effective strategies for the water sector to embrace a circular economy. This involves promoting technological advancements, governance changes, mindset shifts, and organisational restructuring to facilitate the uptake of innovative Water Circular Economy Solutions (WACES). By promoting water cycle closure, water reuse, and the recovery of energy, nutrients, and by-products from wastewater, the project aims to address the challenges of water scarcity and sustainability in Europe.

To achieve this ambitious goal, BOOST-IN brings together a diverse consortium of 12 partners from various EU member states. These partners will collaborate on research, innovation, stakeholder engagement, dissemination, and exploitation activities as outlined in the project work plan.

Gender mainstreaming is a key transversal priority in the BOOST-IN project, influencing the implementation of all activities. This involves:

- Raising awareness about gender equality.
- Developing and implementing gender action plans with ongoing monitoring.



- Ensuring gender-sensitive and inclusive stakeholder engagement throughout all project phases.
- Incorporating gender considerations in the selection of innovative solutions and the development of tools to support women innovators.

A dedicated Gender Committee will be formed within the BOOST-IN project to oversee gender mainstreaming efforts. The committee's responsibilities include:

- Ensuring balanced gender representation within the consortium and in all project activities.
- Actively working on gender equality related to the selection of innovations, focusing on supporting women innovators and addressing gender gaps.
- Providing guidelines and recommendations to address gender biases and promote equality.

1.3 Gender Dimension Key Concepts

The European Commission (EC) is a global leader in integrating the gender dimension in research and policy. Despite significant efforts, inequalities persist, particularly in academia and the private sector. According to the EC "She Figures 2021" Report:

- **In Academia:** Women make up less than 50% of doctoral students, graduates, and academic staff. Women are underrepresented in top academic positions and R&D roles, often forming the majority of R&D support staff but not leading researchers.
- **In the Private Sector:** Women are more likely to work under precarious contracts and earn less on average than men in scientific R&D roles.

The BOOST-IN project is committed to addressing these disparities by ensuring a high presence of women in authorship of project publications and actively supporting women innovators. Integrating gender dimensions into research activities will increase the added value of project results, outcomes, and impacts.

1.1. Definitions

It is important to get familiar with the specific nomenclature related to gender and sex dimensions. Table 1 includes the definitions of several key concepts to understand the gender dimension.

Table 1.- Key concept definitions

Key concept	Definitions
Sex	Sex refers to biological characteristics that distinguish between males and females and intersex people.
Gender	Gender refers to sociocultural norms, identities, attributes and relations that (1) structure societies and organisations and (2) shape behaviours, products, technologies, environments, and knowledge.
Gender identity	Gender identity is the personal sense of one's gender. Gender identity can correlate with a person's gender assigned sex at birth or can differ from it. Gender expression typically reflects a person's gender identity, but this is not always the case. While a person may express behaviours, attitudes, and appearances consistent with a particular gender role, such expression may not necessarily reflect their gender identity (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_identity)

Gender bias	Gender bias is the often unintentional and implicit differentiation between men and women by placing one gender in a hierarchical position relative to the other in a certain context, because of stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity.
Gender mainstreaming	Gender mainstreaming is a strategy towards realising gender equality. As written on EIGE's official webpage, "it involves the integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures and spending programmes, to promote equality between women and men, and combating discrimination" (https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/what-is-gender-mainstreaming). Gender Mainstreaming is the gender equality strategy, which means that project objectives and results are defined in such a way that the wishes and needs of men and women are equally valued and favoured through the project activities.
Gender Sensitivity	A gender-sensitive policy, activity or project that ensures a balanced gender relationship through equal distribution and sharing of power between women and men in the project.
Gender Pay Gap	The Gender Pay Gap (GPG) is the difference between the average gross hourly earnings of paid women and men employees expressed as a percentage of the average gross hourly earnings of paid men employees. (More information may be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/structure-of-earnings-survey)
Gender Disaggregated Data	Data that can be broken down by gender groups - men, women and gender minorities - to allow for analysis of the different challenges they face.
Inclusion / Inclusivity	The practice of including relevant stakeholders and communities, particularly marginalised groups, in the policy-making and urban governance process, to ensure a fair policy process with equitable outcomes despite their differential needs.
Intersectionality	'Intersectionality' describes overlapping or intersecting categories such as gender, sex, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation and geographical location that combine to inform individuals' identities and experiences. Researchers and engineers should not consider gender in isolation; gender identities, norms and relations both shape and are shaped by other social attributes.

1.4 What is Gendered Innovation?

Gendered Innovation was initiated at Stanford University in July 2009. Within FP7, the EC funded an Expert Group on "Innovation through Gender/Gendered Innovations," aimed at developing the gender dimension in EU research and innovation. The goal was to provide practical methods for sex and gender analysis, illustrating how such analysis leads to innovation.

Integrating sex and/or gender analysis into research and innovation:

- Adds value to research in terms of excellence, creativity, and business opportunities.
- Helps researchers question gender norms and stereotypes, and rethink standards and reference models.
- Leads to an in-depth understanding of diverse gender needs, behaviours, and attitudes.
- Addresses the diverse needs of EU citizens, enhancing the societal relevance of the knowledge, technologies, and innovations produced.
- Contributes to the production of goods and services better suited to new markets.

BOOST-IN is committed to integrating these aspects into its research and innovation activities, aiming to foster gender-responsible science and technology, enhancing the quality of life for all and adding value to research, society, and business.

1.5 Ethical Considerations in Horizon Europe

Ethical considerations are integral to research and innovation activities funded under Horizon Europe. Ethical compliance is mandatory, ensuring that all activities adhere to the highest standards of research integrity as described in the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity. The Horizon Europe framework mandates that actions comply with ethical principles and relevant legislation, including the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the European Convention on Human Rights.

1.6 Objectives of the Gender and Ethics Plan

The gender and ethics plan for the BOOST-IN project aims to:

- Promote gender equality and ensure equal opportunities for all genders within the project.
- Integrate ethical considerations into all project activities to maintain high standards of integrity and respect for human rights.
- Foster inclusive stakeholder engagement and prevent any form of discrimination.
- Monitor and evaluate the implementation of the gender and ethics plan to ensure accountability and continuous improvement.

By aligning with the EC's Gender Equality Strategy, the BOOST-IN project aims to create a gender-equal and ethically sound working environment. This will not only enhance the quality and relevance of the research and innovation outcomes but also contribute to sustainable and inclusive growth in the water and circular economy sectors.

2.0 GENDER AND WATER

Gender aspects significantly influence the water sector, impacting access, management, and sustainability of water resources globally. Women and girls often bear the disproportionate burden of water collection in many parts of the world, which can take several hours daily, limiting their educational opportunities and economic participation (UNICEF, 2016). This gender disparity in access to water affects health outcomes, as women and girls are more vulnerable to waterborne diseases due to inadequate sanitation facilities and water access (WHO, 2019). Moreover, women's exclusion from decision-making processes in water management perpetuates inequalities and hampers effective resource governance (IWMI, 2014). Climate change further exacerbates these disparities, as women are more vulnerable to changes in water availability and quality, which impact their livelihoods and wellbeing (UNDP, 2013; GWP, 2018). Addressing these challenges requires gender-sensitive policies and interventions that empower women in water management, ensuring their meaningful participation and benefiting from their knowledge and perspectives (FAO, 2017; OECD, 2019). Below are some of these aspects in detail:

1. **Participation in Decision-Making**: Women's participation in water management is often limited due to cultural, social, and economic barriers. This exclusion means that their needs and perspectives are not adequately considered in water governance, leading to less effective and equitable water management solutions.
2. **Community-Based Water Management**: Studies have shown that involving women in community-based water management leads to better resource management and sustainability. Women's knowledge and experience in managing household water use can contribute to more effective water management practices.
3. **Vulnerability to Climate Change**: Women are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change on water resources due to their roles in water collection and management. Changes in water availability and quality due to climate change can exacerbate existing gender inequalities and increase the burden on women.
4. **Adaptation Strategies**: Gender-sensitive approaches to climate change adaptation in the water sector can enhance the resilience of communities. Women's involvement in developing and implementing adaptation strategies ensures that these strategies are more comprehensive and effective.
5. **Economic Participation**: Lack of access to water affects women's ability to engage in productive economic activities. Improved access to water can free up time for women to participate in income-generating activities, thereby contributing to economic growth and poverty reduction.
6. **Educational Outcomes**: The responsibility of water collection often falls on girls, affecting their school attendance and educational outcomes. Ensuring access to water and sanitation in schools can improve girls' attendance and performance, contributing to gender equality in education.
7. **Gender-Sensitive Policies**: Implementing gender-sensitive policies in the water sector is crucial for addressing gender disparities. These policies should ensure women's participation in decision-making processes and consider the specific needs and challenges faced by women and girls.
8. **Empowerment Programs**: Programs aimed at empowering women in water management can lead to more sustainable and equitable water use. Training and capacity-building initiatives can enhance women's skills and knowledge, enabling them to take on leadership roles in water governance.



3.0 BOOST-IN GENDER ACTION PLAN

In the BOOST-IN project, two dedicated tasks (T7.4 and T8.4) on gender mainstreaming and management are included, ensuring that ethics provisions and gender mainstreaming are effectively applied throughout the project. These tasks, led by BIOAZUL with input from all partners, span the entire project duration and aim to challenge gender stereotypes, reinforce the involvement of women in science and research, and achieve gender balance within the project and partner teams.

The primary objectives of these tasks are to promote gender equality, avoid gender stereotypes, and encourage consortium members to implement gender equality measures within their organizations. A Gender and Ethics Action Plan (deliverable 7.2) will be prepared, detailing necessary actions, and an Updated Gender and Ethics Action Plan (deliverable 8.3) will document the extent to which actions promoting gender equality have been performed throughout the project. BIOAZUL will also implement the necessary provisions resulting from the proposal ethics assessment.

Gender mainstreaming involves incorporating the gender perspective throughout the entire process of developing, designing, executing, monitoring, and assessing policies and programs. Its primary goal is to advance equality for everyone. In the context of water management, this means integrating gender-related issues into the water agenda to better address gender-specific concerns and requirements. By neglecting to integrate a gender perspective, we risk perpetuating existing gender disparities, particularly concerning women's involvement, leadership, and access to opportunities and benefits in the water sector.

The ultimate goal is to ensure that all project activities consider gender impacts and promote equal opportunities for all genders. By aligning with the EC's Gender Equality Strategy and ethical guidelines, BOOST-IN aims to create a gender-equal and ethically sound working environment, enhancing the quality and relevance of research and innovation outcomes and contributing to sustainable and inclusive growth in the water and circular economy sectors.

3.1 Gender Equality Strategy

The BOOST-IN project places a strong emphasis on gender equality throughout its implementation, aiming to ensure equal opportunities, participation, and benefits for all genders. The strategy incorporates several key activities and initiatives to promote gender balance and mainstreaming within the project.

Key Activities and Initiatives

Assessment of Gender Balance. To monitor and ensure progress, the gender balance within the project team will be assessed every six months by BIOAZUL. This assessment will cover all levels, including speakers and participants invited to BOOST-IN events. Initial assessment indicated that women constitute 51% of the team currently working on the project. By month 18, the assessment will include the innovators engaged and participants in project events, with actions taken if the composition is not as balanced as expected.

Establishment of a Gender Committee. A Gender Committee will be established, consisting of representatives from all partners, to ensure gender dimensions are fully acknowledged in every project activity. This committee will work to become aware of gender issues that can appears within the project, resolve stereotypes, consider gender dimensions when analysing social relations, roles, and norms, and propose necessary contingency measures. The committee, which will include a balanced representation

of genders, will meet regularly to discuss assessments and plan actions. BIOAZUL, as the coordinator, will organize these meetings and prepare the agendas.

Dissemination of Gender Activities and Results. Dissemination of gender activities and results will be a key focus, combined with gender equality advocacy campaigns within the project sector. Successful examples of women in the field will be showcased to promote good practices in research and innovation. BIOAZUL, as a signatory of the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) initiative, will share best practices and tools such as the Gap Analyses Tool (https://weps-gapanalysis.org/) with project partners through dedicated webinars. Additional initiatives on gender issues related to research and innovation, such as the EU project RRI Tool, will be identified to support BOOST-IN's gender advocacy activities.

Inclusive Communication and Events. The BOOST-IN Communication and Dissemination Plan (CDP) (deliverable 5.1) outlines methods such as using inclusive, gender-neutral language, organizing gender-balanced events, and digital storytelling and representation. This ensures all project communications are accessible and inclusive, representing diverse perspectives.

Gender Impact Assessment. The potential gender impacts of the project's activities will be evaluated to address any gender-specific needs or concerns. This assessment will help in identifying and mitigating any negative impacts on gender equality and ensure that the project activities promote equal opportunities for all genders.

Capacity Building and Support Mechanisms. The project will provide training and resources to enhance gender awareness and sensitivity among project members and stakeholders. Support mechanisms such as flexible working conditions, and anti-discrimination policies will be implemented to promote gender equality.

Ethical Considerations. Ethical issues related to the project's implementation will be addressed to ensure adherence to ethical principles and standards. This includes obtaining informed consent from participants, implementing robust data protection measures, maintaining transparency in all project activities, ensuring non-discrimination, and promoting sustainable practices to minimise negative environmental impact.

Additional Initiatives and Actions

- **Family-friendly policies** such as promoting the use of teleconferencing to minimise the need for travel and encouraging flexible working hours to help reconcile work and private life.
- **Unconscious Gender Bias Training.** Training will be provided to develop gender competence and tackle unconscious gender bias among staff, leaders, and decision-makers. This will help in fostering an inclusive environment within the project.
- **Quantitative statistics on gender participation** will be set up and regularly updated to track gender balance throughout the project. The participation and progress of gender balance within the consortium will be monitored and documented annually.

By implementing this comprehensive Gender Equality Strategy, BOOST-IN aims to create an inclusive and equitable working environment, enhancing the quality and relevance of research and innovation outcomes. This strategy aligns with the EC's Gender Equality Strategy and ethical guidelines, contributing to sustainable and inclusive growth in the water and circular economy sectors.



3.2 Key Performance Indicators

To ensure the effective implementation of the Gender and Ethics Plan and to measure progress over time, a set of **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** has been defined. These indicators enable systematic monitoring of gender equality, inclusivity, and ethical integrity across all BOOST-IN activities. They provide a measurable framework to assess whether actions are producing the desired outcomes and where adjustments may be needed.

The KPIs are structured around five main areas:

1. Gender balance and representation,
2. Gender Committee performance,
3. Gender-sensitive communication and dissemination,
4. Ethical compliance and inclusivity, and
5. Monitoring and evaluation.

Each area includes specific objectives and measurable indicators that will be reviewed periodically by the Gender Committee. Monitoring will be based on quantitative and qualitative data collected from partner organisations, meeting records, event reports, and internal surveys.

The table below summarises the proposed KPIs to track implementation and assess the impact of gender and ethics actions.

Table 2: Gender and Ethics Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Area	Objective	KPIs	Target / Frequency	Key concept
1. Internal Gender Representation	Promote gender balance in the structure, leadership, and governance of the project.	% of women and men in the BOOST-IN consortium.	Maintain 45–55% gender balance overall. .	Gender balance
		% of women in BOOST-IN management bodies: WP leaders	≥40% women WP leaders	Leadership representation
		% of women in External Advisory Board	≥40% women in EAB	Governance balance
2. Gender Committee Performance	Monitor and guide gender mainstreaming across WPs.	Number of Gender Committee meetings held per year.	≥1 per year.	Gender governance
		% of partners participating in Gender Committee meetings.	≥80% partner participation.	Consortium engagement
		% of women and men in Gender Committee	Maintain 45–55% gender balance overall. .	Committee balance
		% of materials reviewed for gender-neutral and inclusive language.	100% materials reviewed.	Inclusive language
3. Gender-Sensitive Communication and Dissemination	Ensure inclusive and gender-aware communication across all project outputs.	Number of dissemination actions highlighting women's contributions (e.g. "Women in Water" campaign posts, webinars, interviews).	≥5 actions throughout project.	Gender visibility

		Number of website/social media posts promoting gender equality and inclusion.	≥4 posts per year.	Awareness raising
4. Ethical Compliance and Inclusivity	Ensure ethical, inclusive, and gender-balanced outreach and participation in all external-facing activities.	% of women speakers and moderators at project events.	≥40% women speakers/moderators.	Event visibility
		% of invitations sent to women and men for stakeholder and co-creation events	≥40% women invitees per event.	Outreach equity
		% of women attendees for stakeholder and co-creation events	≥35% women invitees per event.	Inclusive participation
		% of project events with gender-balanced participation (40-50% gender balance)	≥40% events with balanced participation	Inclusive participation
5. Monitoring and Evaluation	Monitor the implementation and impact of gender and ethics measures across the project lifecycle.	Number of reported ethical issues or incidents.	0 reported incidents.	Ethical compliance
		Frequency of internal gender assessments conducted.	Every 9 months.	Continuous monitoring
		Existence of a final evaluation report summarising gender and ethics KPIs.	1 final report.	Accountability

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

The BOOST-IN consortium recognizes the crucial role of gender mainstreaming in ensuring the project's success. We are committed to fostering an inclusive environment that incorporates diverse perspectives and innovative research methods, considering sex, gender, and intersectionality.

An evaluation of the current composition of the BOOST-IN project team has been conducted, revealing that the team consists of 49% male (24 members) and 51% female (25 members). This evaluation provides a baseline for future assessments and highlights our ongoing commitment to gender balance.

The establishment of the Gender Committee is a significant step towards embedding gender considerations in every aspect of the project. The Gender Committee meetings that will be established on a regular basis will not only review gender-sensitive issues but also enhance the integration of gender dimensions across various project activities. The committee's role will be critical in ensuring that gender biases are identified and addressed promptly.

Furthermore, the BOOST-IN Communication and Dissemination Plan outlines specific actions, such as using inclusive, gender-neutral language, organising gender-balanced events, and employing digital storytelling to highlight diverse perspectives. These measures will ensure that all project communications are accessible and inclusive.

The project's comprehensive Gender Equality Strategy includes additional initiatives such as family-friendly policies, capacity building, and support mechanisms to promote gender equality. These initiatives are designed to create a supportive and equitable working environment, enhancing the quality and relevance of research and innovation outcomes.

In conclusion, the BOOST-IN consortium is fully committed to gender mainstreaming as a fundamental aspect of the project. By continuously assessing and addressing gender issues, leveraging diverse perspectives, and fostering an inclusive environment, we aim to contribute to sustainable and inclusive growth in the water and circular economy sectors. The ongoing efforts of the Gender Committee and the implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy will ensure that the BOOST-IN project remains aligned with the EC’s Gender Equality Strategy and ethical guidelines, ultimately leading to successful and impactful project outcomes.

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The quantity and quality of water resources are serious problems in many European areas, mostly being a joined result of climate change and anthropic influences. The BOOST-IN project aims to develop a successful strategy that promotes technological changes, governance schemes, shifts in mind-set and organizational structures to solve these problems through a better management of the water sector and application of the circular economy principles, enabling water reuse and recovery of different materials (e.g. energy, nutrients). However, implementation of these changes still faces several barriers (e.g. technology, economy, knowledge, social perception) that need to be overcome. BOOST-IN will achieve these goals by an effective identification, selection (through a specifically designed dynamic funnel method) and transfer of innovative Water Circular Economy Solutions (WACES) to further close and improve the water cycle.

The project will develop and apply its approach in six Regions of Opportunity evenly distributed across Europe (Spain, Greece, Germany, France, Italy and Bulgaria) by organization of co-creation workshops to increase public awareness and support for WACES implementation, barriers overcoming as well as by the specific risk management plans design.

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