



# Integrating gender into research and innovation for nature-based solutions



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon H2020 innovation action programme under grant agreement 101003527.

Deliverable Number and Name	
Work Package	WP6
Dissemination Level	Public
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Date Due	
Date Submitted	30 January 2025
File Name	
Status	
Reviewed by (if applicable)	Baptiste Dauphin, Loïc Charpentier
Suggested citation	Kalin, Ana (2025). Integrating gender into research and innovation for nature-based solutions. MULTISOURCE Deliverable 4.1, H2020 grant no. 101003527

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This document has been prepared in the framework of the European project MULTISOURCE. This project has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 innovation action programme under grant agreement no. 101003527.

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# INTEGRATING GENDER INTO RESEARCH AND INNOVATION FOR NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE AND FROM PRACTICE TO POLICY

## Objectives

Two Knowledge briefs are produced as part of the ModULar Tools for Integrating enhanced natural treatment Solutions in Urban water CyclEs (MULTISOURCE), an EU funded project striving at facilitating the systematic, city-wide planning of nature-based solutions (NBS) for urban water treatment, storage, and reuse.

The first one, titled [INTEGRATING GENDER INTO NBS FOR WATER MANAGEMENT](#), provides an **overview of what a gender-sensitive approach is, what are the benefits of applying it in practice**, while it also offers **guidance on how to further a gender-sensitive approach when using NBS** to tackle environmental, societal and economic challenges.

The second one, titled [INTEGRATING GENDER INTO RESEARCH AND INNOVATION](#), offers an **overview of the existing frameworks that promote gender equality in research and innovation** at the EU level and then **analyses how they are translated into practice in Horizon-funded projects**. It also offers **suggestions on how to further gender equality in projects that are funded through the Horizon programme**, with a focus on those searching for nature-based solutions.

Both briefs are based on knowledge acquired throughout the duration of MULTISOURCE, including the literature review on the interplay between NBS and gender, quantitative and qualitative research and knowledge gained on the gender mainstreaming practices within the project and in other Horizon-funded projects on NBS.

## Who should read these briefs

The first knowledge brief is intended for practitioners responsible for water management and water treatment more specifically, including those involved in design and technology selection of NBS, risk assessment, creations of business models, infrastructure developers, planners and landscape architects, but also anyone interested in understanding how to develop gender-sensitive nature-based solutions.

The second brief is aimed for decision-makers responsible for shaping the European research and innovation landscape and reforming it in a manner that will promote gender equality at institutional and implementation levels, but also anyone else interested in strengthening the gender dimension in Horizon-funded projects, especially those focusing on NBS and other environmental issues.

## Existing frameworks promoting gender equality in research and innovation

Gender equality has been an important priority of the European Union (EU) since the **Treaty of Rome** in 1957. Since 1999 and the adoption of the [Communication from the Commission](#) entitled *Women and Science. Mobilising women to enrich European research*, gender equality also became essential in the EU's approach to research and innovation.

In 2012, the **European Research Area** (ERA) started devoting special attention to the promotion of gender equality in careers, the promotion of gender parity at the decision-making levels, and at the same time, applicants were asked to integrate, where relevant, sex and gender analysis into research and innovation. With Horizon 2020 programmes, the commitment to the integration of the gender dimension in strategies, programmes and projects was strengthened even further.

Yet the She Figures 2018 [report](#) and the interim [evaluation](#) of Horizon 2020 nevertheless identified that there is still room for improvement when considering and designing gender-sensitive approaches, including in relation to systemic structural barriers and unconscious bias. **Horizon Europe and the Gender equality strategy 2020 - 2025 strengthened this commitment** by requiring the adoption of Gender equality plans (GEP) for all public bodies, research organisations and higher education establishments in order to obtain Horizon Europe funding, the integration of the gender dimension into all research and innovation actions of the project proposal, as well as through promoting gender balance among researchers in projects and Horizon-related advisory boards. This commitment towards gender equality is also reflected in the Horizon calls for proposals.

The Horizon calls for proposals reflect this process aimed at strengthening the gender-sensitive approach, which is in more detail analysed in the brief for decision-makers.

## How are the existing frameworks translated into practice?

In order to understand to what extent the commitment to gender equality from the above frameworks is implemented in practice, research was carried out among MULTISOURCE partners from February to October 2024. Additional data was collected among the following 5 consortia, financed by Horizon programmes: CARDIMED, NICE, MARCLAIMED, BOOST-IN, and NetworkNature (5 consortia), which devote their work to NBS or water management in October and November 2024.

The focus of the research is on gender balance and Gender equality plans (GEP) of partner organisation, as well as gender mainstreaming practices from individual experts within the consortia. The results showed that while there are high levels of **gender balance** in the consortia, the figures were less encouraging with regards to gender disaggregated statistic in the various categories, wherein men were more represented among researchers and work package or task leads, while women were more represented among non-researcher.

Due to the Horizon requirement, **gender equality plans** were over the past years adopted by all public bodies, research organisations and higher education establishments to obtain Horizon funding, and as well by some organisations that recognised the need for more gender equality within their entity. This condition thus positively contributed towards gender equality efforts, despite the possibility that they were adopted with the intention of ticking the box.

The **gender mainstreaming** tool for promoting gender equality demands more attention than the previous two. While the statistics varies slightly, the research showed that slightly more than half of the respondents never collect gender-disaggregated data and around two thirds never carry out a gender analysis. In addition, slightly less than half of the experts never consult gender experts in their work, while half of MULTISOURCE experts stated that they have to think about the gender perspective in their free time.

## How to further promote gender equality in research and innovation?

In order to promote gender equality in Horizon projects, including in those focusing on NBS, two sets of recommendations are proposed in the briefs:

- [Recommendations on integrating gender into NBS \(p. 12 – 20\)](#), which suggest this can be achieved with more ambitious GEPs that have clear support from the management, by including gender experts at the project level, through furthering gender mainstreaming efforts at all project levels, and including when planning for and during events.
- [Recommendations on promoting gender equality in Horizon projects \(p. 14 – 24\)](#), which once again call upon ambitious GEPs, suggest ways in which calls for proposals could strengthen the commitment to gender equality at the project level, as well as means to advance the support of the Research Executive Agency towards gender equality.

## Dissemination strategy

The dissemination strategy for the MULTISOURCE Knowledge Briefs on gender equality is designed to ensure the wide reach of the recommendations to relevant stakeholders, fostering gender-sensitive approaches in Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) and EU research and innovation policies. The multi-channel strategy, featured below, aims to raise awareness and drive policy uptake by engaging with key decision-makers, researchers, and practitioners.

### **MULTISOURCE Website**

The policy briefs are available for download on the MULTISOURCE website, ensuring accessibility to all interested stakeholders, including researchers, policy makers, and practitioners. This platform serves as the main reference point for those seeking guidance on gender integration in NBS and research projects. The policy briefs can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

### **MULTISOURCE social media**

To maximize visibility and engage a broader audience, the key messages of the policy briefs are being actively promoted through MULTISOURCE social media channels, particularly [LinkedIn](#) and [X \(formerly Twitter\)](#).



Additional banners featuring key recommendations will be developed in the next phase, to be promoted through thematic social media campaigns using hashtags such as #GenderInWater, #NBSEquality, #HorizonEuropeGender.

## Events

Events play a crucial role in ensuring stakeholder engagement and driving policy change.

- A dedicated Water Projects Europe (WPE) event on Gender is being organized to take place in March 2025. The objective is to introduce both practitioners and policymakers to the recommendations outlined in the policy briefs through presentations by experts in gender-sensitive NBS and Horizon Europe policies, panel discussions with researchers, policymakers, and project coordinators and interactive sessions where stakeholders can exchange best practices and challenges.
- In addition to organizing a dedicated event, MULTISOURCE will leverage existing water and gender-focused conferences to amplify the reach of its findings. Planned activities include presenting the key recommendations at major water-related events.

## Direct stakeholder engagement and outreach

To ensure policy uptake and drive change, targeted dissemination actions will be also implemented. These include directly informing stakeholders about policy briefs (such as the GWP Slovenia and Ministries of environment and energy and Ministry for Labour, Family and Social Affairs in Slovenia), inviting them to relevant events, sending personalized emails to keep them informed, and strategically distributing the briefs during key occasions.

## Monitoring and conclusion

To track the success of dissemination activities, the MULTISOURCE team will implement performance metrics, including monitoring the website's downloads and visits to the policy brief pages, the social media engagement with the relevant posts, the number of participants in the organized WPE event and the feedback received by stakeholders. Overall, by combining online visibility, strategic events and direct stakeholder engagement this dissemination strategy will maximize the impact of the MULTISOURCE Knowledge Briefs and contribute to strengthening gender equality in Nature-Based Solutions and EU research projects.

The overall goal of MULTISOURCE is to, together with local, national, and international stakeholders, demonstrate a variety of about Enhanced Natural Treatment Solutions (ENTS) treating a wide range of urban waters and to develop innovative tools, methods, and business models that support citywide planning and long-term operations and maintenance of nature-based solutions for water treatment, storage, and reuse in urban areas worldwide. The project includes seven pilots treating a wide range of urban waters. Two individual municipalities (Girona, Spain; Oslo, Norway), two metropolitan municipalities (Lyon, France; Milan, Italy), and international partners in Brazil, Vietnam, and the USA will contribute to each of the main project activities: ENTS pilots, risk assessment, business models, technology selection, and the MULTISOURCE Planning Platform. The use of urban archetypes in the Planning Platform will enable users to quickly classify regions (in both developed or developing countries) suitable for the application of nature-based solutions for water treatment (NBSWT) and compare scenarios both with and without NBSWT.



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