



EMPOWERING WOMEN AND MAINSTREAMING  
GENDER EQUALITY IN THE BLUE ECONOMY  
EMFAF-2022-PIA-WBE-101112278

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WOMEN IN THE BLUE ECONOMY

## D1.4 Qualitative feedback from WINBLUE Labs



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## D1.4. Qualitative feedback from WINBLUE Labs

### Technical references

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<b>Abstract</b>	This deliverable provides an overview of qualitative data collected by WINBLUE partners on women representation and gender-related difficulties they are experiencing while being hired or promoted in the WINBLUE selected blue economy sectors. This deliverable mainly focuses on Europe.
<b>Title and number of connected deliverables</b>	D.1.1. Quantitative analysis on gender status in blue economy sectors
<b>Explain Deliverable Dependency/ Connection</b>	Deliverables D1.1 and D1.4 will be used in drafting an open access publication on women position in the blue economy sector.
<b>Title of connected external documents</b>	See Bibliography
<b>Reference of the document and the link (if available)</b>	See Bibliography

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### Objective and Responsibility

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### Executive summary

The WINBLUE project takes a multi-actor, data-driven, trans-sectoral and practice-cantered approach to accelerate the empowerment of women in the blue economy. For this reason, the collection qualitative data has been performed. The data collection exercise analysed in this Deliverable, is essential to identify challenges faced by women working in the WINBLUE selected sectors and to provide a basis for establishing future recommendations. The main messages identified in the Deliverable are:

1. **Understanding gender and gender equality.** For many years, gender equality was considered only as the gender distribution of women and men employed in an organization. This has been changed only in recent years, especially by requesting the adoption of the Gender Equality Plans.
2. **Gender Equality Plan (GEP).** The EU encouraged the mandatory adoption of GEPs in public organisations if the organisation wants obtain EU funding. If it was not enforced by the EU, many legal entities would not introduce it. However, many organizations see this as a formal “tick the box” exercise without its formal implementation. Nevertheless, in blue economy, where a lot of workforce operates in private or non-governmental entities, GEPs can also be of high value to make structural and cultural changes in individual organizations.
3. **Obstacles, such as stereotypes, traditions, mentality and prejudices** are still very present in today's society and represent one of the biggest obstacles for women when entering or trying to move up in the sectors of the blue economy selected by WINBLUE (Blue circular bioeconomy and biotechnology, Fisheries and aquaculture, Sustainable coastal and marine tourism, Offshore renewable energy, Cutting-edge marine technologies and others, such as marine education, marine policy, port management, navigation). An important obstacle to mention is **motherhood and balancing work and family life**. This is not only related to maternity leave and at least one year's absence from work, but also to caring responsibilities and domestic duties, as well as

ineffective institutional or national policies on work-life balance. In addition, women are subject to enormous **social pressure** with regard to role models, family and their life choices.

4. **Education** plays a very important role in raising awareness, fighting stereotypes, changing mindsets and raising new generations who will understand the meaning and importance of gender equality. It starts at an early age with the first lessons learned from parents and continues at school, university and vocational training. Hence, educational activities should be an integral part of any GEPs.
5. **Recruitment and promotion.** Gender alone should not be a factor in hiring and promotion. The decision to recruit or promote a person should be made on the basis of the candidate’s skills, abilities, competencies and experience. However, to address unconscious bias and ensure transparent recruitment and promotion procedures, clear guidelines with standardized questions and tasks should be established and records of the selection/promotion process should be kept so that the transparency of the process can be reviewed if necessary. Recruitment and promotion committees should be composed of both male and female employees.
6. **Creation of support networks** is mostly seen as a valuable tool that can provide mutual support, exchange of good practices and introduce ambassadors with good practice examples.
7. **The WINBLUE project**, in particular the qualitative and quantitative data collection, as well as the GEP models can make a decisive contribution to introducing changes in the blue economy sector, improving the representation of women in this sector and increasing their number in leadership positions. The WINBLUE project is a good starting point to raise awareness and increase the visibility of women in the blue economy sector.
8. **Sustainability** of the results of this project should already be considered at this point, during its implementation stage. This entails that through identified stakeholders, activities and GEPs proposed, the systematic quantitative and qualitative data analysis should be maintained and regular monitoring of GEP implementation should be established, including the collaboration with national and international legislative/funding organizations and other organizations from the blue economy sector.

## 1. Objective and purpose

The main objective of this report is to present an analysis of qualitative data provided by WINBLUE project partners about the current situation and status of women in selected blue economy sectors: blue biotechnologies, fisheries and aquaculture, sustainable coastal and marine tourism, offshore renewable energy, and cutting-edge marine technologies. The table below highlights the partners’ contribution in terms of the provision of data.

WINBLUE sector	Contributing partner
1. <i>Blue circular bioeconomy and biotechnology</i>	<i>BCC, NIB, UNISI</i>
2. <i>Fisheries and aquaculture</i>	<i>ACA, ANFACO, ASSOITTICA, BCC, NIB, UNISI, VEDA</i>
3. <i>Sustainable coastal and marine tourism</i>	<i>ACA, ISDI, UNISI</i>

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4. <i>Offshore renewable energy</i>	<i>PLOCAN, VEDA</i>
5. <i>Cutting-edge marine technologies</i>	<i>ACA, ISDI, PLOCAN</i>
6. <i>Other sectors (marine education, marine policy, port management, navigation)</i>	<i>VEDA</i>

Additional plans include a future scientific publication or policy brief, as well as workshops to analyse the results obtained. These future outputs can then be presented to regional, national, or/and European authorities in charge of policy making and data collection. It would be ideal that data presented in this report were to encourage the establishment of data collection methodologies and regular data collection in the selected blue economy sectors mentioned above.

## 2. Intended audience

This report is confidential. Therefore, it will not be available to a wider audience, at least in this version (including all previous drafts) and before the publication of open access publications that will use its data.

This report is primarily intended for WINBLUE project partners so that they can familiarise themselves with the status of women and the barriers they face when entering or trying to move up in the blue economy sectors selected by WINBLUE. The European Commission and other administrative authorities to whom the report is presented are considered a secondary target group. Finally, the data collected for this report and the report itself will be used to produce a scientific publication on the status of women in the selected sectors of the blue economy. This will be available to the scientific community and the public as an open access publication.

## 3. Introduction

WINBLUE project already performed quantitative data analysis of women status in the selected WINBLUE sectors. The quantitative data present only one side of the picture, thus, to complete the picture, the qualitative data collection and analysis has been performed. Qualitative data allows to receive in depth insights from individuals acting in the selected WINBLUE sectors.

This report will present the existing situation in five selected blue economy sectors – blue biotechnologies, fisheries and aquaculture, sustainable coastal and marine tourism, offshore renewable energy, and cutting-edge technologies (marine robotics, marine AI (artificial intelligence), and marine information and communication technology (ICT). This report identifies in-depth insight from professionals working in the selected WINBLUE sectors, information that cannot be found in any other sources. This report will complement quantitative data analysis performed by WINBLUE project in 2023.



## 4. Data collection methodology and data presentation

### 4.1. Data collection methodology

NIB as WP1 and T1.3 leader prepared the material and instructed WINBLUE project partners on how to perform the qualitative interviews. Instructions were prepared on M3 (July 2023) and uploaded to the WINBLUE shared working space. They are attached at the end of this Deliverable as Annex 1 and 2. Instructions provided to project partners were composed of 6 sections, in details defining each step needed to be completed in order to prepare and submit to NIB good quality qualitative data. Steps to be completed:

#### 1. Identification of interviewees

Partners were advised to identify as soon as possible stakeholders who will be interviewed in the period from July 2023 to February 2024 (M3-M10) for the purposes of collection of the qualitative data. The key players are the ones that are active in five sustainable blue economy sectors and have in-deep knowledge about the situation in their sectors. Project partners had two ways to identify potential interviewees: a) before completing stakeholders mapping or b) after completing stakeholders mapping (T1.2). Stakeholders mapping has been completed on M8, thus some of the interviewees were identified during stakeholders mapping (before M8), while others were not initially included in the stakeholders mapping (after M8). In general, it was not important whether the interviewee will be women or men, but it was recommended to try to keep gender balance when identifying potential interviewees.

In order to reach the number of interviews to be conducted indicated in the application form (in total at least 15 interviews), each partner, participating in T1.3. (NIB, UNISI, BCC, ISDI, PLOCAN, ACA, ASSO, ANFACO and VEDA) were requested to conduct at least 2 interviews, thus it means to identify at least 2 stakeholders to be interviewed.

After you identified the potential interviewees, partners were asked to list them down and to find their contact information this the first contact can be made.

#### 2. Scheduling the interview

Partners were advised to plan well how to approach potential stakeholders and how to schedule interviews. Interviewees should be contacted and provided information about the WINBLUE project (maximum 2-3 sentences) and purpose of the interview well in advance.

Project partners should be polite and friendly and even when scheduling the interview trying to create a friendly and relaxing atmosphere as the goal of the interview is:

1. To make interviewees aware of WINBLUE.
2. To get their feedback and
3. To introduce the interviewer as a successful employee with a significant task in an important EU-funded project. This might assist in advancing interviewers career, networking and building a foundation for future collaborations.

### 3. Preparing for the interview

Interviewers should come to the interview prepared and to present to the interviewee some statistical data related to the interview, in the case of WINBLUE project, information about women status/position in the blue economy sector in general, in the relevant WINBLUE sector on the national, European and international levels. As a starting point for the preparation can be used the “SHE figures 2021” (most recent ones) and the “2021 report on equality between women and men in the EU”.

Moreover, it was advised to use only “dry” statistical data, but also interesting facts and numbers. It is recommended to present information using visual tools – graphs, tables, pictures etc. Material can be printed or digital, in the case of digital form of material, it should be no more than 5-6 slides.

Don't prepare more than 5-6 slides (sheets of paper) to show to the interviewee in order not to waste precious time.

### 4. Before the interview and start of the interview

It is advised to try to create a trustful atmosphere, don't be too formal (but not too little) and do not give the impression that the interviewer is there to judge. The interviewee should feel and know that his/her opinion, experience or anything else is highly valued and is significant for the WINBLUE project and the sector she/he represents.

Before the interview an important administrative task should be completed – the interviewee should sign informed consent form, prepared by NIB. Consent can be signed in original language English or, if situation requires, translated to the native language of interviewee.

It is recommended to record the interview, thus after the interview it will be easier to transcript and in this way will be assured that all important information will be noticed.

It is recommended to start the interview with introducing the WINBLUE project, the project objectives and yourself (role in the project) in a slightly greater detail than when scheduling the interview. As well, it should be once again repeated the purpose and significance of this interview, why data needs to be gathered and that there are no right or wrong answers, there is only opinion about the sector and experience sharing. Interviewee should be informed that interview will be anonymized and nobody else, except, interviewer will know who was interviewed. Finally, remind the interviewee that if they are interested, they could be informed of the final publicly available project results (at least in general) and schedule a follow-up meeting.

### 5. Conducting the interview

Interview should take form in the dialogue, each question should lead to additional questions and continues conversation. Interviewees should be able to speak freely and, if it is useful for data gathering purposes, to go a bit outside of the interview scope. Nevertheless, the interviewer should make sure that this deviation is not going too far and becoming not relevant to the interview scope and data gathering purposes.

Project partners were provided with a list of 18 questions by NIB. It is advised to ask all these questions during the interview, additional questions are also allowed. It is important to follow the list of questions provided by NIB, thus it is assured that all project partners will collect the same information that can be classified and analyzed in order to prepare the deliverable on qualitative data analysis.

### 6. Sending the transcriptions

Project partners were asked to transcribe the interviews and send them to NIB not later than 15 February 2024 (middle of M10). Transcript should contain only the most important information gathered during the interview, while raw data and audio reporting should stay and be protected in line with GDPR and data protection regulations at the interviewer's institution.

## 4.2. Data presentation

In this report, the data is organised according to the interview questions. All questions are divided into 4 thematic blocks, each thematic block consisting of questions that were asked to the interviewee. Finally, each question has six sections, each presenting 5 sectors of the blue economy selected by WINBLUE, plus "Others", which present interviews that are related to the marine environment but do not fall under one of the 5 sectors of the blue economy selected by WINBLUE.

### 1. Organizational context

Presentation of the interviewees and analysis of the positions they are taking in the organizations. Question: Could you please tell us a bit about your positions and responsibilities here in the organization?

- 1.1. **Gender relevance in the organization and entire sector.** Question: On which occasions is gender taken into consideration / mentioned in your organization? Is gender relevant in your sector? Why?
- 1.2. **GEP relevance in the organization.** Question: The EC sees an importance in GEPs (gender equality plans) for pursuing structural change in organisations towards gender equal workplaces. GEPs were mandatory for public institutions that want to participate in Horizon Europe project consortia. Why do you think they can be of relevance in the blue economy sector as well? Which institutional areas do you consider as most important for action?
- 1.3. **Dialogue on gender equality within the institution.** Question: How could we initialize the dialogue on gender equality in your organisation? What is important (on a structural, individual or legislative level) to progress according to your opinion?

### 2. Management processes

- 2.1. **Gender differences in career advancement.** Question: Have you ever observed gendered difficulties for staff members who try ascending their career? If yes, what kind of obstacles do you remember?
- 2.2. **Personal experience.** Question: have you ever PERSONALLY experienced any gender inequalities in your professional career?
- 2.3. **Gender in recruitment and promotion.** Questions: 1) What do you think that can be done to promote women progress in their career (or to avoid the obstacles previously identified)?

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Should gender be considered for promotion?; 2) Do you think gender should be taken into consideration when hiring the candidates or maybe a gender-blind system (e.g. hiding the info on name and gender) could be used? How could this be done? Maybe a strategy for hiring could be developed?

- 2.4. **Improving the status of promotions and recruitment of the underrepresented gender.** Question: What can be done to improve the existing constraints in promotion/representation of women / underrepresented gender?

### 3. Sensibilization and implementation

- 3.1. **WINBLUE project relevance.** Question: Introduce briefly the WINBLUE project and its aims. Why do you think projects such as WINBLUE are necessary/relevant for blue economy, your organisation or you personally?
- 3.2. **WINBLUE produced material.** Question: During the duration of the project, we will organize activities such as training courses, provide a selection of good practices, create toolkits and recommendations. Are you interested in such materials?
- 3.3. **Training topics.** Question: What topics should we cover to raise the awareness on gender/equality topics in blue economy sectors? These can be very general or even only marginally connected to gender, e.g. communication, negotiation skills, or fully gender-related, such as unconscious bias training. Think about it and consider what you would like to learn more about.
- 3.4. **WINBLUE supporting allies.** Question: Could we face any problems or resistances during the project implementation?
- 3.5. **Expectations for WINBLUE project.** Question: What are your expectations and hopes for the WINBLUE project regarding our organisation? Could it make an impact?

### 4. Actional information

Other information provided by the interviewees that does not fall under the previous sections.

## 5. Analysis of qualitative data by sector

In total 42 interviews have been conducted, all project partners performed more than initially planned 2 interviews. The goal of 15 interviews to be performed was achieved by last 300%. Detailed information about interviewees is provided in the table and graphs below.

Table 1: information about performed interviews.

Project partner	Number of interviews	Gender	Sector
ACA (FR)	4	Female – 4 Male – 0	2 – cutting edge technologies 1 – sustainable coastal tourism 1 – fisheries and aquaculture
ISDI (MT)	5	Female – 5 Male – 0	2 – cutting edge technologies 3 – sustainable coastal tourism

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UNISI (IT)	3	Female – 2 Male - 1	1 – circular blue bioeconomy and biotechnology 1 – fisheries and aquaculture 1 – sustainable coastal tourism
ANFACO (ES)	5	Female – 4 Male - 1	5 – fisheries and aquaculture
ASSOITTICA (IT)	5	Female – 5 Male - 0	3 – fisheries and aquaculture 2- other
PLOCAN (ES)	4	Female – 3 Male - 1	3 – offshore renewable energy <sup>1</sup> 2 – cutting edge technologies <sup>1</sup>
NIB (SI)	8	Female – 4 Male - 4	5 – circular blue bioeconomy and biotechnology 3 – fisheries and aquaculture
VEDA (BG)	5	Female – 3 Male - 2	1 – offshore renewable energy <sup>2</sup> 3 – other topics (marine pollution, navigation <sup>2</sup> and marine education) 1 – fisheries and aquaculture <sup>3</sup> 1 - sustainable coastal tourism <sup>3</sup>
BCC (IT)	3	Female – 3 Male - 0	2 – fisheries and aquaculture 1 - circular blue bioeconomy and biotechnology

Interviewees came from 11 different countries across Europe and even beyond. Distribution of the interviewees country of affiliation is presented in the Figure 1: Interviewees country of affiliation.

<sup>1</sup> PLOCAN\_3\_F presented 2 sectors – offshore renewable energy and cutting edge technologies.

<sup>2</sup> VEDA\_1\_F presented two sectors – offshore renewable energy and other.

<sup>3</sup> VEDA\_4\_F presented 2 sectors – fisheries and aquaculture and sustainable coastal tourism.

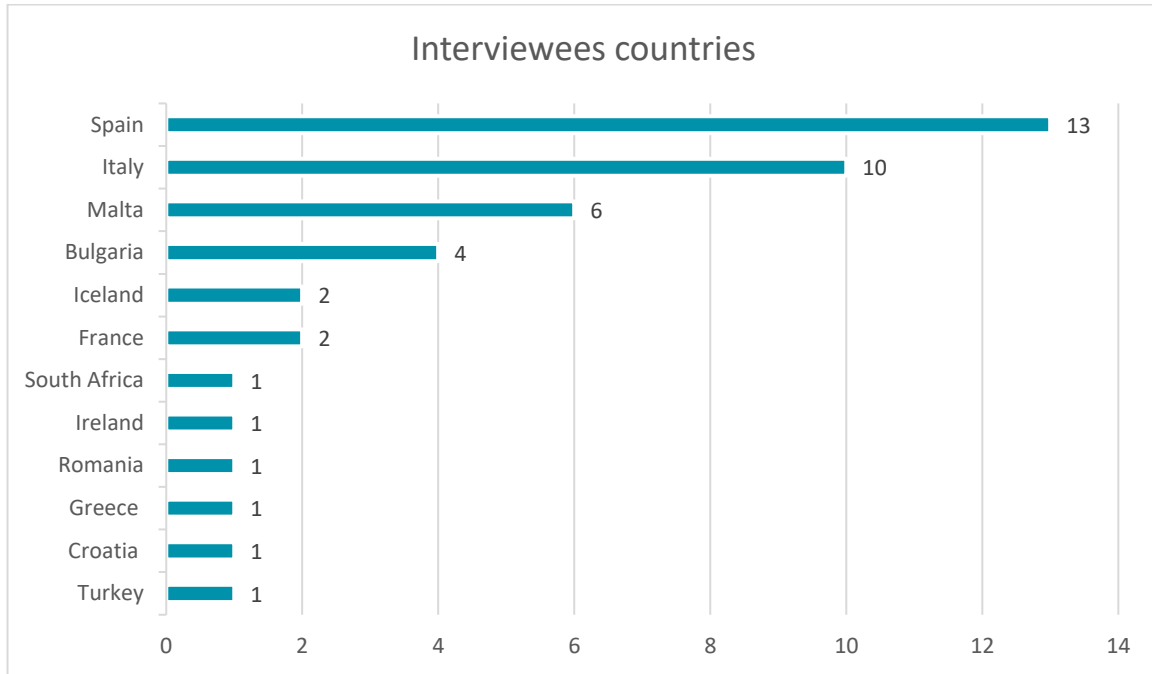


Figure 1: Interviewees country of affiliation.<sup>4</sup>

Gender balance was not maintained in the interviews, as only about ¼ of the interviewees were men (9 men and 33 women). Nevertheless, further data analysis showed that the female interviewees were more critical of the situation, had previous experience, faced problems and inequality themselves and provided relevant feedback and sensitive information. Nevertheless, data provided by the male respondents was also essential and enables to provide a more holistic overview on the sectors analyzed. To summarise, the gender imbalance in terms of the gender of the interviewees can be seen as positive, providing more insights that reveal important information and allow evidence-based conclusions to be drawn.

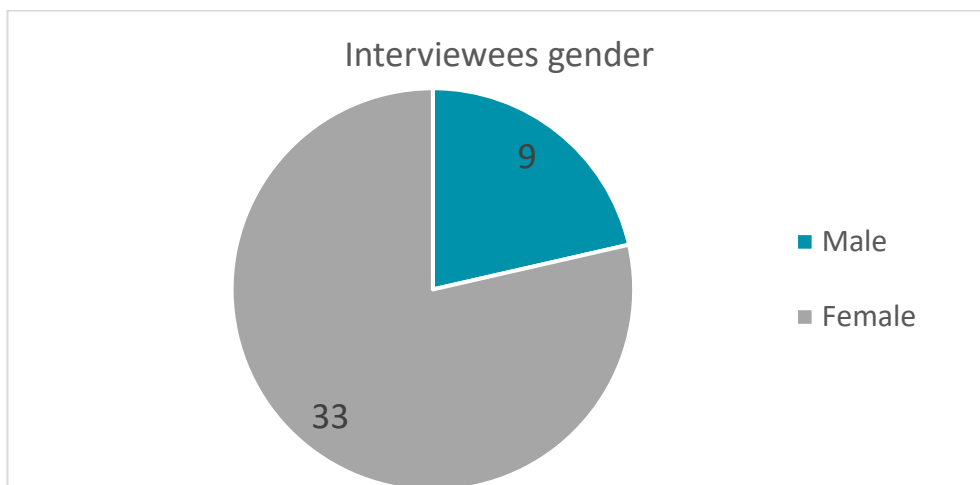


Figure 2: Interviewees gender distribution.

<sup>4</sup> Please note that one interviewee NIB\_4\_F is working and representing two countries – Ireland and South Africa.

## D.1.4 Qualitative feedback from WINBLUE Labs

Project partners conducted interviews in all WINBLUE sectors, while one project partner gathered a bit of data from the other sectors such as maritime transport, marine policy and marine education. Distribution of interviewees by sector is provided in Figure 3: Distribution of interviewees by WINBLUE sectors.

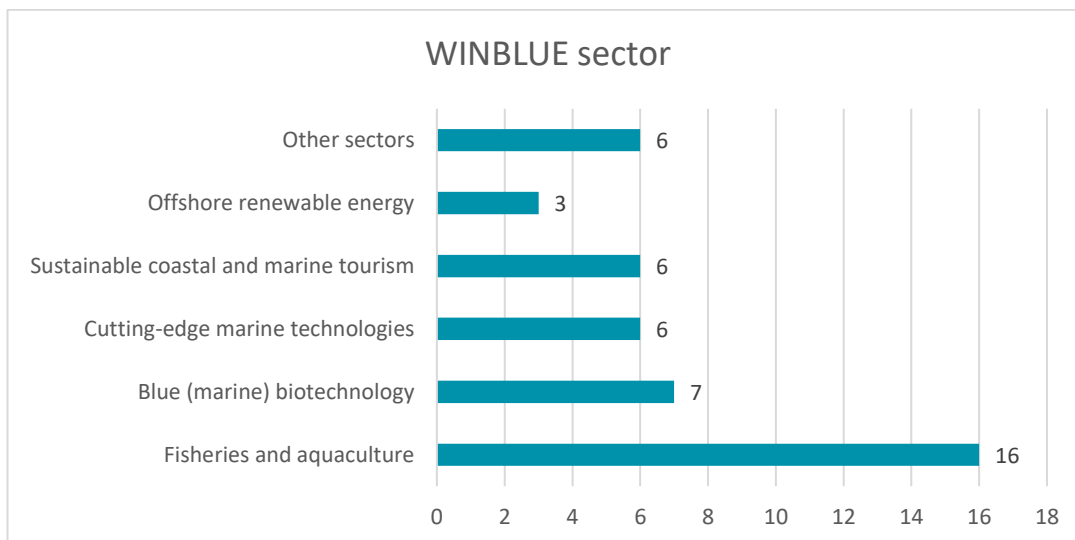


Figure 3: Distribution of interviewees by WINBLUE sectors<sup>5</sup>.

## 1.1. Organizational context

### 1.1.1. Circular blue economy and biotechnology

A total of 7 interviews were conducted by 3 project partners in the field of marine (blue) biotechnology.

Partner	Interviewee country	Interviewee gender	Organization type	Role in the organization	Interview code
NIB	Iceland	Female	Research performing institution	Research group leader	NIB_2_F
NIB	Croatia	Male	Research performing organization Academia	Researcher and project manager Associated professor	NIB_3_M
NIB	Ireland South Africa	Female	Academia	Lecturer	NIB_4_F
NIB	Spain	Female	Research performing organization	Deputy head	NIB_5_F

<sup>5</sup> Please note that two interviewees presented two different sectors each, thus the sum of interviewees by sector is higher than the number of interviewees involved in the data gathering.

#### D.1.4 Qualitative feedback from WINBLUE Labs

NIB	Malta	Female	SME	CEO, researcher, administrative personnel	NIB_6_F
UNISI	Italy	Male	Research performing organization	Project manager	UNISI_2_M
BCC	Italy	Female	NGO	Member of Board	BCC_3_F

The interviews conducted in the field of marine biotechnologies represent different organizations and roles that the interviewees have in the organizations they represent. Seven (5 female and 2 male) interviewees from 7 different countries participated in the data collection, performing 6 different roles in the organizations. Most of the interviewees (6) were from the public sector – research organizations, universities and NGOs, one interviewee represented the private sector – SMEs.

The respondents have different roles in their organizations, most of them hold one position in one organization (NIB\_2\_F, NIB\_4\_F, NIB\_5\_F, UNISI\_2\_M and BCC\_3\_F), one holds more than one position in two different organizations (NIB\_3\_M) and one respondent (NIB\_2\_F) does everything in the organization, from running the company to research.

4 respondents hold senior positions (NIB\_2\_F, NIB\_5\_F, NIB\_6\_F and BCC\_3\_F), from research group leader to deputy leader to managing director and board member.

##### 1.1.2. Fisheries and aquaculture

A total of 18 interviews were conducted by 7 project partners in the field of aquaculture and fisheries.

Partner	Interviewee country	Interviewee gender	Organization type	Role in the organization	Interview code
ACA	Spain	Female	-	Net-maker (invisible worker)	ACA_4_F
ANFACO	Spain	Female	Company	Team leader	ANFACO_1_F
ANFACO	Spain	Male	Company	Quality manager	ANFACO_2_M
ANFACO	Spain	Female	Company	Quality manager	ANFACO_3_F
ANFACO	Spain	Female	Research performing organization	Laboratory analyst	ANFACO_4_F
ANFACO	Spain	Female	Company /NGO	Shellfish harvester/ Member of board	ANFACO_5_F
ASSOITTICA	Italy	Female	SME	Owner	ASSOITTICA_1_F



#### D.1.4 Qualitative feedback from WINBLUE Labs

ASSOITTICA	Italy	Female	International organization	Team leader	ASSOITTICA_2_F
ASSOITTICA	Italy	Female	NGO	Member of board	ASSOITTICA_3_F
ASSOITTICA	Italy	Female	Academia	Professor	ASSOITTICA_4_F
ASSOITTICA	Italy	Female	Academia	Professor	ASSOITTICA_5_F
BCC	Italy	Female	SME	Owner	BCC_1_F
BCC	Italy	Female	NGO -	President/ "Indivisible worker"	BCC_2_F
NIB	Iceland	Male	Academia	Professor	NIB_1_M
NIB	Greece	Male	Research performing organization	Researcher	NIB_7_M
NIB	Turkey	Male	Academia SME	Researcher Owner	NIB_8_M
UNISI	Spain	Female	Research performing organization	Researcher	UNISI_1_F
VEDA	Bulgaria	Male	NGO	Chairmen of the Management Board	VEDA_4_M

The interviews conducted in the aquaculture and fisheries sector represent different organizations and functions that the interviewees have in the organizations they represent. 18 (13 female and 5 male) interviewees from 6 different countries participated in the data collection, performing 10 different functions in the organizations. It is important to highlight that 3 of the respondents represent two different organizations, and therefore have two different roles. Most of the respondents (6) came from the public sector – universities (3), research institutions (3), NGOs (2), international organizations (1), the private sector is represented by 6 respondents – 3 respondents represent private companies, 2 represent SMEs and 1 respondent is an “invisible worker”. 3 respondents represent both sectors – private companies and NGOs, NGOs and 'invisible workers' and universities and SMEs.

The interviewees have different roles in their organizations, most of them (15) hold a position in one organization, while 3 interviewers represent two organizations, i.e., hold two different positions:

- 3 interviewees are owners of the companies, including SMEs.
- 3 interviewees are researchers.
- 2 of the interviewees are college professors.
- 2 interviewers are the so-called “invisible workers”. They help their partners to do their job, but officially they are unemployed.
- 2 interviewees are quality managers.
- 2 interviewees are members of supervisory boards.
- 2 interviewees are team leaders.

- 2 interviewees are chairpersons of an NGO.

**1.1.3. Sustainable coastal and marine tourism**

A total of 5 interviews were conducted by 3 project partners in the field of sustainable coastal tourism.

Partner	Interviewee country	Interviewee gender	Organization type	Role in the organization	Interview code
UNISI	Italy	Female	Private company – yachts	Captain	UNISI_3_F
ISDI	Malta	Female	Private company – hotel	Team leader	ISDI_3_F
ISDI	Malta	Female	Private company – restaurant	Waitress	ISDI_2_F
ISDI	Malta	Female	Academia	Lecturer	ISDI_1_F
ACA	France	Female	NGO Self employed	Founder Captain	ACA_2_F

The interviews conducted in the field of sustainable coastal tourism represent different organizations and roles that the interviewees hold in the organizations they represent. The data collection involved 5 interviewees, all women, from 3 different countries, holding 5 different roles in the organizations. Most of the interviewees (3) work in the private sector – restaurants, hotels or self-employed - while 2 interviewees represent the public sector – universities and NGOs. One respondent represents two organizations and has two roles in them – she is a self-employed captain and founder of an NGO.

2 respondents hold managerial positions (ISDI\_3\_F and ACA\_2\_F), research group leader to founder, respectively.

**1.1.4. Offshore renewable energy**

A total of 4 interviews were conducted by 2 project partners in the field of offshore renewable energy.

Partner	Interviewee country	Interviewee gender	Organization type	Role in the organization	Interview code
PLOCAN	Spain	Male	Company Research performing institution	CEO	PLOCAN_1_M
PLOCAN	Spain	Female	Company	Financial director	PLOCAN_2_F
PLOCAN	Spain	Female	Research financing organization	Project manager	PLOCAN_3_F
VEDA	Romania	Female	Academia	Professor	VEDA_1_F

The interviews conducted in the offshore renewable energy sector represent different organizations and roles held by the interviewees in the organizations they represent. 4 (3 female and 1 male) interviewees from 2 different countries participated in the data collection, holding 4

different roles in the organizations they represent. Two of the interviewees are from the private sector – companies, including research centres, while the other two represent the public sector – government research funding agencies and universities.

Two of the interviewees (PLOCAN\_1\_M and PLOCAN\_2\_F) are in managerial positions in 2 different private companies, including a private research centre. One interviewee is a project manager, the last interviewee is a professor at a higher education institution.

**1.1.5. Cutting-edge enabling technologies for protecting and restoring marine ecosystems**

A total of 5 interviews were conducted by 4 project partners in the field of enabling technologies for protecting and restoring marine ecosystems.

Partner	Interviewee country	Interviewee gender	Organization type	Role in the organization	Interview code
ACA	France	Female	Company	Team leader	ACA_1_F
ACA	Spain	Female	Research performing organization	Researcher	ACA_3_F
ISDI	Malta	Female	Private research performing organization	Founder and director	ISDI_4_F
ISDI	Malta	Female	Academia	Professor	ISUD_5_F
PLOCAN	Spain	Female	Company	Researcher	PLOCAN_4_F

The interviews conducted in the field of cutting-edge technologies enabling protecting and restoring marine ecosystems represent different organizations and roles held by the interviewees in the organizations they represent. The data collection involved 5 interviewees, all female, from 3 different countries, holding 4 different roles in their organizations. Most of the interviewees (3) are from the private sector – companies and private research institutions - while 2 others are from the public sector - universities and research institutions. The interviewees represented 4 different positions. Two of the interviewees are in senior positions – director of the company and team leader, two interviewees are researchers, while one is a professor in the higher education institution.

**1.1.6. Other sectors**

A total of 3 interviews were conducted by 1 project partner in sectors other than the blue economy sectors selected by WINBLUE, but their highlights are important for the report.

Partner	Interviewee country	Interviewee gender	Organization type	Role in the organization	Interview code
VEDA	Bulgaria	Male	Academia	Chef assistant	VEDA_3_M
VEDA	Bulgaria	Female	NGO	Project manager	VEDA_2_F

VEDA	Bulgaria	Female	Academia	Lecturer	VEDA_5_F
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The interviews were conducted in the other selected sectors of the blue WINBLUE economy representing public institutions – two higher education institutions and one NGO. Three (two female and one male) interviewees from one country - Bulgaria - participated in the data collection, performing three different functions in the organizations. One of the interviewees is in a managerial position in the organization he represents.

### 1.1.7. Gender relevance in the organization and entire sector

#### 1.1.7.1. Circular blue bioeconomy and biotechnology

In general, respondents report that women in this sector seemingly have the same opportunities as their male colleagues. However, often the higher administrative positions (e.g., managers and CEOs) are still occupied by men. This can be a result of inequalities, leading to harder path to promotion and the glass ceiling for women that prevents the advancement of their careers. Furthermore, some countries (e.g., Malta) do not have all regulations in place, which could help address such inequalities (NIB\_6\_F).

The importance of gender mainstreaming in organizations is increasing, especially following the European Commission's initiative to introduce mandatory Gender Equality Plans (GEP) as a requirement for public bodies to apply for EU funding. It was highlighted that it is important to ensure gender equality and promote equal representation of both women and men. This way, everyone can become a part of the solution as everyone can feel addressed (NIB\_5\_F, NIB\_3\_M and UNISI\_2\_M).

The institution represented by NIB\_5\_F had a dissemination committee, which was later transformed into the committee for dissemination and gender equality. This committee oversees the institutional dissemination activities as well as the preparation and monitoring of the implementation of the GEP. In addition, this committee also works with other institutions regarding gender equality and the empowerment of women working in the institution (NIB\_5\_F). In another institution, gender equality is not high on their priority agenda, but there are nevertheless attempts to promote women in science, e.g. the organization of the Day of Women and Girls in Science in February or campaigns against gender-based violence, while there are no activities that explicitly promote gender equality and ensure equal opportunities (NIB\_4\_F).

#### 1.1.7.2. Fisheries and aquaculture

In recent years, gender equality is being addressed in the fisheries and aquaculture sector, especially since the EU introduced mandatory GEPs for public bodies applying for EU-funded projects. This has enabled the addressing of gender and equality issues in public organizations, which otherwise might have not happened (NIB\_7\_M). Nevertheless, there is still a low number of women in decision-making positions (especially in government positions) (UNISI\_1\_F).

The opposite opinion was also expressed. According to one interviewee, gender is not considered in her organization because it is no longer relevant, as gender equality represents an issue of the past (ANFACO\_4\_F).

In interviewee NIB\_1\_M's university, the topic of gender is mentioned very often, as there are more women (both students and staff) than men. The reason for this is very simple – women are more prevalent in fields of nursing, teaching and social sciences, while gender equality is maintained in the natural sciences. In fisheries and aquaculture, however, there are still more men, but the gap is narrowing. The university is working on a strategy to achieve a better gender balance among students and negotiations are underway to introduce technical courses (NIB\_1\_M).

Some of the interviewees reflected on the gender distribution among staff in their institutions. In the institution represented by VEDA\_4\_M, the gender ratio is almost balanced, with 3 out of 7 employees being women. In the institution represented by the interviewee ANFACO\_3\_F, the administrative and production departments (40 people in total) are managed by a team composed predominantly of women. The interviewee VEDA\_4\_M emphasised that both genders are employed in the facility, but he does not know the exact gender distribution. The institution represented by UNISI\_1\_F has 500 employees, the current manager is a woman, but in the 40-year history of the company only 1 or 2 women have reached such a high position. There are 63 fishing associations in Spain, of which only 3 have a female leader (ANFACO\_5\_F).

In the past, the fisheries and aquaculture sector was predominantly male-dominated, and there were and still are many family-run micro-enterprises (ANFACO\_1\_F, UNISI\_1\_F and ASSOITTICA\_3\_F). Historically, very few women were officially employed in such organizations, which represents a recurrent problem of the so-called invisible workers and prevents setting clear boundaries between family and business (ASSOITTICA\_3\_F). In the fisheries and aquaculture sector, there are a large number of invisible workers who are currently the driving force behind family-run micro-enterprises. The invisible workers not only perform physical labour (cleaning boats and equipment, helping to bring in the catch, etc.), but in many cases also take care of the administrative part of the business and communication with customers (BCC\_2\_F and BCC\_1\_F).

The company represented by ASSOITTICA\_1\_F was founded by women, and all management positions are still held by women from the same family. This could be the reason why the majority of employees in the company are women. Nevertheless, there is a division of tasks – tasks that require physical strength, such as forklifting and carrying bags of mussels, are conducted by men, while the selection and cleaning of the mussels is done by female employees (ANFACO\_3\_F, ANFACO\_2\_M).

On a positive side, the opinion on gendered roles and labour distribution is slowly fading away. In addition, the company of an interviewee formalized equal treatment and payment for employees who perform the same tasks; it is also common in the company to rotate employees. Moreover, there are many women in management positions in the administration, e.g. in administration, quality management and production. The employee responsible for production leads a male-dominated team (ANFACO\_2\_M).

Nevertheless, negative examples still persist. In the organizations where the male gender is underrepresented, the female employees sometimes even ask the management to hire men. The reason behind this is very practical – it is much easier for male researchers to do the field work,

#### D.1.4 Qualitative feedback from WINBLUE Labs

which includes communicating with the fishermen, who are seen as very conservative and sometimes might have a negative attitude towards women (NIB\_8\_M).

In Spain, the fishermen's association had a problem in the 1990s when the government and male members refused women to participate in the association. During this time, women were only treated as crew members and were not allowed to sit at the negotiating table and were excluded from decision-making processes. As crew members, they represent a category of association members with lower power, even though there are more women than men in the association. In Vilanova, for example, there are 250 women and 80 men, but women's decision-making power is lower, as they are only considered as crew members. The women in the association are trying to change the association's law, but this is almost impossible as the government does not want to take measures that go against the interests of men (ANFACO\_5\_F).

In Galicia, the situation was reversed: the association of female net makers of Galicia did not allow male net makers. This is because the working conditions for male net makers are completely different to those for female net makers. The female net makers are self-employed, while the men generally work as net makers on boats and trawlers, hence not self-employed. They receive a salary and are part of the ship's crew. Although both women and men work on the nets in the same way, the position of male net makers is not the same as the women's, as men are typically permanently employed (ACA\_4\_F).

Despite net making can be done by both women and men, it is usually done by women, a pattern that is present in every underpaid job. Furthermore, according to the interviewee who is married to a fisherman, fishermen tend to be very conservative, which can lead to traditional attitudes – men are expected to be breadwinners and women are expected to be housekeepers or, in the case of fishing, 'invisible workers' who help their husbands/partners/sons/fathers to do their jobs, while men take care of their female family members so they do not need social guarantees (security) (ACA\_4\_F).

Finally, there is a historical reason behind this large gender imbalance and a clear separation between female and male activities in the fisheries and aquaculture sector. From time immemorial, women were seen as a distraction for men in their work, so women were not allowed to be on the boat. This includes unsubstantiated prejudice that women on board bring bad luck (accidents, no catch, etc.). Fortunately, the fishing and aquaculture communities have become much more open and are adapting to the changing circumstances, so the historical approach to women and their unfair treatment will hopefully become a thing of the past (ANFACO\_3\_F).

Furthermore, the situation is improving as generations change, and the number of women working in the industry is increasing. Women play an important role in the management and processing of fishery products, especially in quality control, which plays a crucial role in this sector (ASSOITTICA\_3\_F).

### *1.1.7.3. Sustainable coastal and marine tourism*

Interviewee ISDI\_3\_F represents the hotel industry. In her company, most employees are female and an increasing number of women is taking up management positions in the hotel. She also emphasised that, in her opinion, gender does not really play a role in her daily work tasks.

In the restaurants sector, men are asked for help when it comes to difficult tasks (lifting boxes of products, moving heavy objects). Also, sometimes when a table is full of male customers, and especially late in the evening, male waiters are asked to take care of them to prevent sexist jokes or inappropriate behaviour (ISDI\_2\_F).

Interviewee ISDI\_1\_F emphasised that gender should not be considered when evaluating an individual's performance, but that each individual should be valued for their individual skills and background.

Interviewee UNISI\_3\_F works as a private yacht captain in a field that is dominated by men. In Italy, it is very rare for women to work as captains, so customers are usually very surprised when they see a female captain. In this sector, gender plays an important role and is a reason for discrimination, as women are only seen as crew members, as auxiliaries for the customers and male crew members.

### *1.1.7.4. Offshore renewable energy*

In interviewee PLOCAN\_1\_M's institution, gender perspective relates mainly to the employees' gender composition. Sometimes there are more women, sometimes more men, but the difference itself is not dramatic. There is however a distinction of work positions between men and women – men tend to hold engineering and technical positions, while women dominate in roles related to administrative, financial and legal tasks.

There are many more men than women in the PLOCAN\_2\_F interviewee's organization (19 men and 6 women). 20% of the board members are female, a few years ago the percentage of female was 40%, but some of the female board members were promoted. To prevent and reduce the pay gap, salaries are reviewed every year. The organization has also introduced mandatory training on harassment. However, gender does not play a major role in the daily work of the organization, as all employees are treated equally and given the same opportunities, as they are all individuals with special skills and qualifications.

Gender is considered in the strategies, communication activities and actions of the organization represented by the interviewee PLOCAN\_3\_F. As the organization is involved in funding activities, it regularly publishes calls for proposals where gender equality is ensured. In 2023, the calls were reviewed to ensure that the language used in the calls is not sexist. The organization also collects gender-disaggregated data from the calls to analyze and improve upcoming calls. In addition to formal activities, they organize awareness-raising events such as "Women and Girls in Science" and school visits.

Similar awareness raising activities are also organized by the respondent's organization VEDA\_1\_F. The organization offers seminars to schools on marine-related professions and presents them with

career guidelines and success stories of women in marine-related professions. In addition, the organization participates in many projects to promote sea-related or so-called blue careers.

### *1.1.7.5. Cutting-edge enabling technologies for protecting and restoring marine ecosystems*

In the organization represented by interviewee ACA\_1\_F, a network called “Women” has been established, which unites men and women and provides a safe place for women to share their experiences and give them self-confidence. Furthermore, in line with the EU Directive on improving the gender balance among directors (DIRECTIVE (EU) 2022/2381), the organization has made a commitment in its HR policy to increase the number of women in leadership positions and to set a minimum percentage of women on boards (40% women or underrepresented gender). The institution has a department dedicated to tackling inequalities. In addition, the institution also invests in supporting women in cycling and participation of women in sport recreation activities. As little as a few years ago, there were even no changing rooms for women.

Gender aspects are taken into account in the research projects of the ISDI\_4\_F's organization. The ISDI\_3\_F interviewee also noted that there is a split between male and female professions in the industry, meaning that technical positions are held by men and administration is led by female, and she acknowledged that women are underrepresented in decision-making positions, which are mainly held by men.

The organization represented by interviewee ISDI\_5\_F represents a different extreme, where almost all staff are female – all five academic staff and one of two administrative staff. Yet there has been no internal debate of gender within the organization since interviewee ISDI\_5\_F was hired, and gender was not considered important. Similarly, in interviewee PLOCAN\_4\_F's organization, gender is not mentioned in any way, but at the same time there is no gender conflict or discrimination. The managing director and founder of the organization is male, but if the founder were a woman, the position of managing director would probably also be held by a woman. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that the interviewee PLOCAN\_4\_F has only been working for 6 months, so perhaps she still lacks a certain institutional context.

### *1.1.7.6. Other*

Interviewees VEDA\_3\_M and VEDA\_5\_F, who represent the same institution, have a slightly different opinion about the importance of gender in their institution. According to VEDA\_3\_M, the topic of gender has never been particularly emphasized in the organization, while according to interviewee VEDA\_5\_F, gender is included in considerations, but mostly due to EU requirements. Nevertheless, both interviewees agreed that both genders can study all professions offered by the organization, even those that were previously reserved for men only. The interviewee VEDA\_5\_F also emphasized that there are no gender inequalities in the organization.

Women are well represented in the VEDA\_2\_F organization and the organization itself is working to create a gender balance. Moreover, gender equality is one of the principles enshrined in the internal rules for the implementation of the organization's socially beneficial activities and is observed by the organization's governing bodies - the Board of Directors and the General Assembly.



### 1.1.8. GEP relevance in the organization

#### 1.1.8.1. Circular blue bioeconomy and biotechnology

Interviewees NIB\_5\_F and NIB\_3\_M stated that the institutions they represent have introduced GEP. The interviewees did not provide much information on their structure, efficiency and implementation. Both only emphasised that GEP is a “living” document that should be tailored to the respective institution

Some interviewees expressed the opinion that GEPs should be urgently introduced in all sectors of the blue economy, that are currently dominated by men. Moreover, GEPs are a perfect tool to improve/address/balance the position of women in all sectors of the blue economy, but especially in those that are dominated by men (NIB\_4\_F and NIB\_5\_F). The implementation of the GEP in the private sector should be considered, as it could improve gender equality and diversity and in this way bring about positive changes for the entire sector (NIB\_2\_F). However, even if the GEP could also be useful for private companies, there is a risk that some private companies would see the GEP adoption as another administrative “tick the box” exercise and only formally adopt it, without any serious commitment to monitor and implement its activities (NIB\_6\_F).

Interviewees also commented on the content of the GEP. In their opinion, GEPs that only focus on gender equality are outdated and no longer reflect the current reality. The scope should be broadened to include aspects of diversity (including but not limited to sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, etc.) (NIB\_3\_M and NIB\_5\_F). GEPs should include measures that indirectly contribute to the promotion of gender equality, e.g. training in soft skills such as women's empowerment, leadership, networking, lobbying, communication, negotiation, etc. (NIB\_5\_F and NIB\_2\_F). In addition, GEPs should also include stricter measures such as quotas, changes in institutional legal acts, etc. (NIB\_2\_F). Finally, GEPs should focus more on measures to support women during family-related career breaks (e.g. maternity or caring for the elderly) so that they do not fall significantly behind their male colleagues (NIB\_2\_F).

According to interviewee UNISI\_2\_M, the GEP is also a driving force for institutional improvements and the direction of company policy. In addition, interviewees emphasised the link between the implementation of the GEP, the greater involvement of women in management of companies and the creation of a greener future (UNISI\_2\_M and NIB\_5\_F).

#### 1.1.8.2. Fisheries and aquaculture

All efforts to ensure and promote gender equality should be welcomed and supported, and the GEP is no exception. It is also important to understand that the implementation of the GEP should continue, it cannot be considered complete if only a few measures listed in it have been implemented (NIB\_1\_M). GEPs are important for any private or public organization as they help to ensure gender equality, which should be implemented in all sectors, not just aquaculture and fisheries. The importance of GEP is emphasized at European level, but more efforts are needed and additional measures should be taken at local level (ANFACO\_2\_F, ANFACO\_3\_F and ANFACO\_4\_F). However, EU initiatives cannot be successfully implemented with only local efforts (ANFACO\_1\_F). It would therefore be useful to obtain governmental support to introduce GEP as

a tool that promotes and supports gender equality in all sectors, not only in the blue economy (ANFACO\_5\_F).

The interviewee NIB\_8\_M was the first to present the GEP` concept to his university management. The reason behind this action was very pragmatic - the mandatory EU requirement to have adopted and published GEP in order to be able to obtain funding for EU projects. In interviewee's UNISI\_1\_F institution the GEP was developed with the main aim of balancing the gender gap. Before adopting the GEPs, the organization had a gender equality strategy, but this strategy was not treated as an important/relevant document.

GEPs should be mandatory for all types and sizes of public and private entities (UNISI\_1\_F). This would improve the well-being of the companies, their good environment and cooperation (ANFACO\_3\_F). GEP is essential in the private sector (ANFACO\_1\_F) and could be especially beneficial for small companies (NIB\_1\_M). Nevertheless, the possibility should also be considered of not making GEP mandatory for micro-enterprises, but rather as a guideline, as it would be too much of a burden for many of them to implement it. In Greece, for example, there are 13,000 vessels, each represented by 1-3 people, and due to the nature of the sector, most of the employees are male. It would be difficult or even impossible to implement GEP in such companies (NIB\_7\_M), but GEPs could be relevant for the large private companies operating in the fisheries and aquaculture sector (NIB\_8\_M).

It is very important to implement GEP in practice and not use it as yet another declaration that remains in the drawer. Its implementation should be monitored, controlled and revised (ANFACO\_1\_F, ANFACO\_4\_F, ANFACO\_5\_F and UNISI\_1\_F). GEP can be a powerful way for the organizations to make structural changes and take steps that were not previously considered necessary (ANFACO\_4\_F, NIB\_8\_M).

### *1.1.8.3. Sustainable coastal and marine tourism*

GEPs can contribute to a more sustainable and inclusive development of the sector and the legal entities operating in it (ISDI\_1\_F). GEP can also help to reduce gender gaps, especially in sectors or professions where men predominate. In the restaurants sector, for example, in most cases men work in the kitchen, while women take on the role of waitress (ISDI\_2\_F).

It would be much easier to eliminate gender inequalities and combat struggles in the industry if the GEP became a standard with appropriate templates and guidelines (UNISI\_3\_F).

### *1.1.8.4. Offshore renewable energy*

The organization represented by the interviewee PLOCAN\_2\_F will start implementing the GEP in 2024, even if it is not mandatory according to the rules set by the EU, but the organization has already committed to it 10 years ago. The introduction of the GEP can enable women to take on higher positions and move up in the organization.

The interviewee PLOCAN\_3\_F represented an organization that has already introduced a GEP. The GEP is tailor-made and adapted to institutional needs, e.g. the requirement to consider gender in the public calls prepared by the organization.

In general, the implementation of GEP can help to prevent sexual harassment and ensure equal treatment. GEP should not only be implemented in the offshore renewable energy sector, but also in the entire blue economy sector. Adopting and implementing effective GEPs could encourage women to enter the sector and, if they are already there, – help them to advance their careers (PLOCAN\_3\_F).

The organization represented by interviewee VEDA\_1\_F has introduced GEP, but the interviewee did not provide any further information.

### *1.1.8.5. Cutting-edge enabling technologies for protecting and restoring marine ecosystems*

As already mentioned, the EU has incentivised all public research organizations wishing to apply for EU funds to introduce the GEP, making GEP compulsory. On the one hand, this is a good initiative, but on the other hand, it is a coercive measure and many organizations may resist its implementation. There are many cases where GEP is only officially adopted but never implemented as it seems to be just another administrative burden for the organization (ACA\_3\_F and ISDI\_4\_F). Moreover, GEPs may not be the best tool to promote gender equality in research institutions (ISDI\_4\_F).

Nonetheless, GEP could be an important starting point for improving gender equality in areas of the blue economy that are predominantly male-dominated. GEPs can be relevant for sectors such as marine energy, deep sea mining and cyber security (ISDI\_5\_F). In addition, GEPs are a very suitable and relevant tool for organizations to improve and ensure work-life balance. Finally, senior managers of the organizations should consider the implementation of the necessary regulations to comply with the requirements of the GEP (PLOCAN\_4\_F).

### *1.1.8.6. Other*

The organization represented by the interviewees VEDA\_3\_M and VEDA\_5\_F does not have a GEP, as the institution does not apply for Horizon Europe calls.

The interviewee's VEDA\_2\_F organization has introduced the GEP. GEPs in public institutions such as universities and research institutions support the career development of women and help to realize the full potential of women. For the same reason, it would be useful to introduce GEPs in private companies operating in this sector, including the port authorities (VEDA\_2\_F).

## **1.1.9. Dialogue on gender equality within the institution**

### *1.1.9.1. Circular blue bioeconomy and biotechnology*

As far as the beginning is concerned, the gender dialogue should be initiated on a personal level. This will help the identification of potential issues, needs and areas that need improvement. Gender should become an integral part of the institutional culture and daily conversations, and staff will not feel that it has been artificially introduced into their routine by management (“from the top down”), so rejection and resistance to the topic will be much lower (NIB\_4\_F and NIB\_5\_F). It is important that women on all positions have strategic roles within the organisation to initiate the dialogue on gender equality in the organisation (UNISI\_2\_M).

Another, no less important level is the institutional level of legislation. In this case, some measures should be defined as binding in the institutional legal acts. A starting point can be the adoption of GEP by an institution as a mandatory measure that must be implemented within a certain period of time (NIB\_2\_F). This can follow national legislation, such as for example France and in Spain, where GEPs are mandatory in companies above 50 employees.

Gender equality and the GEP should be communicated in a friendly and non-aggressive manner (NIB\_5\_F). An aggressive and pushy way of communication can cause rejection and resistance. Meritocracy and professional skills should however still be maintained, otherwise it may lead to the misconception that in a situation where a man is more competent than a woman and better suited for the position, the woman will be hired/promoted solely because of her gender.

The opinion was also expressed that it is too late to initiate gender dialogue in the workplace, as it should happen much earlier, long before the person enters the job market. It should start in the family and then continue in kindergarten, school and higher education institutions (NIB\_3\_M).

### *1.1.9.2. Fisheries and aquaculture*

It is very important to continue or complete initiatives that have been started. In the case of the adoption of the GEP, it should not only be adopted and published, but also implemented and updated according to the needs; therefore, mechanisms for its monitoring and updating must be established. This applies not only to the GEP, but to all initiatives related to gender equality: if step 1 is done, it should logically follow step 2, 3, etc. (NIB\_8\_M).

Changes in legislation related to gender equality can be introduced, especially in male-dominated organisations. In Spanish fishing associations, for example, quotas must be set for women, otherwise women will not be elected and their potential inequalities will not be visible enough (ANFACO\_5\_F). In addition to changes in legislation, internal changes to the organisational structure could also make an important contribution to initiating gender dialogue. It is important that activities that are compulsory by national and/or EU law are reflected not only in external activities but also in internal activities (UNISI\_1\_F, VEDA\_4\_M and ANFACO\_4\_F).

Dialogue between genders can be initiated by sharing practical information and conducting educational activities related to gender equality (ANFACO\_1\_F and ANFACO\_2\_F). Everyone in the company must be treated and valued equally, only in such an environment can the dialogue between the genders be initiated (ANFACO\_2\_M). In addition, it is very important that men do not feel attacked and have a positive attitude towards internal and national legislation related to gender equality (ANFACO\_1\_F). Furthermore, it is important to point out that sometimes women do not stand up for equality and ignore problems because they rely on outdated traditions and the attitude "if I have endured a position, so can the younger women, they just have to suffer a little" (ANFACO\_4\_F).

Organisations should work to improve relations between workers and create a good, safe and friendly working environment where everyone is heard and receives help when needed. A safe space should also be created where all employees can openly talk about their problems in groups

or individually and not be afraid of the potential consequences. In fact, management should know what problems they are facing and provide the necessary help (ANFACO\_4\_F).

### *1.1.9.3. Sustainable coastal and marine tourism*

The initiation of a gender dialogue should encompass all levels - the organizational, the individual and the legislative level (ISDI\_2\_F). Dialogue on gender topic should be initiated at the institutional level by senior managers. Initially, it could be awareness-raising activities and various trainings on the topic - they can be of a general nature, such as gender equality in the company, or they can be very specific and deal with a particular topic, such as gender-based violence. This could help to change the mindset of the sector and the existing approach to gender equality and reduce tolerance to gender inequality. Legal entities should have a person responsible for gender equality, a point of contact that staff can turn to if they experience or observe gender inequality or discrimination. The organization should also have clear guidelines on what to do if a person experiences or witnesses gender inequality/discrimination (ACA\_2\_F).

The initiation of a gender dialogue in academia must be based on a multi-layered approach, which means that different organizational levels must be addressed with different tools and measures (ISDI\_1\_F).

The involvement of external companies to assess the level of gender equality in the organizations could be useful, the assessment should take place regularly and be based on the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data (ACA\_2\_F).

### *1.1.9.4. Offshore renewable energy*

Enforcing gender equality through legal measures is not the right approach, as it could provoke resistance and lead to the opposite results. Changes at the structural level, which are the most stable and focus on the mechanism that supports integration and promote the inclusion of women in the organization, could be the right approach to initiate a gender dialogue within the organization (PLOCAN\_1\_M, PLOCAN\_2\_F and PLOCAN\_3\_F). In addition, an analysis of the gaps and barriers faced by women should be conducted and the results, as well as other evidence of inequalities in the organization and across the sector, such as policy recommendations and examples of good practice, should be presented to senior managers (PLOCAN\_2\_F and VEDA\_1\_F). All these measures can help to share experiences and knowledge to raise awareness and promote gender equality within the institution (PLOCAN\_3\_F).

### *1.1.9.5. Cutting-edge enabling technologies for protection and restoration marine ecosystems*

Gender dialogue should be initiated by implementing structural changes in terms of the support that organizations provide to their employees in the area of work-life balance (ACA\_1\_F). Measures should also be taken to enable more women to reach management positions (ACA\_1\_F and ISDI\_5\_F).

Educating and informing about gender equality is crucial as gender inequalities can only be eliminated if there are enough people who understand the problem and the need to solve it. This can be done by inviting external experts who are already involved and trained in the topic of

gender equality to support the organization through training and workshops for employees (ISDI\_4\_F).

### 1.1.9.6. Other

The organizational bodies responsible for professional development should initiate a dialogue on gender equality (VEDA\_5\_F). This dialogue can also be initiated by drafting internal rules, revising them and adopting the GEP (VEDA\_2\_F).

## 1.2. Management processes

### 1.2.1. Gender differences in advancement of the career

#### 1.2.1.1. Circular blue bioeconomy and biotechnology

Two of the seven interviewees (UNISI\_2\_M and NIB\_5\_F) clearly stated that there are no gender differences in career advancement in the organizations they represent. Nevertheless, the majority of interviewees stated that there are serious gender differences in career advancement in the field of marine biotechnologies and that these differences can also be observed in the private and public institutions working in this sector. One interviewee (NIB\_3\_M) noted that in the Mediterranean region, toxic masculinity is still strong in professional and private life and a strong division of female and male roles can be observed, especially in rural areas or small islands.

Unfortunately, one of the main reasons cited for gender differences in career progression was caring responsibilities, which are not limited to childcare but also include caring for the elderly (UNISI\_2\_M, NIB\_4\_F, NIB\_6\_F). Caring responsibilities have two types of consequences for women:

- **Career break.** In most cases, women have at least one long career break related to the birth of the child and the early years of staying at home and caring for the child. During this time, their male colleagues can write articles, apply for projects, lead projects, attend conferences and simply be active in their field.
- **Work-life balance.** Balancing work and life is a challenge these days, even if you do not have children, but with the birth of a child and returning to work after maternity leave, balancing work and life becomes even more difficult. In addition to childcare, women may also be responsible for caring for the elderly or disabled. In most cases, it is women who are responsible for looking after children, the elderly or disabled people. This means that even if the children are big enough, it can be difficult to balance life and work due to caring for elderly/disabled relatives.

Another stress factor is the social pressure to start a family and have children, as “the clock is ticking” and careers can wait. This pressure is specifically aimed at young women, especially those in their thirties. Unfortunately, the situation is exactly the opposite – the thirties are an important time for career advancement for both women and men (NIB\_4\_F). So women basically have three options: 1) have children and focus on family life, 2) don't have children and focus on career, and 3) have children and a career and try to be the best version of themselves for both. Each of these options can be extremely dangerous for women's mental health – the first two options can lead to

endless guilt and doubts about whether the decision to focus on career or family was the right one, the third option can lead to burnout, and all of these options can have serious consequences for women's mental health.

Some employers ask female applicants very personal and intimate questions during promotion or job interviews, e.g. about their marital status, if and when she plans to have children. These types of questions are seldom/never asked to male applicants for promotion/hiring. In addition, these questions are asked in a closed room where the female applicant and the evaluation committee of several people are present. In most cases, the interviews are not recorded, so a female applicant who wishes to complain about unequal treatment or discriminatory questions has no opportunity to do so as she has no evidence. Eventually the employer might end up choosing a male applicant for very pragmatic reasons – he cannot change his mind and cannot get pregnant, so he does not neglect his work, does not cause problems related to the absence/needs during pregnancy and is not absent on maternity leave (NIB\_6\_F and UNISI\_1\_F).

Moreover, there are societal differences between women and men related to their confidence and self-assurance, which often prevent them to apply or take on positions with more responsibility (NIB\_5\_F).

The institutions of some interviewees are aware of the problems related to gender differences in career advancement and have taken appropriate measures to minimise them (e.g. promoting work-life balance or developing a strategy to recruit more female professors at the university) (UNISI\_3\_M and NIB\_4\_F).

##### *1.2.1.2. Fisheries and aquaculture*

Interviewees pointed out that one of the biggest gender differences in career progression is family status, pregnancy and caring responsibilities (NIB\_7\_M, ASSOITTICA\_1\_F, ANFACO\_3\_F and ANFACO\_4\_F). In Europe, women still play the main role in the family when it comes to caring responsibilities. At least in Greece, working hours in the private sector are not as flexible and it is difficult to reconcile work and family life. In general, employers do not prefer to hire women because at some point they may get pregnant and the employer has the problem of finding another person to replace the woman during maternity leave, followed by another problem – when the woman is back, she might still be absent due to responsibilities connected to toddlers' care (NIB\_7\_M). In the organization of interviewee UNISI\_1\_F pregnancy does not cause a negative reaction per se, but women are still objectified as mothers or as women in a sexual sense.

Often women have to make the difficult decision – to put their career on hold and have a child, which results in them losing their career opportunities as their male colleagues are active in their field during their break and move up (NIB\_1\_M).

Marital status and caring responsibilities make it difficult to reconcile work and family life (ANFACO\_1\_F and ANFACO\_3\_F). For example, jobs that require mobility are most likely to be given to men, or sometimes women are not even considered because they might not be able to travel and be away from home for longer periods of time, which can be seen as lack of commitment by the employer. Ultimately, the woman herself might not be satisfied if she is away from her

#### D.1.4 Qualitative feedback from WINBLUE Labs

home, her family and her young child, which can also affect her work efficiency. Even if the woman's capacity, level of commitment, attitude and skills are not questioned, her availability will always be questioned (ANFACO\_3\_F).

Being a female entrepreneur in a male-dominated field is still a challenge today. When the interviewee's ASSOITTICA\_1\_F mother started her business 40 years ago, she had to face many barriers and great scepticism about her decision to start a business in the fisheries and aquaculture sector, as it was not common for women to start a business and this sector.

There are also cases in which women do not have the opportunity to choose their profession freely due to family pressure (ASSOITTICA\_3\_F). Wives or female relatives of fishermen traditionally help their family members who are fishermen, but they are the so-called "invisible workers", they are not officially employed, so they do not receive a salary and have no social security, which prevents them to advance in their careers. Furthermore, it is very difficult to gain a foothold in the fishing sector if you do not have a family working in the sector (BCC\_1\_BCC and BCC\_2\_F). Another example is the canning industry - the management of the cannery or other family-run micro-enterprise is passed on to a male family member. In the region of Galicia (Spain), there are only three canneries run by women (ANFACO\_3\_F, ASSOITTICA\_1\_F and ANFACO\_4\_F). The only case in which women are respected by default is when they come from a family that has been involved in fisheries or aquaculture for a long time (BCC\_1\_F).

Women occupy lower positions even if they have the same or higher abilities, and they are seen as lower performing than men, and their opinions are never valued as much as men's (UNISI\_1\_F). Furthermore, women's abilities are overlooked and underestimated. The interviewee ANFACO\_4\_F recalled that 20 years ago in the company where she worked, employees preferred to see a male head of department. The interviewee ANFACO\_5\_F experienced very similar things – men believed that women's abilities are limited to, e.g. shellfish, and they lacked the skills in dealing with nets/fishing. In contrast men were believed to be knowledgeable in all areas related to fishing. She has also experienced cases where women were judged on the basis of their appearance, in this particular case because of the colour of their hair. In the official meeting of the fishing association, the senior patron referred to the female secretary as a "blondie" and such pattern was so prevalent that the female employees stopped noticing and reacting to such observations.

Pressure and the approach that women are worth less or are not able to do the same work as men also come from the family – there are cases where women work on the rafts and even if they have a licence and meet the requirements to go on the boat, the men, usually the father or the husband, do not let the woman go alone (ANFACO\_5\_F). In the experience of interviewee ANFACO\_1\_F, the only cases where women are equally or even more valued are companies run by women or families where there is a strong female legacy (e.g., the company is run by the grandmother).

Over time, even women themselves started doubting their capabilities and stopped applying or accepting leadership positions and preferred to leave them to men, who were regarded (even by women) as better suited for leadership positions (NIB\_8\_M, ASSOITTICA\_3\_F). As in any sector, it is crucial to be present at various events and to showcase your work and expertise. This is



connected to networking and a better self-promotion, areas where men are still seen as better performing (ASSOITTICA\_1\_F, ANFACO\_3\_F and NIB\_1\_M). This was also reflected in interviewee NIB\_1\_M exercise when he asked his first-year students to write an essay on why they chose this course and where they see themselves in five years' time. The female students reported their vision to keep a low profile, likely by working in laboratories, while the male students clearly elaborated their entrepreneurial vision to start their own business at that point. This clearly shows that there is a need to invest in developing women's skills and teaching them to use their good qualities in developing their careers.

To be regarded as equally capable and knowledgeable, it is believed that women must constantly prove themselves and they must work and achieve much more than men (ANFACO\_4\_F).

Legal frameworks, a hostile work environment, gender-based violence and stereotypes are barriers to women's career advancement. Women in this sector are confronted with them on a daily basis, which affect them in different ways. Gender-based violence and stereotypes are omnipresent in markets, ports and landing sites. They affect women physically, emotionally and sexually and contribute to the creation of an exploitative and hostile work environment, often exacerbated by an unsafe home environment (ASSOITTICA\_2\_F).

There are reported cases of unfair treatment of female students by their supervisors. Interestingly, in most cases, the reports of mobbing are not confirmed. There are two explanations for this: 1) it is difficult to prove mobbing and there is a lack of evidence, 2) the women complain about mobbing out of revenge or with the aim of destroying the supervisor's career (NIB\_8\_M).

Differences in career advancement do not always have to be related to gender, because some professions are still not attractive to women. Fisheries and aquaculture traditionally employ more men than women and hold positions that require more physical strength, while women hold positions in processing but not in technical areas. Technical positions that involve the operation of machinery and require practical knowledge are generally held by men (NIB\_1\_M, NIB\_8\_M and ASSOITTICA\_3\_F). In addition, jobs in fisheries are exposed to the cold, are weather-dependent and have very difficult and often unpredictable working hours (BCC\_1\_F, BCC\_2\_F and ASSOITTICA\_3\_F). However, there is another part of processing – automation, so potentially there will soon be a greater equality in sectors where human strength is no longer a necessary prerequisite (NIB\_1\_M).

Two interviewees, VEDA\_4\_M and ANFACO\_2\_M, could not identify any gender differences in career advancement.

Finally, the fisheries and aquaculture sector will soon face difficulties due to lack of generational change, lack of investment and lack of interest from policy makers in the fishing industry and its development. Locals are not interested in working in the fisheries and aquaculture sector, so an increasing number of workers is coming from outside Europe (BCC\_1\_F). While this is not directly related to gender inequalities, it may ultimately contribute to exacerbating gender inequality in the sector.

### *1.2.1.3. Sustainable coastal and marine tourism*

The perceived societal constraints of women can in many cases be an obstacle to their professional advancement. Gender-specific socialisation constructs gender-specific identities. For example, society associates certain characteristics with women rather than men (delicacy, gentleness, kindness, ability to listen to others). This can contribute to a lack of self-confidence in women, who are less inclined than men to emphasise their achievements. They are more reluctant to apply for leadership positions for fear of not being up to the responsibility (ISDI\_3\_F and ACA\_2\_F).

There is also a lack of gender-specific role models, so women do not easily see the female ambassadors. Women, especially in male-dominated fields, can be victims of gender-based violence, which lowers their self-esteem and has a negative impact on their mental health (ACA\_2\_F).

Mentality, culture and stereotypes also represent an obstacle to career advancement for women. For example, the opinion of a sailor is valued more than that of a non-sailor. The same logic applies to women's opinions, which are considered less valuable than those of men (UNISI\_3\_F and ISDI\_1\_F). Women's physical appearance also plays an important role in career advancement – women who are not attractive or/and do not conform to existing beauty norms/stereotypes do not advance as quickly and are less supported than their peers who are considered to conform to beauty norms (ISDI\_1\_F and UNISI\_3\_F).

### *1.2.1.4. Offshore renewable energy*

One of the main obstacles to women's career advancement is motherhood. Many employers believe that a woman who has become a mother does not perform as good as before. Fortunately, this situation is improving and attitudes towards motherhood are changing (PLOCAN\_1\_M). In addition, women, especially those with young children or those caring for elderly relatives, have many challenges related to work-life balance. At the same time, management positions require greater availability, which is a challenge for women with caring responsibilities. Finally, it is physically and mentally frustrating for women to find a balance between career and personal life while trying to optimize their work performance, while remaining a responsible mother, especially when judged by the society. Mothers are judged and labelled as bad mothers much more quickly than fathers. Even though fathers are much more involved in childcare today than they were years ago, the problem persists (PLOCAN\_3\_F).

Interviewee PLOCAN\_2\_F was unable to identify any gender-specific differences in career advancement. Her opinion was echoed by interviewee VEDA\_1\_F, who added that all employees have the same opportunities for career advancement if they have the necessary training and skills for the position in question.

### *1.2.1.5. Cutting-edge enabling technologies for protecting and restoring marine ecosystems*

The interviewees ACA\_1\_F and ISDI\_5\_F stated that there are no gender-specific differences in career advancement in the organizations they represent.

The qualified women in this sector, especially in cetacean research, have a hard time advancing in their careers and climbing the ladder to higher positions (ISDI\_4\_F). The female colleague of the

interviewee ISDI\_4\_F gave up her career in Italy when she realized that it was impossible to move up because of her gender and moved to Malta, where career advancement was easier. One of the biggest gender differences in career advancement is motherhood, as women take a break (or several breaks) at some point in their career, while their male counterparts move up their career ladder. All this leads to a gender pay gap (ACA\_1\_F).

Sometimes the women themselves slow down their career advancement by extending their parental leave, resulting in longer absences and lower overall performance (ACA\_1\_F).

A change in mindset, traditions and culture is needed, especially in countries with a male tradition, such as Malta (ISDI\_4\_F). Commonly, parents try to realize their dreams through their children and force them to choose a profession which usually falls strictly into either the “female professions” or “male professions” category. And still, girls are pressured to choose “women's jobs” while boys are relegated to “men's jobs” (ACA\_1\_F).

Nevertheless, compared with 15 years ago, many gendered differences are gradually decreasing (PLOCAN\_4\_F).

### *1.2.1.6. Other*

Interviewee VEDA\_2\_F could not notice any gender differences in career advancement, while interviewee VEDA\_5\_F did not notice any gender inequalities in the organization she represents, but she knows that there are quite a large number of such cases in the maritime industry.

In the organization represented by VEDA\_3\_M, there were and still are difficulties and problems in career development, but the interviewee was not sure if these were exclusively related to gender.

Motherhood is one of the biggest challenges for women entering the sector or advancing in their careers. The prejudice that women bring bad luck is also still very much alive (VEDA\_5\_F).

There is still a belief that women cannot perform certain tasks that require physical exertion (VEDA\_2\_F). Even though many processes are nowadays being automated and the demands on physical strength are slowly dwindling as a result, another stereotypical approach comes into play: women cannot perform technical tasks as well as men (VEDA\_5\_F).

## **1.2.2. Personal experience**

### *1.2.2.1. Circular blue bioeconomy and biotechnology*

Male interviewees (UNISI\_2\_M and NIB\_3\_F) and one female interviewee (NIB\_5\_F) have never experienced gender inequalities in their professional careers. Interviewee NIB\_3\_M shared the experience of his younger female colleague who wanted to have a child in her early thirties but was afraid of losing her position at work and therefore postponed it until her late thirties.

Interviewee NIB\_5\_F explained that she never had difficulties due to her strong character and the image of a strong woman she created. She always fought for her rights and never remained silent when she witnessed inequalities or unfair treatment.

The situation is quite different for other female interviewees – two of them experienced gender inequalities in their careers (NIB\_4\_F and NIB\_6\_F), while another stated that she had experienced difficulties but could not characterise them as gender inequalities (NIB\_2\_F).

Interviewee NIB\_6\_F began her career as a fisheries biologist, which meant that she also had to go on field trips to the sea. Culture and traditions shaped society's stereotypes about female and male professions. She experienced this kind of pressure from society because, in the eyes of the majority, she was working in a field that is traditionally dominated by men and performing tasks that are not regarded as suitable for women. In addition to the social pressure, she was also confronted with the pay gap, she was paid less for the same position and the same tasks as her male colleagues. Despite these gender-specific difficulties, she never considered giving up her job and choosing a profession which was societally regarded as better suited for women.

The interviewee NIB\_4\_F also had to deal with gender-specific difficulties in her career – she experienced unconscious biases regarding her gender, skin colour and country of origin. Her professional opinion is never treated in the same way as that of her male colleague (white man from Western Europe). According to her, it often happened that she proposed an idea during a scientific discussion, but it was completely ignored, so she had to ask her male colleague to repeat the same idea. And surprisingly, the same idea repeated by a male scientist was accepted as valuable and taken into consideration. Also, when people see her first and last name and the continent she is from, they tend to correct her English, even though English is her first language. And these are just a few examples of her personal experiences. To be where she is, to be accepted and respected, she has had to work ten times harder than her male colleagues.

Interviewee NIB\_2\_F had some minor problems during her career, but they were not important enough to be mentioned. She emphasised that she seized every opportunity that came her way and never doubted herself or her expertise.

##### *1.2.2.2. Fisheries and aquaculture*

Interviewee UNISI\_1\_F was not put in charge of the project, even though she had the better expertise and experience, only because she is a woman and the project was more “masculine”, hence it was given to the less experienced male colleague. In the end, she reviewed the whole project, its documentation and completed many missing parts, but her male colleagues did not acknowledge her, acting as if all the work had been done by him, so all the credit for a job well done went to him. The interviewee ANFACO\_4\_F told a very similar story: she and her male colleague were the lowest paid in the company, both receiving the exact salary. She was a lab technician while he delivered the mail and did some administrative tasks. The company reviewed the salary policy and increased the salaries for everyone, but in the end she learned that his salary had been increased more, without providing further explanation. In addition, when the interviewee ANFACO\_4\_F was very young, about 20 years old, she experienced attempt from her boss trying to sexually harass her, but she made it clear to him that this would not happen and also asked him how he would feel if someone treated his daughter the way he treated her. It was his first and last attempt at sexual harassment.

The interviewee ANFACO\_3\_F had some difficulties at the beginning of her professional career, but they were not serious. When she decided to study veterinary medicine and informed her parents about it, her father was very upset and began to take all kinds of measures to change her mind. The reason for this is simple – even though more women than men study veterinary medicine, farms in rural areas do not want to employ women, which creates additional difficulties for women when looking for work.

Interviewee ANFACO\_5\_F noted that one can expect two different meal arrangements at meetings organized by the fisheries associations – if it is a more formal meeting with many male participants, one is served seated, if it is a meeting with more female participants, such as shellfish harvesters, a standing snack is usually organized.

Male interviewees VEDA\_4\_M, NIB\_1\_M, NIB\_8\_M, NIB\_7\_M and ANFACO\_2\_M and one female interviewee ANFACO\_1\_F explicitly stated that they had never experienced gender differences in their professional careers.

Even though interviewees NIB\_1\_M and NIB\_7\_M have not experienced gender inequalities in their professional careers, they have heard stories or personally knew women who have had such experiences. Interviewee NIB\_1\_M does not know anyone who has faced gender difficulties in their professional career, but from time to time there are reports in the news about these kinds of disputes being taken to court, while interviewee NIB\_7\_M personally knew a woman who had too many responsibilities and roles to manage while trying to balance her professional life, which led to serious health problems.

### *1.2.2.3. Sustainable coastal and marine tourism*

Interviewee ISDI\_1\_F has had negative personal experiences in relation to inequalities in her professional career but did not want to give the interviewer any further details.

Interviewee ISDI\_2\_F felt inferior to men on several occasions. When she performed better than her male colleagues, they were clearly not satisfied. In addition, men tend to belittle women so that they can take the lead. Interviewee UNISI\_2\_F often heard customers say: “Nice boat, too bad it has a female captain”. Such comments are influenced by mentality, culture and stereotypes. She had to work much harder and prove to others that she is able to fulfil the assigned tasks, otherwise failures are attributed to her being of the “weak gender”.

Interviewee ISDI\_3\_F has not experienced gender inequalities in her career due to her personal characteristics, she is persistent and ambitious, therefore she will do anything to achieve her goals.

### *1.2.2.4. Offshore renewable energy*

Interviewees PLOCAN\_2\_F and VEDA\_1\_F have not personally experienced gender inequalities, while interviewee PLOCAN\_1\_M has also never personally experienced gender inequalities, but he has often witnessed gender inequalities, mainly due to motherhood.

Interviewee PLOCAN\_3\_F was confronted with gender inequalities at least three times in her professional career. The first time happened when she decided to study engineering, not only because there were only three girls out of 30 students in the class, but also because she felt

constantly judged for choosing a male-dominated profession and felt that she did not belong there. The second time, she applied for an internship in Madrid with a large private company. After the interview, the employer called her and said that she was a perfect candidate, but not for the internship. The position they were proposing was a secretary to the director, it was promoted as a glamorous position, and in reality they were looking for a female engineer to be a secretary to the director. The hiring manager was honest enough to say that the director is an old, conservative man and expects his secretary to come to work well dressed and in high heels. The third time interviewee PLOCAN\_3\_F faced gender inequalities in Las Palmas when she applied for a job which main task was to check the electricity transformation centres. Her female colleague with less experience and fewer qualifications also applied for the same job. In the end, a male employee was promoted, while the interviewee PLOCAN\_3\_F was not even invited for an interview.

##### *1.2.2.5. Cutting-edge enabling technologies for protecting and restoring marine ecosystems*

The interviewee ACA\_1\_F experienced gender-specific inequalities in connection with motherhood and work-life balance. Interviewee ACA\_1\_F returned to work 4 months after giving birth, she was extremely tired and in a poor mental state. She was frustrated and did not feel well because she could not perform optimally at work and could not be the “good mother” that was expected of her. This led to additional psychological stress and feelings of guilt. It is very difficult for women with caring responsibilities to cope with their personal situation. Often there is not enough time in the day to fulfil all family and work obligations, so at a certain point the woman has to choose one of two options – work or family. For example, it is sometimes very difficult for women to agree on an appointment, especially in the afternoon, because they have family commitments, whereas men can more often be flexible by relying on their partner. Nevertheless, ACA\_1\_F wants to be seen and valued as a professional and not stand out primarily because of her gender.

Interviewee ACA\_3\_F faced many obstacles during her professional career, some of which were related to her gender, others to her young age and inexperience, while some were used as revenge on her partner, as the senior manager was not able to influence her partner’s career. She began her work at the university without a contract, which was a common practice at the time. She helped her husband and his colleagues conduct research. This lasted 10 years, of which her contract lasted for only 2.5, while for the remaining years she worked without a contract and therefore without pay. Her director often sent her to the students to give them practical lessons, even though she was not allowed to do so according to institutional rules.

When The interviewee ACA\_3\_F experienced power-structured relationship with her director and suffered the consequences. For example, during the period of death in her family, she was asked to leave the meeting because she was not being cheerful. Although her doctoral thesis was given an award for exceptional quality, the director prevented it final presentation for a long time. Finally, she turned to the student ombudsmen, to several vice-rectors for research and finally to the dean, who resolved the situation. The situation could only be resolved because a senior employee, who held a higher position in the organisation than the director, was involved.

Due to the intolerable working conditions, ACA\_3\_F and her husband left their former employer. In the current institution, the working environment is good and there is no evidence of any kind

of discrimination. Nevertheless, she found that gender discriminatory approaches are still used in the field. For example, she went to the field work with her male colleague, and the fishermen only talked to him. The interviewee ACA\_3\_F thought it was because of her dialect, so she switched to the local dialect, without avail.

The interviewee PLOCAN\_4\_F worked in a company where all women were invited to a meeting and asked very intimate questions about their marital status, their future plans to have children, etc. She also witnessed in the same company how her pregnant colleague was fired one month after announcing her pregnancy.

ISDI\_4\_F and ISDI\_5\_F emphasised that they have never experienced any gender differences or discrimination in their professional careers.

### *1.2.2.6. Other*

Interviewee VEDA\_2\_F has not experienced any gender-specific difficulties in the organization where she is currently employed, but has been confronted with them in her professional career (she did not want to give any further details). Interviewee VEDA\_5\_F has also not experienced unequal treatment due to her gender, but she strongly believes that in Bulgaria there is a deeply rooted belief among men that women are not suitable for leadership positions, and if they achieve one, their leadership role is not respected nor supported.

## **1.2.3. Gender in recruitment and promotion**

### *1.2.3.1. Circular blue bioeconomy and biotechnology*

#### *1.2.3.1.1. Recruitment*

Everyone should have equal opportunities in recruitment, but there should be no gender preference. The person who is best suited for the job and has the most appropriate skills, competence and expertise should be hired (NIB\_3\_M, NIB\_6\_F, UNISI\_2\_M). NIB\_6\_F also suggested that only in cases where two candidates of different genders score the same points should the underrepresented candidate be offered a job.

Interviewee NIB\_4\_F also stated that gender should be considered in recruitment when there is an institutional need to ensure gender equality and give the underrepresented gender a chance.

Good practice examples from other countries, such as Iceland, can be used, where it is a legal requirement that if there are two equally rated applicants of different genders, the gender that is underrepresented in the institution should be hired (NIB\_2\_F). Nevertheless, the most important factor for promotion is expertise and competence, and only if the candidates are rated equally gender is taken into consideration

According to interviewee UNISI\_2\_M, a gender blind hiring procedure is not necessary, while interviewee NIB\_5\_F agreed that gender blind hiring procedure might help to improve the existing situation. Interviewee NIB\_4\_F added that when recruiting scientists, the gender blind hiring procedure should be complemented by the evaluation of published articles and submitted projects.

It is important not to forget another vulnerable social group – applicants, especially women of colour - and the need to ensure that they are treated the same as other applicants in the recruitment process (NIB\_4\_F).

### 1.2.3.1.2. Promotion

Interviewees NIB\_2\_F and NIB\_4\_F stated that gender should be considered in promotion, as this would at least slightly reduce existing institutional gender inequalities and allow women to catch up on missed opportunities. Interviewees NIB\_6\_F, NIB\_5\_F and NIB\_3\_M were of the opposite opinion – gender should not be considered for promotion. The most important factor for promotion should be expertise and competence and not gender. The most qualified and suitable person for the job should be promoted.

It is also important to give due attention to people who are overlooked even though they are performing their duties well. The reasons why they are overlooked can be many, but most likely it is because they tend to not openly expose themselves and do not emphasise their achievements (NIB\_3\_M). In fact, most of these overlooked employees are women. At least in the organisation of interviewee NIB\_5\_F, it is noticeable that men are more self-confident and see promotion as a natural development of their career, while women are more critical of themselves and in many cases tend towards perfectionism. This leads to men moving up faster because they believe they are perfectly suited to the position and can handle the new tasks, while women need an “external push” and motivation as well as clearly expressed institutional support to be promoted (NIB\_5\_F).

### 1.2.3.2. Fisheries and aquaculture

#### 1.2.3.2.1. Recruitment

A person's skills, competences and experience should be assessed during recruitment and no one should be recruited just because they represent a certain gender, unless there is a great inequality (NIB\_1\_M and VEDA\_4\_M), but then the right procedural mechanism should be set in place to maintain equal treatment and transparency during the recruitment hiring procedure (NIB\_8\_M). The candidate who proves to be the best, who has the most relevant knowledge and experience and who is best suited for the job should be hired. The decision should be made after assessing his/her expertise, experience, values, attitude, qualities, skills and abilities (ANFACO\_1\_F and ANFACO\_3\_F).

A blind hiring procedure could be very useful at least in the early stages of selection and would not require many resources, while in later stages, when face-to-face interviews start, anonymization is no longer possible (UNISI\_1\_F and ANFACO\_4\_F). A blind hiring procedure could eliminate not only gender-specific, but also cultural, country-specific and other aspects that could serve as a basis for discrimination (ANFACO\_1\_F). However, it was also argued that concealing gender in the recruitment procedure would have more negative than positive consequences (ANFACO\_3\_F).

#### 1.2.3.2.2. Promotion

Interviewees agreed that talent, knowledge, attitude, skills and experience should be the primary considerations for promotion and that no one should be promoted solely on the basis of his/her gender (UNISI\_1\_F, NIB\_1\_M, ANFACO\_2\_M and ANFACO\_4\_F). Nevertheless, each individual situation should be treated individually and some exceptions can be made (NIB\_7\_M). If there is



a large gender inequality in the organization, then the underrepresented gender should be given priority for promotion (NIB\_1\_M and UNISI\_1\_F). In cases where gender is considered in promotion, procedural mechanisms should be put in place to address these issues, otherwise there is a risk of creating a system of discrimination and inequality (NIB\_8\_M).

Furthermore, it is still regarded that some positions are simply better suited to men, e.g. those that require strength, so they are dominated by men and predominantly men are promoted (NIB\_7\_M).

### *1.2.3.3. Sustainable coastal and marine tourism*

#### *1.2.3.3.1. Recruitment*

Hiring qualified women in male-dominated fields helps to combat gender bias and promote gender equality (ISDI\_1\_F).

Any recruitment hiring procedure, whether blind or standard, should offer equal opportunities to all applicants regardless of their gender. Applicants should be assessed on the basis of their qualifications, skills and experience. Recruitment panels should be diverse and made up of men and women so that different perspectives can be brought to the assessment and recruitment procedure. The recruitment panel should have clear guidelines for conducting the interview, including standardized questions that ensure transparency and fairness. All intimate questions such as marital status and children should be avoided (ISDI\_1\_F).

Interviewee ACA\_2\_F stated that as part of the recruitment procedure, competency tables should be reviewed and reassessed as to what is really required for the job, and more attention should be paid to characteristics that could enhance the work environment and tasks (for example, search for ambitious or productive attitude).

A blind hiring procedure could ensure fairness and remove stereotypes from the recruitment procedure (ISDI\_1\_F). It would be interesting to see how a gender-blind hiring procedure would work in practice, but only until the interview stage. In the case of seafaring, the CV is important, but even more important are the recommendations of men (UNISI\_3\_F).

Two interviewees disagreed, stating that a gender blind hiring procedure is not necessary as the competences and skills of the applicant are more important than their gender (ISDI\_2\_F and ISDI\_3\_F). Instead of a gender-blind system, an institutional recruitment strategy should be developed (ISDI\_2\_F).

#### *1.2.3.3.2. Promotion*

Nowadays, the society promotes people who are more competitive. However, it is necessary to also review the qualities and skills that employers are looking for. Collaboration, cooperation, adequate productivity, sustainability and environmental awareness should be considered for promotion. Changing the skills that are assessed during the promotion process may help more women to be promoted (ACA\_2\_F). This demands the change in mentality and organizational, which could be achieved through team building training (UNISI\_3\_F).

Regarding gender being included as a factor for promotion, there are diverging opinions. On one hand, an interviewee states that positive discrimination could be one of the measures that should be used in the promotion process (ACA\_2\_F). On the other hand, interviewee ISDI\_2\_F does not think that gender should be considered in the promotion process.

### *1.2.3.4. Offshore renewable energy*

#### 1.2.3.4.1. Recruitment

As in other sectors, interviewees stated that the best fit for the organization should be assessed based on the educational requirements for the position and the required skills, regardless of gender (PLOCAN\_1\_M, PLOCAN\_2\_F, VEDA\_1\_F).

In theory, the gender-blind hiring procedure could be implemented, but only until the interview stage. Nevertheless, companies should develop recruitment strategies that ensure anonymity in the recruitment process for as long as possible.

This sector also expressed diverging opinions on positive discrimination. On the one hand, it was stated that at some point, positive discrimination measures can be established to ensure that women are represented in male-dominated fields (PLOCAN\_3\_F). On the other hand, positive discrimination might have adverse reactions and harm the company and the working environment (PLOCAN\_1\_M).

#### 1.2.3.4.2. Promotion

According to interviewee PLOCAN\_2\_F, gender should not be a factor in promotion. A system should instead be created to remove constraints and barriers that prevent women from entering in the offshore renewable energy sector (PLOCAN\_1\_M).

Women should be given all kinds of support and facilities so that they can take care of their children or elderly relatives (PLOCAN\_3\_F). This may include teleworking, flexible working hours, childcare facilities, etc. Temporarily, it may be necessary to set quotas, but at the same time ensure that women who are promoted meet all formal requirements (PLOCAN\_3\_F).

### *1.2.3.5. Cutting-edge enabling technologies for protecting and restoring marine ecosystems*

#### 1.2.3.5.1. Recruitment

Applicants' skills and qualifications should be assessed and the best fit for the positions should be selected based on these criteria alone (ACA\_1\_F, ISDI\_5\_F, ISDI\_4\_F and PLOCAN\_4\_F). However and only if absolutely necessary, gender should only be taken into account in the pre-selection phase (ISDI\_5\_F).

The gender blind hiring procedure could be effective only at the pre-interview stage (ISDI\_4\_F and ISDI\_5\_F). Later it is important to fully evaluate the candidates, and base the decision also to the best fit to the existing team, besides the expertise of the candidates (ACA\_1\_F).

As in previous sectors, there were diverging opinions on positive discrimination. On the one hand, it might be a tool used in the recruitment hiring procedure to ensure a higher participation of women in the sector (ISDI\_4\_F). However, on the other hand, quotas can be regarded as a

destabilizing measure that should be avoided (ACA\_1\_F). Another opinion states that if positive discrimination is set up, it must be backed by clear and transparent rules (ACA\_3\_F).

### 1.2.3.5.2. Promotion

Interviewees agree that promotion should be based on applicants' skills and qualifications, rather than their gender alone (PLOCAN\_4\_F and ACA\_3\_F). A suggestion also states that horizontal (i.e., soft) skills should be considered, such as accuracy, cooperation and helpfulness (ACA\_3\_F).

### 1.2.3.6. Other

#### 1.2.3.6.1. Recruitment

Interviewees also believe that gender alone should not be taken into account in the recruitment hiring procedure (VEDA\_3\_M, VEDA\_2\_F and VEDA\_5\_F). However, there is acknowledgement that a blind hiring procedure could be introduced in the recruitment process. However, unless such a requirement would become mandatory by national or EU laws, organizations would not introduce this system in their recruitment processes (VEDA\_3\_F).

#### 1.2.3.6.2. Promotion

Interviewees state that although gender alone should not be a factor in promotion, measures should be taken to increase the number of women in higher positions and women should be given the opportunity to be promoted (VEDA\_3\_M, VEDA\_2\_F and VEDA\_5\_F).

## 1.2.4. Improvement of status in promotion and hiring of underrepresented gender

### 1.2.4.1. Circular blue bioeconomy and biotechnology

A system should be created to promote young women in this sector (NIB\_4\_F, UNISI\_2\_M and NIB\_6\_F). Female scientists in their thirties are expected to build a career on the one hand and start a family on the other, but still lack institutional support regardless on their decision (NIB\_4\_F). This support is especially important for women returning to work after a long career break, usually related to child rearing. An institutional support system can provide women with the opportunity to advance in their careers. The support system could include, among other things, additional funding, help in establishing collaborations, the promotion of networks (NIB\_4\_F). In addition, the recruitment and promotion system should ensure that the marital status of female employees, pregnancy and child or elderly/disabled persons, care leave do not influence the decision to recruit or promote women (NIB\_6\_F).

Some kind of quota should be applied for participation in the conferences. There should be a minimum percentage of women and representatives of minorities (e.g., people of colour) selected to speak at the conferences (NIB\_4\_F). This would help women (and other underrepresented minorities) gain knowledge and experience that could help them advance their careers.

At universities, differences can already be observed between the various courses of study – in some, male students predominate, in others, female students predominate, and in still others, the genders are balanced. It is therefore normal that these imbalances are also reflected in the labour market (NIB\_6\_F). As one of the measures that could help to attract more young women to this field, it was suggested that the marine biotechnology sector and its professions should be introduced at a very young age, for example in elementary school (NIB\_5\_F).

Examples of good practice from other countries should be taken up and, if possible, transferred to other countries. In Iceland, for example, gender equality has been an important issue for decades and the situation has improved considerably during this time, not only targeting specific sectors but the country in general. This has made it possible to educate generations and build a society that understands gender equality and equal opportunities as a fundamental value nowadays. Nevertheless, Iceland will continue to raise awareness of gender equality and equal opportunities so that the hard work of the past decades is not lost. Continuity is the key to success (NIB\_2\_F).

Interviewees NIB\_2\_F, NIB\_4\_F and NIB\_5\_F emphasized the importance for women to be visible and heard, and that any time they experience discrimination, unequal treatment or being treated as the “weaker gender”, they should speak up loud and clear about it. The worst thing one can do is to remain silent and invisible. This can be catalysed by showcasing the experiences of women in the labour market, including the recruitment and promotion (NIB\_4\_F).

The presentation of role models for women working in this sector could significantly improve the existing situation. The interviewee has a lot of personal experience and is a witness to the effectiveness of this measure, as she has been a member of a national association dedicated to the empowerment of women in the sector for more than 10 years. The association holds monthly meetings and visits companies so that association members can share their personal success stories, raise awareness and empower women. There is also another association at national level that encourages women to appear in the news and showcase their achievements. These kinds of associations and activities where women are empowered by sharing success stories, struggles and ways to overcome them and solve problems can greatly contribute to improving the status of women's recruitment and advancement (NIB\_2\_F).

Institutions should provide opportunities for their employees, especially women, to participate in educational activities whose main purpose is to improve professional skills and promote networking among women working in maritime blue biotechnology professions (BCC\_3\_F).

In addition, strategies should be developed to help women reach top positions. Currently, top positions are predominantly held by men, who also prefer male than female candidates for these positions (BCC\_3\_F).

Finally, the an interviewee stressed that, in addition to gender, we should also focus on other marginalized groups that are not visible and experience even greater discrimination. The differences between generations also need to be taken into account (NIB\_3\_M).

### *1.2.4.2. Fisheries and aquaculture*

There is a data gap regarding the representation and role of women in the fisheries and aquaculture sector (ASSOITTICA\_2\_F and ASSOITTICA\_4\_F). There is not enough data on the role of women in the fisheries sector, while the situation in the aquaculture sector is different – there is data and the role of women is much clearer, most women work in administration, pre- and post-harvest and processing, but their jobs are mostly not full-time positions and processing depends on the season. Other jobs in the sector, such as direct involvement in fish farming (feeding), require physical effort and are therefore mostly performed by male employees. It is also important to

mention that not only women but also men who work in the fisheries sector usually have more than one job, as otherwise they would not earn enough to make a living, especially in rural areas. It is very important to understand the role of women in this sector, especially the role of those who help the fishermen in their work. These are usually wives, daughters, mothers, sisters and other female relatives who perform unpaid, invisible work without any social security (NIB\_7\_M and ASSOITTICA\_2\_F). Data and its analysis highlighting the role of women in the fisheries and aquaculture sector would make it possible to plan the next steps on how to improve the existing situation in the fisheries and aquaculture sector (ASSOITTICA\_4\_F).

The EU should be more proactive in data collection, not only in quantitative data collection, but also in collecting qualitative data and conducting case studies. Case studies should be conducted in the local language by locals so that stakeholders know they can trust the person and it would allow for more honest information to be obtained that mirrors the real situation in the sector. Finally, the results of this data collection should not remain in a drawer, but the EU should develop guidelines/recommendations on how gender should be taken into account in companies operating in the sector. The guidelines/recommendations should be written in easy-to-understand language and presented and explained to companies on how to apply them. This presentation and explanation should also be done by a local person in the local language, as fishermen are very traditional and sceptical of new things and people they do not know (NIB\_7\_M).

Gender equality should be promoted until the goal of gender balance is achieved in all areas of the company's activities (ANFACO\_5\_F). This can be done through various educational activities, exchange of experience, capacity building, introduction of female role models in leadership positions (NIB\_8\_M and ASSOITTICA\_4\_F). Public and private institutions should proactively and on their own initiative promote forms of leadership for women through tailored mentoring, leadership and coaching activities and programmes. It is important to invest in capacity building so that women can acquire both sectoral technical and transversal knowledge to master the complexity of the blue economy and work in a multidisciplinary way (ASSOITTICA\_4\_F). In addition, activities to empower women, encouraging them to follow their passion and inclinations and develop their leadership and soft skills, can contribute to improving the existing situation (ASSOITTICA\_5\_F and VEDA\_4\_M). Measures should also be taken to combat any kind of gender pay gap (ASSOITTICA\_4\_F).

In many cases, it is too late to educate people about gender equality when they enter or are already in the labour market. When a person enters the labour market or even university, they enter with all the stereotypes they grew up with and then it is very hard to change their approach and mindset. Educating children on gender equality from an early age should be made a priority (NIB\_8\_M and BCC\_2\_F). From an early age, girls and boys grow up with stereotypes – blue is for boys and pink is for girls, cars are for boys and dolls are for girls, math is for boys and history is for girls. These stereotypes accompany people throughout their lives, so it is very likely that the decision to study a subject is also based on stereotypes. Only a small percentage of both genders choose careers that are considered to be not suited to their gender. As a result, there are fields of study that are dominated by one gender or the other, which means that there will be a large gender imbalance in the specific studies and later in the labour market of the specific field

(NIB\_3\_M). Early education can be provided through various trainings and the promotion of knowledge about women in the sector and in professions that are considered masculine (ANFACO\_3\_F and BCC\_1\_F). The relationship between the education sector and industry, policy makers, research/academia and society must be strengthened and the needs of the sector must be analysed in order to then transfer and implement appropriate measures in the education system (ANFACO\_3\_F). Not only the official education system, but also the family plays an important role in educating the younger generation. The idea of gender equality should be taught to children by their parents from a very early age and exemplified in the family (e.g., no female/male housework), then we will raise generations that are free of stereotypes (NIB\_8\_M and BCC\_2\_F).

In addition, the mentality that the differences between professionals depend on knowledge, skills, open-mindedness, willingness to engage in dialogue and determination to achieve goals, and not on gender, should be promoted (ASSOITTICA\_3\_F and NIB\_1\_M).

Maternity and related career breaks are still seen as one of the biggest obstacles to women's careers, as maternity leave means the loss of at least one year of work and a number of career opportunities (NIB\_1\_M). The work-life balance of mothers should be addressed and improved. At an institutional level, an understanding approach to young mothers and their difficulties in the early years of child rearing should be developed. At the national level, the whole childcare system should be reorganised and made more flexible and women-friendly to offer alternative solutions and allow working mothers to extend their working hours when needed, as they are now dependent on their partners or family members (ASSOITTICA\_1\_F and ANFACO\_5\_F). Furthermore, the practice of the Scandinavian countries, where fathers are encouraged to take full parental leave or at least share it with their partner, could also be transferred to other countries (NIB\_1\_M). In addition, in some countries or regions, a change in mentality regarding the husband's role in the family is needed so that men can participate equally in child rearing and women can devote more time to work and career development (ANFACO\_4\_F).

Institutional documents such as GEPs or gender equality strategies that aim to ensure that women have the same voice and decision-making power as their male counterparts, the same right to access and control resources, the same right to access service markets, while ending occupational accidents and reducing the workload of women, should be adopted in organisations operating in the sector (ASSOITTICA\_2\_F). Institutional documents such as GEPs should include measures to eliminate preconceived ideas, unconscious biases and stereotypes, which in many cases depend on the cultural and geographical context, and change the mentality (ANFACO\_1\_F and ANFACO\_5\_F).

Women should unite and have legal bodies that officially represent women's rights and ensure gender equality (ASSOITTICA\_2\_F and ANFACO\_1\_F). Policy makers must also intervene to tighten labour laws when it comes to protecting women from occupational risks. In addition, new laws should improve women's working conditions and grant them the same rights as men doing the same work (ASSOITTICA\_4\_F and ANFACO\_5\_F). Finally, trade unions should take a more active role in eliminating gender inequalities. In Iceland, for example, there are numerical differences in pay, but these are transparent and can be explained by the fact that men do not have at least one

year long career breaks that stops them to advance in professional field. As long as the difference is minimal and the reasons for the pay gap can be explained, it should be accepted as reality. In Iceland, the pay gap is carefully monitored by the trade unions, which play an active role in negotiating pay increases (NIB\_1\_M).

In the fisheries and aquaculture sector, there is a large proportion of invisible workers, who are usually family members of the fishermen and help them without being officially employed; most invisible workers are women. This results in a lack of social security and no or minimal pension, and this insecurity can be considered historical, as women have helped their male relatives to carry out their work since the beginning of fishing activities (ANFACO\_1 and NIB\_7\_M). Policy makers should take action and provide social security to invisible workers (BCC\_2\_F and NIB\_7\_M). The role of invisible workers needs to be recognised and highlighted as they play a very important role in the business of their partners or family members (NIB\_7\_M).

Modern times require modern measures, therefore gender inequalities should be addressed and the ideas of gender equality should be promoted with measures and in a language that is understood by the younger generations. For example, various videos addressing the issues could be created and shared on social media platforms such as TikTok or Instagram (NIB\_1\_M).

Regardless of what measures are taken to change the existing situation and remove inequalities, men should also be included in all discussions and decision-making (ANFACO\_1\_F and ASSOITTICA\_4\_F).

##### *1.2.4.3. Sustainable coastal and marine tourism*

Tackling the barriers to the advancement and representation of women and the underrepresented gender requires the combined efforts of individuals, society and organizations working together. The individual and societal levels are key to driving change, as individuals bring their approach and values to organizations, while society creates stereotypes and norms (ISDI\_1\_F). Therefore, great efforts should be put into educating the younger generations to break the existing stereotypes (ISDI\_1\_F).

Raising awareness and promoting equal opportunities for all will break stereotypes and eliminate historical gender imbalances and ensure that women have the knowledge and skills to overcome barriers and pursue careers in the blue economy (ISDI\_1\_F and ISDI\_2\_F). In Malta, for example, women are still treated as objects, especially in small rural areas and in small family-run restaurants, leading to sexual harassment and sexist jokes, with no consideration for women in general (ISDI\_2\_F). Education at institutional and national levels, including education institutions, is key to changing the existing situation and statistics (ISDI\_1\_F).

At the institutional level, many policies and procedures related to gender equality can be introduced, but it will be very difficult to bring about many changes if people have a lack of knowledge and limited skills to assess the current situation and the future (ISDI\_1\_F). The institutional culture should also be changed by developing openness, empathy and flexibility (ISDI\_2\_F). More women in the sector, in the organization and in leadership positions would lead

to changes in the institutional and national culture and mentality, as men would be forced to adapt to the situation and change their attitude towards women (ISDI\_3\_F).

On a societal level, education should start at school and various projects should be carried out to introduce sea-related professions and the concept of gender equality. In addition to traditional teaching, the school should be involved through more interesting and innovative activities, e.g. a sailing trip (ACA\_2\_F).

Measures should be taken to empower women and underrepresented genders, train them to advocate and promote themselves, showcase their achievements and contributions, develop leadership skills, negotiate promotions and communicate their value within the organization (ISDI\_1\_F and ACA\_2\_F). In addition, women should receive training or coaching so that they become more confident and are not afraid to present their own achievements (ACA\_4\_F). Training would help to improve the existing situation, combat the constraints that women face and help them to acquire skills so that they can achieve more (ISDI\_2\_F). In addition to training and coaching, awareness-raising activities, including training, on gender biases, discrimination and stereotypes should be carried out at the organizational level (ISDI\_1\_F and ISDI\_3\_F). This could help to change mindsets and attitudes towards gender equality (ISDI\_3\_F).

Women should be provided with a mentoring program that accompanies and supports women in different phases of their careers. In addition, women should be given the opportunity to obtain higher degrees, participate in training, obtain various job-related certificates, participate in empowerment programs and projects, and simply get the chance to prove themselves (ISDI\_1\_F, ISDI\_3\_F and UNISI\_3\_F).

Women often have major problems reconciling their professional and family responsibilities. Work-life balance, including flexible working arrangements, parental leave and childcare facilities, can help women to achieve more in their professional lives (ISDI\_2\_F and ISDI\_1\_F).

Women must feel comfortable and safe in their workplace. It is impossible to promote professions related to the sea if safe working conditions for women are not provided. This includes also women-friendly spaces where women can speak freely or educate themselves (ACA\_2\_F). The experience of ACA\_2\_F shows that women hold back as soon as a man is on board (crew member, passenger) and tries to overpower them. Also in the workplace, any violence, especially psychological violence, which is difficult to notice and prove, should be prevented, and in cases where it occurs, the strictest measures should be taken against the aggressor and the victim should be given all necessary support (ACA\_2\_F).

The formation of support networks within the organization or at regional/national level should be encouraged (ISDI\_1\_F). The interviewee ACA\_2\_F founded an NGO that united 250 members. The idea behind the NGO is to create a safe space for its members where they can help each other, share their experiences, support each other and be inspired by their experiences (ACA\_4\_F).

A mechanism for reporting gender inequalities or cases of discrimination should be established so that the victim knows exactly what to do and who to inform about inappropriate behaviour



(ISDI\_1\_F). The institution should ensure that all employees feel safe in their workplace, not only physically but also psychologically (ISDI\_1\_F).

A feedback mechanism for career development should be established so that there is a dialogue between employer and employee about their own career development (ISDI\_1\_F).

There are not enough female role models, especially in senior positions, to promote careers not only in sustainable coastal tourism but also in the whole blue economy sector (ISDI\_2\_F and ACA\_2\_F).

### *1.2.4.4. Offshore renewable energy*

External actors should be introduced to assess companies' equality policies and identify companies that can be considered examples of good practice, while those whose equality policies are assessed negatively should be subject to additional scrutiny. The reasons why gender equality policies do not work should be investigated by external experts using anonymous surveys (PLOCAN\_2\_F).

Gender mainstreaming should be supported at the organizational level (PLOCAN\_2\_F). Organizations should aim to ensure work-life balance for both genders, with special consideration given to women with caring responsibilities. Male employees should be encouraged to take all or at least part of their paternity leave so that women can return to work more quickly (PLOCAN\_3\_F, PLOCAN\_2\_F and PLOCAN\_1\_M). In addition to work-life balance, the gender pay gap should also be addressed and all employees should receive the same pay for the same position and tasks (PLOCAN\_2\_F).

Recruitment and promotion procedures should be as transparent as possible and include records so that the process can be reviewed in the event of a dispute. In addition, promotion criteria should be linked to SMART KPIs to avoid subjectivity (PLOCAN\_3\_F).

Education is very important if we want to attract more women to the sector or if we want to enable women to advance their careers at the same pace as their male counterparts. Science education should be promoted, with a focus on women working in the sector and sharing their experiences with girls and other women (PLOCAN\_3\_F). Children should be educated from an early age about gender equality and maritime professions and it should be emphasized that there are no male or female professions and everyone can find the place in the field they see for themselves (PLOCAN\_1\_M, VEDA\_1\_F and PLOCAN\_3\_F). This education can take the form of various events at schools where women working in maritime professions are invited to tell their career stories, create mentoring programs for school children or organize competitions (PLOCAN\_3\_F and VEDA\_1\_F). All types of organizations (policy makers, research/academia, industry and society) active in this sector should cooperate with each other and work together on the educational program. Finally, EU-funded gender-specific projects or projects promoting marine-related professions could be relevant for the design of educational activities (VEDA\_1\_F).

Nevertheless, there is already a kind of natural inclination factor – men tend to prefer technical and engineering professions, while women choose humanitarian and social science professions

(PLOCAN\_1\_M). There are also deep-rooted stereotypes that female engineers are perfect for office work, but field work requires male engineers (PLOCAN\_3\_F).

Girls and women should see more role models to give them an example of what can be achieved by choosing a maritime profession (PLOCAN\_3\_F).

### *1.2.4.5. Cutting-edge enabling technologies for protecting and restoring marine ecosystems*

Organizations should provide comprehensive support to women returning to work after maternity leave and introduce effective work-life balance measures, in particular measures to make maternity leave flexible. (ISDI\_4\_F, ISDI\_5\_F and ACA\_1\_F). Men should be encouraged to take the full paternity leave or at least share it with their partners so that they can return to work earlier (PLOCAN\_4\_F).

A clear promotion system with set targets should be introduced that applies to all employees (ACA\_1\_F and PLOCAN\_4\_F). A clear timeframe for the promotion of employees should be established (ISDI\_5\_F).

A clear recruitment and promotion mechanism should be introduced to ensure transparency. It should include standardized criteria that apply to all candidates regardless of gender. The evaluation should be carried out by an evaluation committee composed of representatives of both genders from different departments. As part of the recruitment process, it should be possible to view the criteria used to assess candidates. The employer should provide as much information as possible about the vacancy, including but not limited to information about working conditions and starting salary (PLOCAN\_4\_F).

There are many cases in which students come to a research institution and ask for work or internships. They do not care if they get paid or not, but they want to work to see how the institution works from the inside. This is a big mistake that they learn the hard and painful way. Regardless of how passionate someone is about their job, they should never allow themselves to be taken advantage of and work without a contract, social security and salary. Institutional rules should also not allow anyone to work without a contract (ACA\_3\_F).

Women should be involved in a wider range of tasks, they should not only be included in the projects as supporting technical staff in field or laboratory work, but also in project management and decision making (ISDI\_4\_F).

Training should be organized or offered that can contribute to the development of employees' professional and personal skills (ACA\_1\_F and ISDI\_5\_F). Awareness-raising activities such as sharing success stories could also contribute to remove barriers to the promotion and recruitment of women (ACA\_1\_F, ACA\_3\_F and ISDI\_5\_F).

The family and early education are very important in shaping the values of the younger generation and their attitude to life (ACA\_1\_F and ACA\_3\_F). Boys should be taught to help and cooperate and behave selflessly, while girls should no longer be taught to be constantly available, sacrifice their own needs and be the main caregiver for children and elderly relatives. These activities can take the form of sharing success stories through workshops, presentations, websites, books, social

media content and the like, depending on the age of the target group (ACA\_3\_F and ISDI\_5\_F). Girls and young women should be encouraged to choose a marine-related profession, even if it is male-dominated. There should also be support mechanisms to help women retrain and change careers (ACA\_1\_F).

The gender gap and underrepresentation of women in various conferences, forums and other events should be addressed and measures should be taken to ensure a more balanced participation of women and men in these events. In this case, positive discrimination could be introduced, but again, it is very important to establish clear rules on how this measure is implemented and how long it is applied (ISDI\_4\_F).

Role models who represent both genders are very important. Female role models inspire women to dare more, to gain self-confidence, to deal with resistance, to ignore criticism based solely on gender and to overcome barriers. Male role models can also inspire women, but above all, male role models can set an example to other men on how to treat and respect women (ACA\_1\_F).

Male employees and senior managers (of both genders) should be actively involved in promoting greater representation of women in the industry and in their career advancement (ISDI\_4\_F).

In addition to widespread gender discrimination, there are other grounds of discrimination such as religion, culture, sexual orientation, age, etc. (ACA\_1\_F). All discrimination should be combated in order to reduce inequalities in this sector.

The young generation now entering the labour market is very different from the generation of 30- or 40-year-olds, and older generations, where the difference is even more pronounced. The coming generations are not prepared to work with the same pace and conditions as before. This does not mean that the younger generation works less, on the contrary, they are very committed and very courageous. In addition, the younger generations draw clear boundaries between work and private life and prioritise private life, which means that work stays at the workplace and is only done during working hours. This is an approach that was never considered by the older generations (ACA\_1\_F). Perhaps this generational shift and the new approach to work-life balance could improve the status of women in the sector.

##### *1.2.4.6. Other*

Awareness campaigns and programmes should be organised at national or institutional level to promote the employment of women, and success stories of women who have made a career in this sector should be disseminated. These activities should not only be aimed at professionals working in the sector, but also at society. Employers who hire women should receive motivating incentives for this decision. National or institutional funding to support the promotion and recruitment of women could also help to remove existing gender barriers. Finally, more stringent measures such as mandatory quotas or legislation could be used to promote and recruit women (VEDA\_5\_F).

At the institutional level, a policy or strategy should be developed that includes measures to overcome gender-specific difficulties (VEDA\_3\_M). In addition, larger organisations should have a

person, or an entire department dedicated to the professional development of all employees, with a focus on women (VEDA\_5\_F).

At national level, an organisation could be set up to deal with gender equality and all related issues (VEDA\_5\_F).

Examples of good practise that have proved successful in other countries could be transferred to countries facing difficulties related to gender equality (VEDA\_2\_F).

## 1.3. Sensibilization and implementation

### 1.3.1. WINBLUE project relevance

#### 1.3.1.1. Circular blue bioeconomy and biotechnology

All interviewees agreed that WINBLUE is an important and necessary project. The importance of qualitative and quantitative data collection was emphasised (UNISI\_2\_M and NIB\_4\_F). Data collection is crucial so that the collected and analysed data can be presented to policy makers, which in turn can influence future cooperation policies (UNISI\_2\_M). The data collected in the WINBLUE project can bring about significant changes not only in the selected WINBLUE sectors, but also in the entire blue economy sector and in science in general (NIB\_4\_F).

The WINBLUE project makes visible women, their problems and barriers they face in the circular blue bioeconomy and biotechnology sector when trying to enter, work or get promoted in the sector. Visibility is very important if we want to change the situation, because for many people and institutions the problems do not exist if they cannot see or experience them (NIB\_5\_F).

#### 1.3.1.2. Fisheries and aquaculture

Interviewees highlighted the collection of quantitative and qualitative data as one of the most important project activities that could provide an up-to-date picture of the gender balance and be a starting point for changing the gender equality situation in the sector (NIB\_7\_M, ANFACO\_2\_M and ANFACO\_3\_F). At the same time, it was also noted that data collection is very difficult. Sensitive data such as salaries are very difficult to collect as this information is in most cases confidential. Another potential difficulty is statistical data, where gender is often not taken into account, so that only limited conclusions can be drawn after statistical data analysis. Nowadays, many private and almost all public institutions present their employees and their positions online, so the analysis of organisational charts can be an important source of information for presenting the gender balance among employees and in decision-making positions (NIB\_7\_M).

The data collected and analysed in the WINBLUE project can help to explain the existing gender inequalities in the sector, such as the differences in salaries (NIB\_1\_M), and to illustrate the state of gender equality in the fisheries and aquaculture sector (ANFACO\_3\_F). The results of the WINBLUE project, especially the collection of qualitative and quantitative data, are also crucial as they can be used to draw organisations' attention to the status of women not only in fisheries and aquaculture, but in the entire blue economy sector. It is very important that the results of WINBLUE are shared with stakeholders (UNISI\_1\_F).

Projects like WINBLUE are important and relevant not only on a personal level, but also on an institutional level, as they allow us to talk about gender inequalities in the sector and make them visible to younger generations, even though younger generations are much better able to take care of themselves and fight for their rights (ANFACO\_4\_F). Projects like WINBLUE can help to unite women, make them and the problems they face visible and find common goals. This project can help women shellfish harvesters to gain more visibility and change their position in the different associations (ANFACO\_5\_F). Another interviewee noted that the WINBLUE project is not only relevant for the individual institutions but can also bring about change at an international (global) level (ANFACO\_1\_F).

The interviewee ASSOITTICA\_2\_F emphasised that the WINBLUE project is very much in line with the work in the department of the international organisation where she is employed.

### *1.3.1.3. Sustainable coastal and marine tourism*

Projects such as WINBLUE help to shed more light on gender equality in general and to promote the blue economy more strongly among women (ISDI\_1\_F). In addition, such projects raise awareness of gender equality and the different professions that exist in this field. The WINBLUE project can also contribute to this. First to those involved in its implementation and then to those who are presented with the results to reflect on their workplace, think about the existing gender inequality and try to find ways to reduce the gender gap (ISDI\_2\_F).

The results of the WINBLUE project can help to change the mentality of male-dominated societies, such as the Maltese one. It is still widespread that male guests are reluctant to speak to women at reception (ISDI\_3\_F).

### *1.3.1.4. Offshore renewable energy*

The WINBLUE project can help raise awareness of gender equality and promote marine-related professions and their potential, not only in the offshore renewable energy sector, which is clearly dominated by men, but also in the entire blue economy sector (PLOCAN\_1\_M). In this way, more women could be attracted to opt for marine-related professions. After entering the sector, women face challenges related to gender equality that exist in the sector. These challenges could be overcome with the help of the WINBLUE project and the material it produces (PLOCAN\_3\_F).

Also, the WINBLUE project could provide results that can be further analyzed to find the reasons the status quo this sector. It is very important as the data and information can help to prepare more meaningful conclusions and a thorough analysis of the status of women in the sector and take appropriate actions based on these conclusions (PLOCAN\_2\_F).

The GEP templates/models developed by the WINBLUE project will be very useful for the different organizations, especially if they include clear performance indicators to be achieved, examples of good practices, policy recommendations and other material produced by the WINBLUE project (VEDA\_1\_F).

### *1.3.1.5. Cutting-edge enabling technologies for protecting and restoring marine ecosystems*

All projects that shed light on the gender gap in this sector are necessary and important (ISDI\_4\_F). WINBLUE is also important as it collects, analyses and presents gender equality and the status of women in the sectors of the blue economy selected by WINBLUE. The WINBLUE project can highlight the inequalities in the selected WINBLUE sectors and serve as a starting point for corrective action (ACA\_1\_F).

The WINBLUE project is important for networking. For example, during the event organized by the WINBLUE project in Gijón, the interviewee ACA\_3\_F met the president of the Asturias-based inshore fisherwomen association. In addition, projects such as WINBLUE are interesting for presenting training opportunities in the blue economy (PLOCAN\_4\_F).

The project is interesting from the point of view of the connection between women in maritime professions and entrepreneurship (ISDI\_5\_F). The organization ISDI\_5\_F represented by the interviewee also carries out publicity campaigns that are very relevant to the objectives of the project

### *1.3.1.6. Other*

The WINBLUE project could be very useful for teachers, especially university teachers and managers of all seniority as it would contribute to raising awareness and growing generations free of stereotypes (VEDA\_3\_M).

## **1.3.2. WINBLUE produced material**

### *1.3.2.1. Circular blue bioeconomy and biotechnology*

All interviewees expressed an interest in receiving materials produced by the WINBLUE project and being invited to events organized by the project.

### *1.3.2.2. Fisheries and aquaculture*

Almost all interviewees (NIB\_7\_M, NIB\_8\_M, NIB\_1\_M, ASSOITTICA\_2\_F, UNISI\_1\_F, ANFACO\_1\_F, ANFACO\_2\_M, ANFACO\_3\_F, ANFACO\_5\_F and VEDA\_4\_M) expressed their interest in receiving material produced by the WINBLUE project.

The interviewee ASSOITTICA\_2\_F emphasised that the material produced by the WINBLUE project will be an interesting reference for the international organisation it represents and its members. The interviewee ANCAFO\_1\_F emphasised that the material is interesting for her personally, but she has to check at company level if it is relevant and interesting for the company to receive it. The interviewee UNISI\_1\_F would not only like to receive material produced in the project, but also information about the next steps in general and the results of the project.

### *1.3.2.3. Sustainable coastal and marine tourism*

All interviewees (ACA\_2\_F, UNISI\_3\_F, ISDI\_1\_F, ISDI\_2\_F and ISDI\_3\_F) expressed a desire to receive material produced by the WINBLUE project.

### *1.3.2.4. Offshore renewable energy*

All interviewees (PLOCAN\_1\_M, PLOCAN\_2\_F, PLOCAN\_3\_F and VEDA\_1\_F) have expressed their interest in receiving material produced by WINBLUE. HR managers can use the material produced

by WINBLUE to remove barriers and microaggressions during the recruitment process (PLOCAN\_1\_M). It can also help to improve the management of the company (PLOCAN\_2\_F).

### *1.3.2.5. Cutting-edge enabling technologies for protecting and restoring marine ecosystems*

Interviewees ACA\_1\_F, ISDI\_4\_F, ISDI\_5\_F and PLOCAN\_F expressed their interest in receiving material produced by the WINBLUE project.

Interviewee ACA\_1\_F doubted that she was the best person in the organization to receive the information. Interviewee ISDI\_5\_F would like to receive brief summaries and highlights of the tasks performed and results achieved in addition to the material produced by the WINBLUE project.

### *1.3.2.6. Other*

All interviewees (VEDA\_3\_M, VEDA\_2\_F and VEDA\_5\_F) expressed their interest in receiving material produced by the WINBLUE project. This material should be passed on to organizations and companies operating in this sector, especially to female employees and HR managers (VEDA\_2\_F and VEDA\_3\_F).

## **1.3.3. Training topics**

### *1.3.3.1. Circular blue bioeconomy and biotechnology*

Suggested training topics are:

1. Environmental awareness and the role of women in sustainable environmental practices (UNISI\_2\_M).
2. Unconscious bias (NIB\_3\_M, NIB\_4\_F, NIB\_5\_F and NIB\_6\_F)
3. Communication skills, including communication of the gender issue. Communication with different groups of people – other countries, other ages and other types of diversity (NIB\_2\_F).
4. Training to improve behaviour and thinking (NIB\_6\_F).
5. Self-awareness (NIB\_3\_M).
6. Biases in the recruitment process (NIB\_3\_M).

### *1.3.3.2. Fisheries and aquaculture*

Possible training topics could be:

1. Negotiation skills (NIB\_7\_M, NIB\_1\_M, ANFACO\_3\_F, ANFACO\_5\_F)
2. Soft skills (communication, presentation, social skills, public speaking) (NIB\_7\_M, NIB\_1\_M, ANFACO\_1, ANFACO\_2\_M, ANFACO\_3\_F, ANFACO\_5\_F)
3. Leadership (NIB\_7\_M, NIB\_8\_M, ANFACO\_3\_F, )
4. Cooperation/teamwork (NIB\_7\_M and ASSOITTICA\_2\_F, ASSOITTICA\_2\_F)
5. Resilience (how quickly you recover after a failure) (NIB\_7\_M)
6. Empowerment (NIB\_8\_M, NIB\_1\_M, ANFACO\_3\_F and ASSOITTICA\_2\_F). Training should be designed to enable women to enter the sector and empower women already working in the sector (ASSOITTICA\_2\_F).
7. Emerging technologies (digitalization and artificial intelligence) (ASSOITTICA\_1\_F, ASSOITTICA\_2\_F, ANFACO\_2\_M, ASSOITTICA\_2\_F)

8. Job-related training, including the development of technical skills (ANFACO\_1 and ANFACO\_2\_M)
9. Project management (ANFACO\_1)
10. Coordination of groups/meetings (ANFACO\_1)

Interviewee VEDA\_4\_M emphasized the importance of sharing examples of good practices related to female leadership and gender equality in the blue economy.

It is also very important that the training are led by professionals who know what they are talking about and who use the latest information available (ANFACO\_5\_F).

### *1.3.3.3. Sustainable coastal and marine tourism*

Suggested training topics are:

1. Customer relations (ISDI\_2\_F).
2. Women's rights (ISDI\_2\_F).
3. Sexual harassment (ISDI\_2\_F and ACA\_4\_F).
4. Communication (UNISI\_3\_F).
5. Education (UNISI\_3\_F).
6. Investment (UNISI\_3\_F).

Engage men in the conversation on gender equality and encourage them to be allies in promoting a more inclusive and equitable blue economy (ISID\_1\_F).

### *1.3.3.4. Offshore renewable energy*

Interviewees identified the following training topics:

1. Topics related to the offshore renewable energy sector, e.g. promotion the use of sustainable, clean and environmentally friendly energy (PLOCAN\_1\_M).
2. Topics related to the blue economy (VEDA\_1\_F).
3. Equal treatment and equal opportunities (PLOCAN\_2\_F).
4. Non-discrimination (PLOCAN\_2\_F).
5. Values such as respect, honesty, humanity (PLOCAN\_2\_F).
6. Leadership (PLOCAN\_3\_F).
7. Communication (PLOCAN\_3\_F).
8. Teamwork (PLOCAN\_3\_F).
9. Empowerment and motivation (PLOCAN\_3\_F).

### *1.3.3.5. Cutting-edge enabling technologies for protecting and restoring marine ecosystems*

Interviewees ISDI\_4\_F and ISDI\_5\_F suggested empowerment as a training topic.

### *1.3.3.6. Other*

1. The training topics mentioned by interviewees are listed below:
2. Awareness raising (VEDA\_3\_M).



3. Gender equality (VEDA\_2\_F).
4. Social skills (VEDA\_5\_F).
5. Soft skills (communication, teamwork, flexibility and adaptability, leadership, emotional intelligence) (VEDA\_5\_F).

### 1.3.4. Obstacles to implement WINBLUE project

#### 1.3.4.1. Circular blue bioeconomy and biotechnology

The older generation of men are not so open-minded and may resist carrying out this type of project. The same goes for the researchers working in this field – in many cases, the higher a researcher's position, the bigger their ego, and they do not consider projects like WINBLUE important and necessary. They are very powerful and important figures in the field, so their negative attitude and opinion towards the project can influence a large number of people (NIB\_2\_F).

Data collection should not be a problem, the biggest problem according to the interviewees is the implementation of the tools prepared by the WINBLUE project, including good practices (UNISI\_2\_M).

According to interviewee NIB\_4\_F, the worst thing that can happen in the implementation of WINBLUE is that those who are against it do not participate in the implementation of the projects – do not provide data, do not show up to the events, etc., but there are many ways to replace them and find other alternative speakers and data providers.

#### 1.3.4.2. Fisheries and aquaculture

Almost all projects today face problems and obstacles, and WINBLUE will be no exception. Potential problems and obstacles are one of the reasons why this project was funded. Most of the resistance might come from men working in the fisheries and aquaculture sector, as this sector is historically a male sector, still dominated by men. In addition, there is a very strong influence of families, especially those traditionally involved in the canning industry, who have a very conservative attitude towards the participation of women in the sector and the role of men in the family (ANFACO\_3\_F, ASSOITTICA\_1\_F and ANFACO\_4\_F).

Sexists who are satisfied with the existing segregation of functions by gender, as well as those who do not care about what is going on in the sector, can express their opposition to the WINBLUE project (ANFACO\_1\_F and ANFACO\_2\_F and ANFACO\_5\_F). In this case, the gender of the resisters does not matter, most likely most of them will be men, but it is also possible that some women will be on their side (ANFACO\_4\_F). Even those who should care, such as the associations and local policy makers, do not pay enough attention or even boycott the events organized to address gender inequalities in the sector (ANFACO\_5\_F). Finally, there are people who resist women in jobs related to the sea or place themselves higher than others, especially in management, and look down on them as well as ignore problems they face; this is the case with shellfish harvesters (ANFACO\_5\_F).

Interviewees UNISI\_1\_F and VEDA\_4\_M do not believe that the WINBLUE project will have any resilience. Nevertheless, respondent UNISI\_1\_F added that if resilience were to occur, it would not be due to the WINBLUE project.

### *1.3.4.3. Sustainable coastal and marine tourism*

Mentality and cultural stereotypes can influence a negative attitude towards the WINBLUE project and the resistance to accept its ideas and evaluate its results objectively (UNISI\_3\_F). Some men have always had comments and a certain attitude towards women no matter what they do. Men with this attitude could be the ones resisting the WINBLUE project (ISDI\_1\_F).

The approach of the participants to the course is very important, some of them might not be willing to participate in the trainings as they think that they already know everything about the topic or that the topic is not relevant to their organization or the position they hold (ISDI\_3\_F).

Interviewee ISDI\_2\_F is of the opinion that the WINBLUE project should not encounter any obstacles during its implementation.

### *1.3.4.4. Offshore renewable energy*

In general, there will always be people who disagree with the implementation of the changes, react negatively or resist them, regardless of gender (PLOCAN\_2\_F). There may also be some reluctance and resistance among men, especially those of the old school, older generations (PLOCAN\_1\_M). Nevertheless, this should not be a significant resistance (PLOCAN\_1\_M).

In addition, at the organizational level, the issue of equality and related activities are seen as additional, unnecessary and mostly unpaid work, so there may be some kind of resistance within the organization to the implementation of activities related to equality, as well as general resistance to changes in organizational routines (PLOCAN\_3\_F)

### *1.3.4.5. Cutting-edge enable technologies for protecting and restoring marine ecosystems*

Resistance to the adoption of the measures can occur especially when stakeholders are not involved in the design of the tools that the project aims to create and when users do not feel that they have had a say in the development of the project's outcome (ISDI\_5\_F). This can be prevented by ensuring good methods of communication with stakeholders (ISDI\_4\_F and ISDI\_5\_F).

Interviewee ACA\_1\_F is of the opinion that the WINBLUE project will not encounter any obstacles. Interviewee ISDI\_5\_F stated that resistance from women is unlikely.

### *1.3.4.6. Other*

It may be difficult for employees to obtain the consent of senior managers to participate in project implementation. This is particularly true for male-dominated institutions that focus on technical activities and operate in sectors such as shipping, ports, fishing and aquaculture (VEDA\_2\_F and VEDA\_3\_M).

In the opinion of interviewee VEDA\_5\_F, the WINBLUE project will not encounter any difficulties during the implementation phase.

### 1.3.5. WINBLUE supporting allies

#### 1.3.5.1. Circular and blue bioeconomy and biotechnology

WINBLUE supporting allies could be:

1. Policy makers (NIB\_4\_F and NIB\_2\_F)
2. Society (NIB\_4\_F)
3. Traditional media (NIB\_4\_F)
4. Influencers in the social media (NIB\_4\_F)
5. Private companies (NIB\_5\_F and NIB\_2\_F)
6. Regulatory stakeholders (NIB\_5\_F)
7. NGOs (UNISI\_2\_M).
8. Recruitment consultants, career counsellors, people involved in the recruitment process (NIB\_6\_F and NIB\_3\_M).
9. Strong women and men who are sensitised to the topic and can bring it to the world (NIB\_2\_F).
10. Researchers (NIB\_2\_F).

#### 1.3.5.2. Fisheries and aquaculture

According to the interviewees, supporting allies of WINBLUE could be

1. Representatives of the social sciences with a particular focus on gender issues (NIB\_7\_M).
2. HR (NIB\_8\_M).
3. Professional associations (e.g. shellfish harvesters or fishermen's associations) (NIB\_1\_M, ANFACO\_1\_F, ANFACO\_2\_F, ANFACO\_4\_F, ANFACO\_5\_F).
4. Researchers/academics (UNISI\_1\_F, ANFACO\_4\_F and ANFACO\_5\_F).
5. Executives (UNISI\_1\_F, ANFACO\_2\_F, ANFACO\_4\_F).
6. Industry (ANFACO\_1).
7. Local/regional policy makers (municipalities) (ANFACO\_1\_F, ANFACO\_5\_F).
8. Companies (ANFACO\_2\_F, ANFACO\_4\_F).
9. All those working in the fisheries and aquaculture sector (ANFACO\_2\_F).
10. Education system (schools, universities) (ANFACO\_3\_F).
11. Women's organizations and networks (VEDA\_4\_M).

#### 1.3.5.3. Sustainable coastal and marine tourism

Allies supporting WINBLUE have been identified:

1. Those working on the educational projects in the field of conscious and sustainable tourism (UNISI\_3\_F).
2. Men from different sectors of sustainable coastal tourism, including different levels of management – from waiters and tour guides to senior managers (ISDI\_1\_M).
3. Male and female executives from the different industries in the sector. They can also be invited to speak at the events and share their experiences (ISDI\_3\_F).

### *1.3.5.4. Offshore renewable energy*

WINBLUE allies identified by the interviewees:

1. Education sector (PLOCAN\_1\_M and PLOCAN\_2\_M).
2. Clusters (PLOCAN\_2\_M).
3. Trade unions (PLOCAN\_2\_M).
4. Public and private administrations (PLOCAN\_2\_M).
5. Business associations (PLOCAN\_2\_M).
6. Middle and senior management (PLOCAN\_3\_F and VEDA\_1\_F).
7. WINBLUE sister projects (PLOCAN\_3\_M).
8. Policy makers (VEDA\_1\_F).
9. NGOs (VEDA\_1\_F).
10. Media (VEDA\_1\_F).

### *1.3.5.5. Cutting-edge enabling technologies for protecting and restoring marine ecosystems*

Respondents indicated that WINBLUE supports the following allies:

1. NGOs working in education (ACA\_1\_F).
2. Experts working on gender equality (ISDI\_4\_F).
3. Chambers of commerce (ISDI\_5\_F).
4. Research funding organizations (ISDI\_5\_F).
5. Shipping companies (ISDI\_5\_F).
6. Shipyards (ISDI\_5\_F).
7. Private fishing companies (ISDI\_5\_F).
8. Environmental consulting companies (ISDI\_5\_F).
9. Maritime transport authorities (ISDI\_5\_F).
10. HR (PLOCAN\_4\_F).
11. All levels of management (PLOCAN\_4\_F).

### *1.3.5.6. Other*

WINBLUE identified supportive allies from the interviewees:

1. Senior executives (VEDA\_3\_M).
2. HR (VEDA\_3\_M).
3. Women working in the sector (VEDA\_3\_M).
4. Education system (schools and universities) (VEDA\_5\_F).
5. WINBLUE sister projects (VEDA\_5\_F).
6. National organizations responsible for gender equality (VEDA\_5\_F).
7. Women's associations (VEDA\_5\_F).

### 1.3.6. Expectations for WINBLUE project

#### 1.3.6.1. Circular blue bioeconomy and biotechnology

The most important expectation mentioned was the use of collected data to promote change in the sector (NIB\_4\_F). It is also important that WINBLUE is in contact with other projects that promote the presence of women in European initiatives, as joint efforts can have a greater impact and bring about real change (UNISI\_2\_M). WINBLUE should also raise awareness and reduce the influence of traditions and a traditionally male world (NIB\_6\_F).

It would also be interesting to compare the GEP model developed as part of the project with that of the institution surveyed (UNISI\_2\_M).

#### 1.3.6.2. Fisheries and aquaculture

The project results should be used to drive structural change (UNISI\_1\_F). The analysed data and other results of the WINBLUE project can pave the way for future generations and have a positive impact on them (ANFACO\_2\_M). A project like WINBLUE gives women in the fisheries and aquaculture sector some hope that the situation might change in the future (ANFACO\_5\_F).

Respondent ANFACO\_1\_F expects that the WINBLUE project will contribute to the implementation of awareness-raising activities and a change in attitudes towards gender equality among participants, while ANFACO\_4\_F expects that the project will train women or produce materials for training that will give them self-confidence. Respondent VEDA\_4\_M was very general about the expectations of the WINBLUE project, he hopes that the stakeholders involved in the activities will learn something new.

Respondent ANFACO\_4\_F expects that the WINBLUE project and its results will promote the implementation of the GEP and convey to the stakeholders that the GEP is a living document that is useful for the organisation and that it is not just another paper to be officially prepared and submitted to the EU Commission.

The WINBLUE project could initiate or inspire smaller projects (at national, regional and local level) that could have an impact at local level and last beyond the duration of the WINBLUE project (UNISI\_2\_F).

The interviewee ASSOITTICA\_2\_F suggests that WINBLUE adopts a gender transformation approach in all its activities. This approach can be used to tackle a wide range of gender-specific challenges. It also strives to go beyond superficial solutions and redress power imbalances at both individual and societal levels. This encourages seeing power imbalances not just on the surface, but at an individual and social level. The gender transformative approach offers a way to challenge harmful gender norms, promote equitable decision-making and create a supportive environment in which women can engage across the blue economy.

#### 1.3.6.3. Sustainable coastal and marine tourism

The WINBLUE project should find ways to get the message about gender equality and the status of women in the sustainable coastal tourism sector to senior managers so that they are informed and can take corrective action (UNISI\_3\_F). The WINBLUE project can contribute to a change in

mentality, especially in countries with a masculine culture, and influence cultural changes in these countries (ISDI\_2\_F).

The interviewee ISDI\_1\_F stated that the material produced by the WINBLUE project could be used for the education of the younger generations entering the higher education system.

### *1.3.6.4. Offshore renewable energy*

WINBLUE can have a major impact by providing opportunities for the participation and retention of women in organizations working in the sector, thus making a positive contribution to reducing the gender gap (PLOCAN\_1\_M).

Anything that analyses the sector and focuses these analyses on gender equality provides an overview of the current state of affairs. This makes it possible to identify ways to improve the situation and measures to promote gender equality and can help to reconcile the opinions of policy makers or senior managers (PLOCAN\_2\_F).

Sharing experiences with the sister project, participating in events organized by the Athena project and sharing WINBLUE tools related to GEP models would be beneficial not only for the Athena project but also for WINBLUE (PLOCAN\_3\_F).

The WINBLUE project can provide tools to create a more pleasant and friendly working environment and encourage women to pursue a career in the sector. (PLOCAN\_1\_M).

Finally, the WINBLUE project should have a long-term impact that does not end with the project funding. Ways should be found to sustain the impact and results of the WINBLUE project (VEDA\_1\_F and PLOCAN\_3\_F).

### *1.3.6.5. Cutting-edge enabling technologies for protecting and restoring marine ecosystems*

The WINBLUE project can make a direct contribution to the creation and development of women's careers by facilitating their entry into the sector and, if they are already in the sector, by advancing their careers (ISDI\_4\_F). Furthermore, the WINBLUE project, in collaboration with sister projects, provides an excellent opportunity to create a community/network of like-minded people focused on reducing the gender gap and providing equal opportunities for women working in the sector (ISDI\_4\_F and ISDI\_5\_F).

WINBLUE material can have a positive impact on the workplace, especially on working conditions and work-life balance. In addition, it can promote a more inclusive and equitable workplace and environment, but also help to create an atmosphere where all employees feel valued and can fully develop based on their skills and performance, without external factors influencing their career progression (PLOCAN\_4\_F).

### *1.3.6.6. Other*

The WINBLUE project will help to clarify the gender equality situation in this sector (VEDA\_3\_M and VEDA\_2\_F). Based on the WINBLUE results and the data collected, measures targeting existing inequalities can be planned and implemented (VEDA\_M\_3). In addition, the project results are very valuable and useful for students embarking on the path of professional development in the

blue sector (VEDA\_5\_F). In addition, the WINBLUE project can contribute to developing expertise and knowledge in the field of gender equality (VEDA\_2\_F).

## 1.4. Additional information

### 1.4.1. *Advantage of gender mixed teams*

#### 1.4.1.1. *Fisheries and aquaculture*

Women bring differences, different opinions and approaches to the teams in which they work. The best possible performance of teams is only possible when different types of skills and attitudes are present. If only half of the population is represented, many important aspects can be overlooked (NIB\_1\_M). Women are used to making compromise decisions so that all sides are more or less happy and satisfied with the outcome (ANFACO\_3\_F).

#### 1.4.1.2. *Sustainable coastal and marine tourism*

Gender diversity in teams and in the workplace allows for a variety of perspectives and different approaches to problem solving. Diverse teams can produce innovative solutions to solve problems or develop business strategies (ISDI\_1\_F).

#### 1.4.1.3. *Offshore renewable energy*

Since there is a shortage of qualified personnel in all economic sectors in the EU countries due to the negative birth rate, the brain drain and the tendency towards an aging population, it would be unreasonable not to consider female applicants (VEDA\_1\_F). If we want to have excellent science and innovation and an effectively functioning offshore renewable energy sector, we cannot exclude half of the population, otherwise we will lose talent and society will not be able to develop without offering equal opportunities to men and women (PLOCAN\_3\_F).

#### 1.4.1.4. *Cutting-edge enabling technologies protecting and restoring marine ecosystems*

Women bring different skills to the sector that can enable it to grow and become more sustainable. Organisations should try to combine the knowledge and skills of both genders, as they have different visions and ideas that, when combined, add value to the sector (ISDI\_4\_F and ISDI\_5\_F).

## 2. Conclusions

Overall, the qualitative assessment analysis identified 5 key areas:

1. **Situation overview and identification of barriers**
2. **GEP content and implementation, with special emphasis on a) recruitment and promotion, and b) Proposed activities and trainings**
3. **Stakeholders**
4. **Legal perspective**
5. **Pathway to change**

These areas are summarized below, based on the interviewees' opinions and feedback.

### 1. Situation overview and identification of barriers

Analysis of the qualitative data revealed that women in all the blue economy sectors selected by WINBLUE face very similar and often identical challenges. Sometimes, these may prevent them to even enter in a specific sector, while other times they might prevent them from advancing in their career.

- There is a persistent opinion that gender inequalities are outdated and were relevant in the past but not anymore. This demands a stronger communication within the community and the identification of recurrent obstacles.
- There are stereotypes, traditional attitudes and beliefs in several blue economy sectors, that include
  - o Stereotypical thinking about women`s personality as well as physical appearance. Women are often not seen as independent enough. Women are still considered to bring bad luck (e.g., on ships).
  - o Underrated abilities and skills. Women are often seen as auxiliary colleagues, working in administration, finance or legal departments, or even as invisible workers. The reason behind this is that men are considered as physically stronger and more suitable for technical education and workplaces.
  - o Lack of family support networks in several sectors (e.g., fisheries and aquaculture), where women are not valued enough if they do not have a strong family legacy.
- Parental and caring responsibilities often prevent or slow down female career advancement due to longer career breaks.
- Women are often not considered for positions that require mobility as their availability and commitment are often questioned (mainly due to caring responsibilities, but not only).
- Gender-based violence and hostile working environments still often remain with unclear ways to address them and can lead to unnecessary tolerance for such behaviour.
- Pay gap is still present, where often women are the so-called invisible workers that work without salary or social benefits to support their family-run businesses or women with the same qualifications and experience are payed less than their male peers.
- Unconscious bias is still present and women are often ignored during collaborations and not acknowledged for their work/contribution/ideas.

### 2. GEP content and implementation, with special emphasis on a) recruitment and promotion, and b) Proposed activities and trainings



GEP is seen by the interviewees as a tool with high potential. They suggest that it should be a living document, tailored not only to gender but also diversity in general. It should become mandatory in the blue economy sectors but not for micro SMEs. The mechanisms for monitoring its implementation should be set in place to avoid GEPs becoming just another “tick the box” exercise without any impact. One of the monitoring mechanisms was suggested to involve external experts. Regular monitoring would enable its control, revision, updates, identify the good practices and scrutinize the bad ones. It is important to see GEP as a set of guidelines that should not be enforced to prevent resistances. GEPs should provide guidelines to:

- Address bias and stereotypes, providing women with tools to address and report any incorrect behaviours.
- Monitor the organizational salaries and address the pay gap.
- Improve the working conditions through flexibility in working hours, work from home arrangements, facilities for childcare, paternal leave support.
- Identify monitoring and analysis plans.

Moreover, the implementation of GEPs should be done through individuals, the organization itself and even through support of the society.

Two important components of GEPs should include a) recruitment and promotion and b) activities and trainings.

**Recruitment and promotion.** Interviewees agree that meritocracy and skills must have preference over gender alone. An exemption can be (temporarily) done only when equally qualified candidates are present. In these cases, preference can be given to the underrepresented gender. Importantly, the recruitment and promotion panels should be diverse themselves and clear procedures must be established, including standardized questions and avoiding personal and intimate ones. A gender-blind recruitment could potentially be useful, but only until the interview stage. In the recruitment stage, it was suggested to include as much information on the expected position, working conditions and salary already on the call. The recruitment and promotion processes should have established KPIs, timeframe and evaluation committees (which should be as diverse as possible). Importantly, interviewees suggest to have an archive of the documentation. In the promotion process, it is important to establish feedback mechanisms of interaction between employer and employees.

**Training, education and activities.** These should include awareness raising activities, presentation of good practices and skills improving activities. Interviewees suggested several high-potential topics for trainings:

- *Awareness raising:* unconscious bias, women rights and gender equality, sexual harassment and gender-based violence, equal opportunities, discrimination
- *Good practices:* bias in recruitment, cooperation and teamwork, experience sharing, empowerment, motivation
- *Skill-improving:* communication, presentation, public speaking, self-awareness, negotiation skills, leadership, resilience, empowerment, digitalization, AI, project management, leadership and coordination, customer relations, investment, entrepreneurship, values (integrity, honest, respect), social skills, adaptability and flexibility, emotional intelligence

In addition, tailored mentoring, coaching and leadership programmes were identified as high-potential activities to advance in gender equality. Importantly, education should start at an early age, within the

family and in schools. Thus women will not remain silent and report when faced inequalities, will not doubt themselves, and learn how to emphasize own achievements.

### 3. Stakeholders

Interviewees identified important stakeholders for enabling a long-term impact of WINBLUE activities.

These are:

- Ambassadors of good practices
- Policy makers and public administration and authorities (local, regional, national and European), including financers
- Society
- Media (traditional ones and influencers)
- Industry and SMEs
- NGOs
- Chambers of commerce
- Recruitment and HR experts
- Researchers
- Professional associations and networks
- Executives
- Middle and senior management
- Educational organizations (schools, universities)
- Similar projects
- Men
- Trade unions

These stakeholders can help spread the message and become an important catalyst for change. They can also lead to creation and promotion of networks of support and recommendation on the national/international/sectoral levels.

### 4. Legal perspective

Interviewees suggested that the outputs of the qualitative benchmarking should be also used to develop EU-wide case studies. These can serve as potential guidelines for future GEPs or addressing gender-based inequalities, in blue economy but also wider. Ideally, labour laws can be targeted to protect women by developing hiring strategies, providing increased safety measures in the working environment, institutionalize the involvement of trade unions (these can also be important motors in addressing the pay gap), provide social security for invisible workers and prevent pro bono work without social security.

### 5. Pathway to change

This qualitative analysis should not be a standalone exercise. To advance in the gender equality status in blue economy, interviewees suggest to combine quantitative and qualitative assessment, share the findings and propose corrective measures. Indeed, this is a confirmation of the suitability of WINBLUE implementation, as these tasks will be done as part of the T1.4 by creation of a observatory network. The vast majority of interviewees also expressed their interest and availability for providing all the findings and guidelines, which is a strong confirmation that WINBLUE is relevant for the blue economy practitioners.

#### D.1.4 Qualitative feedback from WINBLUE Labs

The following conclusions have been drawn from the information provided by the interviewees. These **opinions** respond to the reflections, experiences and knowledge that the interviewees may have. In any case they should be considered as irrefutable truths or an accurate diagnosis of the situation of equality in the blue economy sector.

A reading of all the responses transcribed in this document shows their great value, as it provides information on the **pre-existence of stereotypes and gender roles**, on the **degree of existing knowledge on equality policies** and allows us to obtain keys to improve employment opportunities for women in the blue economy, as set out in the WINBLUE project objectives.

The joint analysis of individual opinions immediately reminded us of a maxim of feminism which concludes that 'the personal is political', because from the different personal discourses it is possible to clearly identify the structural inequality rooted in the social, political and economic structures that govern our socio-cultural environment.

As a first conclusion, it should be mentioned that the quantitative and qualitative analysis documents developed within the framework of the WINBLUE project show that **gender inequality is present within the blue economy** and that it is necessary to develop action programmes and establish specific measures to promote equal opportunities between women and men within this economic sector. Economic activity and the labour market must be seen within cultural processes, and as a social construction, which participates in the same roles, stereotypes and prejudices as the societies that create them. As in other sectors of activity, women have greater difficulties in accessing jobs, gender stereotypes are present in selection processes and career development, they have greater job insecurity, there are pay gaps and there is notable segregation both horizontally and vertically.

Faced with this reality, which has inspired the WINBLUE project and which has been verified by the data collected in the quantitative study, there are several people who deny the existence of gender gaps. Perhaps this perception stems from **a reinterpretation of the occupational segregation that characterises the labour market**. Those who denied inequality seemed to contrast the greater presence of women in the health and education sectors with others that are male-dominated, such as the fisheries sub-sector. These same people identify an equal presence of men and women in other sectors and from this they conclude that there is equality in the labour sphere, stating that it is unnecessary to intervene in companies, as the future of society is oriented towards equality.

From these statements it can be concluded that the **interviewees are generally influenced by gender stereotypes**. The transcribed interviews show how these stereotypes appear in relation to women's abilities or in reference to psychological and behavioural issues. From this point of view, the informants understand, for example, that the lower career progression is due to women, ignoring the gender factors that make it difficult for women to gain access to positions of responsibility and decision-making.

In addition to these stereotypes, there is a **strong lack of knowledge about the application of the principle of equality in the workplace**. On occasions, the need to establish a regulatory framework that establishes systems that guarantee equal treatment and opportunities for women is asked for. However, European institutions and the member states have been developing a wide range of regulations and

instruments to remedy the existing inequalities in the business sphere, and the WINBLUE project itself is an example of this.

In the opinion of the people interviewed, these policies are based exclusively on the establishment of **positive actions**, about which doubts are raised as to their legality, in contrast to the EU guidelines that legitimise these measures. These measures are perceived with rejection and reticence, fearing that they will relegate men from their jobs or promote women exclusively. This again reaffirms the conclusion that there is a **general lack of knowledge about the mechanisms at work** in the establishment of positive action measures and their relationship with the development of associated equality measures in work organisations.

In relation to **Gender Equality Plans (GEPs)**, a high level of unawareness of these tools has also been identified. The GEPs operate as a set of measures, adopted after a diagnosis has been carried out, and their objective is to achieve equal treatment and opportunities between women and men in business organisations, eliminating any form of discrimination based on sex. However, for several of the people interviewed, these instruments have the sole function of making women visible and facilitating their maternity leave and return to work. On the other hand, another group of people proposed that companies should establish comprehensive measures that are compulsory for companies and that are accompanied by monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, without knowing that they were referring to the GEPs.

There is also **confusion in the distinction between the GEP and good practices (GP)**. Although both instruments can facilitate the incorporation of equality measures in a business organisation, their scope is quite different. If a GEP was previously mentioned as a comprehensive instrument with a transformative capacity on the different processes and the organisational model of a company's human resource management, good practices, on the other hand, have a limited scope. GP focuses on a specific issue or a specific aspect (work-life balance, harassment protocols, etc.). They act as examples, establishing a model that can be valid for different organisations, but in no case can they lead to a transformation of the Human Resources model.

Focusing these findings on specific aspects, **respondents describe sexist and discriminatory practices in recruitment processes**. They detail processes in which female candidates are asked about personal and maternity-related aspects, questions that would currently be **prohibited practices**, for example in Spanish legislation. In relation to the selection processes, confusion is also detected regarding their formulation, with the understanding that it is only about establishing positive actions and therefore the exclusive recruitment of women. Several of the people interviewed maintain that it would be appropriate to establish objective processes that identify the person with the best skills for professional performance. However, they do not identify their description of establishing objective and **gender-neutral recruitment** processes as an equality measure.

In relation to the processes of career development and access to positions of responsibility and decision-making, the people interviewed identify a **lower presence of women**, both in companies and in associations or guilds. The interviews reveal experiences in which **women are not listened to** in their

proposals or are subsequently relegated by a man in management. As an element to be considered, the interviews identify that women have more opportunities to access management positions in family businesses than in other types of organisations.

However, there is also a reverse reading with regard to **family businesses**. Generally, and in activities associated with fishing, the business acts as an extension of the family, and in these cases women adopt a secondary and complementary role to the main activity carried out by the men. In these cases, generally associated with **job insecurity**, women lose their status as workers, as they do not receive a salary or recognition for their work, and their activity is rendered **invisible**.

Another example that describes the situation of women in one of the most precarious sub-sectors is their refusal to affiliate men to their association, justifying this decision on the different working conditions and pay for men and women. In contrast to the salaried crew members who repaired the nets on board the vessel, there were women who were self-employed and received little pay for their work.

Generally speaking, the labour market shows different signs of **occupational segregation**. An occupational segregation that affects all economic sectors and where it can be seen how the tertiary sector accumulates higher rates of feminisation, especially all those jobs and trades associated with caring for people. The blue economy sector is a male-dominated sector, as has been identified in the quantitative data study. At the same time, within this broad sector, it can be seen that there are subsectors with higher levels of masculinisation, such as fishing, compared to others, like the tourism sector, where women maintain higher percentages of representation. Another sphere that shows occupational and horizontal segregation is presented by the different jobs carried out by men and women in each company or in a generalised way in each sub-sector. The interviews show that women mainly carry out administrative or research tasks, while men carry out tasks associated with physical activities.

Segregation in the sector can also be seen in the **vertical** dimension, as the interviewees identified the existence of fewer women as managers or in decision-making positions. The informants have identified an increase in the presence of women in leadership positions, but some of their comments question women's capacity to manage work teams or exercise leadership, alluding to women's character. Perceptions based on gender stereotypes.

Associated with the sexual division of labour and the intervention of gender stereotypes on the valuation of jobs and their economic compensation, **pay gaps** arise. In the interviews, these wage discriminations were described by pointing out the differences in pay that women and men receive despite carrying out the same functions and having the same, or even higher, training.

An element present throughout the interviews are the references to **care** and the consequences derived from it. In their accounts, respondents identify the consequences for women of taking on caring responsibilities both in terms of their access to the labour market and in terms of their career development. When analysing the accounts, we can see an acceptance of gender roles, which assign to women the provision of family and maternity-related care; only a few of them make reference to the

exercise of co-responsibility by men or ask for the establishment of measures and resources for work-life balance in work organisations.

Another element described by those interviewed was situations of **sexual harassment**. In the accounts of experiences, situations of sexual violence against women were described, recognising the importance of developing protocols that allow for knowing how to act in these situations.

**Training** is an issue that was also reflected in the interviews, however, and by way of conclusion, it is significant that only women were mentioned as the **target group**. Specifically, the training actions proposed are associated with the development of leadership skills.

In general, the importance of having disaggregated **data** that allow a good diagnosis of the sector to be made, as a starting point for the implementation of equality measures, was mentioned. In this sense, the respondents also mention the existing difficulties in obtaining them and in processing the information in the best possible way.

From the interviews it is also possible to identify **measures and proposals** to improve women's participation in the blue economy.

- Expand the **regulatory framework** and develop labour legislation that guarantees equal opportunities for women and men in the labour market.
- Develop **equality plans** in companies in the sector, defining comprehensive plans that are accompanied by monitoring measures and continuous improvement processes.
- Initiate changes by **transforming the educational model**. To this end, it is proposed to work on equality issues from childhood and throughout the entire educational stage.
- Improve **data collection**, in order to have an accurate diagnosis of the sector, it is necessary to have a greater number of data and for these to be disaggregated by sex.
- **Promote female leadership** in the blue economy sector, showing women that they can be a point of reference in the sector.
- **Implement protocols** to deal with situations of sexual harassment or gender-based harassment, with the aim of having instructions and guidelines on how to act in these situations.
- Improve the **working conditions** of the blue economy sector **as a whole**, as the improvement of these conditions will act as a facilitator for the development of equality measures and the situation of women workers in the sector.

In short, this study has made it possible to expand information on the situation of women in the blue economy, analysing the greatest difficulties faced by women in accessing this economic sector, which will make it possible to develop gender equality actions in companies with greater precision. Breaking gender stereotypes, achieving a greater commitment from the sector in the implementation of rigorous processes of personnel recruitment, promotion and career development, expanding training in equality in companies, establishing protocols against sexual or gender-based harassment are some of the challenges facing the future actions to be developed within the framework of the WINBLUE project.

## ANNEX 1: Interview questions

Appendix 1: Interview summaries (qualitative data)

COUNTRY:

Interviewee No: 1

Interviewee gender:

Sector (circle): circular blue bioeconomy and biotechnology / aquaculture and fisheries / offshore renewable energy / sustainable coastal tourism / cutting-edge enabling technology for protecting and restoring marine ecosystems / other \_\_\_\_\_

### NATIONAL CONTEXT

Present to the interviewees the national data from the SHE figures or other national and also institutional statistics, which prove a gender gap (in payment, retirement, hiring, promotion, leadership position or others). And based on this you could discuss possible interventions, like: if gender gap was proven to be the case for our organization, how could we prevent this?

*[Enter the transcribed text in English here]*

### ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

Could you please tell us a bit about your positions and responsibilities here in the organization?

*[Enter the transcribed text in English here]*

On which occasions is gender taken into consideration / mentioned in your organization? Is gender relevant in your sector? Why?

*[Enter the transcribed text in English here]*

Introduce briefly the WINBLUE project and its aims. Why do you think projects such as WINBLUE are necessary/relevant for blue economy, your organisation or you personally?

*[Enter the transcribed text in English here]*

The EC sees an importance in GEPs (gender equality plans) for pursuing structural change in organisations towards gender equal work places. GEPs were mandatory for public institutions that want to participate in Horizon Europe project consortia. Why

do you think they can be of relevance in the blue economy sector as well? Which institutional areas do you consider as most important for action?

*[Enter the transcribed text in English here]*

How could we initialize the dialogue on gender equality in your organisation? What is important (on a structural, individual or legislative level) to progress according to your opinion?

*[Enter the transcribed text in English here]*

#### MANAGEMENT PROCESSES

Have you ever observed gendered difficulties for staff members who try ascending their career? If yes, what kind of obstacles do you remember?

*[Enter the transcribed text in English here]*

Have you ever **PERSONALLY** experienced any gender inequalities in your professional career?

*[Enter the transcribed text in English here]*

What do you think that can be done to promote women progress in their career (or to avoid the obstacles previously identified)? Should gender be considered for promotion?

*[Enter the transcribed text in English here]*

Do you think gender should be taken into consideration when hiring the candidates or maybe a gender blind system (e.g. hiding the info on name and gender) could be used? How could this be done? Maybe a strategy for hiring could be developed?

*[Enter the transcribed text in English here]*

What can be done to improve the existing constraints in promotion/representation of women / underrepresented gender?

*[Enter the transcribed text in English here]*

#### SENSIBILIZATION

During the duration of the project we will organize activities such as training courses, provide a selection of good practices, create toolkits and recommendations. Are you interested in such materials?

*[Enter the transcribed text in English here]*



What topics should we cover to raise the awareness on gender/equality topics in blue economy sectors? These can be very general or even only marginally connected to gender, e.g. communication, negotiation skills, or fully gender-related, such as unconscious bias training. Think about it and consider what you would like to learn more about.

*[Enter the transcribed text in English here]*

#### IMPLEMENTATION

Could we face any problems or resistances during the project implementation?

*[Enter the transcribed text in English here]*

According to your opinion, whom should we try to include as (other) supportive actors/allies?

*[Enter the transcribed text in English here]*

What are your expectations and hopes for the WINBLUE project with regard to our organisation? Could it make an impact?

*[Enter the transcribed text in English here]*

Anything you want to add?

*[Enter the transcribed text in English here]*

Additionally asked questions:

*[Enter the transcribed text in English here]*

## ANNEX 2: Informed consent form

### Informed consent form

#### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

#### INTERVIEWS ON GENDER EQUALITY IN BLUE ECONOMY SECTOR

You are invited to give an interview, which gathers stakeholders' perspectives on the present situation of gender equality in the blue economy sector.

Before the interview will be performed, you will be asked to sign the attached consent form to confirm that you have read this information sheet and agree to be interviewed.

#### The WINBLUE project

The contribution of women in the blue economy is often overlooked and undervalued, especially in the roles where technical scientific background is required. Women are still underrepresented in jobs linked to disciplines of science technologies, engineering and mathematics and most of the blue economy sectors are predominantly male dominated. The project WINBLUE intends to accelerate the empowerment of women in the blue economy through facilitating their participation in five different sectors revolving around the conservation and sustainable use of the aquatic resources: circular blue bioeconomy and biotechnology, aquaculture and fisheries, offshore renewable energy, sustainable coastal tourism, cutting-edge enabling technology for protecting and restoring marine ecosystems.

WINBLUE takes a multi-actor, data-driven, trans-sectoral and practice-centred approach, which adopts both top-down and bottom-up activities, to help the blue economy actors to effectively address largely unsolved gender equality challenges.

For this purpose, the project launches five WINBLUE labs to involve a relevant community of stakeholders in the design and implementation of gender equality plan models that address gender-biased dynamics and unconscious rules thwarting the participation of women in the blue economy and their representation in decision-making positions in public and private entities. This activity is supported by the design and validation of upskilling and coaching programs that enhance those entrepreneurial good practices that engage female

human capital, drive competitiveness and strengthen research and innovation undertakings.

The project also implements a data collection and monitoring strategy to both benchmark and monitor the evolution of the level of gender inclusiveness in the blue economy sectors and fill the data gaps that still exist. This complements a comprehensive identification and assessment of highly replicable good practices which can easily be adopted and transferred to different sectors and types of organisations.

#### MAIN OBJECTIVE OF QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

Qualitative research in the form of interviews will be performed with the main aim to get deeper understanding of the inequalities that are present in European Blue Economy sectors. Interviews will assist in evaluating the state of awareness and existence of potential inequalities due to gender, as well as provide feedback from personal experience, identification of bottlenecks and opportunities. Interviews will provide an insight to the sectorial culture and enable project partners to enlarge the circle of WINBLUE supporters.

#### PARTICIPATION IN THE INTERVIEW

It is up to you to decide whether you agree to take part in this study. If you agree to take part in this study, you will be given this participation sheet to keep and will be asked to sign an informed consent form. Please note that as your participation is voluntary, you can withdraw from the interview at any time by informing in written contact identified below and without giving a reason why you decided not to participate in the interview.

**INTERVIEW AND DATA PROCESSING.** The interview will take about **30-45 minutes** and will be conducted face to face, over the phone or using online meeting tools such as Skype, Zoom etc.

In order to properly capture what you will say, and as a matter of convenience for the analysis we would like to audio record the interview (**with possibility of** video recording, providing consent). In case you would like to address something not to be used for the analysis, there will be the opportunity to stop the record any time during the interview.

Your answers will be transcribed, and, upon your request, you will have right to review the transcript of this interview and, if needed, to amend it. Your answers will be treated strictly confidentially and will be generally integrated with other respondents' answers in the analysis so that a personal identification will not be possible. However, your sectoral affiliation might be mentioned in reporting a citation, e.g. "an **interviewee** from academia/working in the industrial sector, mentioned that ...". The information provided in the interview will be used anonymously for publicly available WINBLUE project reports, and

for related scientific publications. It will only be used for WINBLUE project purposes, and will not further be used for other purposes, unless you explicitly agree. Personal details and institutional identification will be kept strictly confidential in any documents that may be produced using the data.

If you agree, personal data consisting of the interviewee's name, affiliation and contact details will be included in a contact list, which will be used for the project's dissemination activities (e.g. news, announcements), and for invitations to further project activities (e.g. workshops, networking events). Data will only be used for WINBLUE project and will not be made accessible to third parties.

#### DATA STORAGE

Audio records will be saved on secure servers at the National Institute of Biology, not shared within the consortium, and deleted after the final versions of transcripts are available. The transcripts will also be stored electronically on secure servers at the National Institute of Biology. The translated – English – summarised versions of your interview will only be accessible for WINBLUE project team members directly engaged in the corresponding research work. Interviewees' names will be encrypted in the translated files.

Video recordings can be used to produce informative videos. However, the filming of video material will be agreed and consented prior to starting the recording.

As at any time you may withdraw from the study, you have right to ask to delete any information provided by you. This also applies for the use of your personal data. However, data which have been already processed and published can further be used for this project.

If you agree to be interviewed, please fill in the attached form for informed consent prior to the interview, and send the signed form electronically or as hard copy to:

Dr. Ana Rotter

National Institute of Biology

Marine Biology Station

Fornace 41, 6330 Piran

[ana.rotter@nib.si](mailto:ana.rotter@nib.si)

#### D.1.4 Qualitative feedback from WINBLUE Labs

Should you have any questions regarding the purpose and design of this research and/or the interviewing process, or if you decide to withdraw from the research at a later stage, please contact dr. Ana Rotter ([ana.rotter@nib.si](mailto:ana.rotter@nib.si)).

Thank you very much for your time and effort!

Best regards,

Dr. Ana Rotter

on behalf of the WINBLUE team

## ANNEX: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Research project title: WINBLUE – Empowering Women and mainstreaming Gender Equality in the Blue Economy

Interviewer's name: \_\_\_\_\_

In signing this consent form I confirm that (please circle):

I have read the Participant Information Sheet (invitation to be interviewed) and the nature and purpose of the research has been explained to me.	YES	NO
I have had the opportunity to ask questions.	YES	NO
I understand the purpose of the project and my involvement in it.	YES	NO
I understand that I may withdraw from the project by means of a written notification to the contact indicated below at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.	YES	NO
I agree that for the purpose of implementing the WINBLUE project, my personal data, including an audio recording of the interview, will be processed	YES	NO
I agree that my personal information (name, organization and contact) will be stored in a list that will be used exclusively for the dissemination activities of the project (e.g. news, announcements) and for sending invitations to participate in workshops and networking events.	YES	NO
I am aware that the data will be used exclusively for the purposes of the WINBLUE project and will not be accessible to third parties.	YES	NO
I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal data will remain strictly confidential.	YES	NO
I understand that data, collected during interviews, will be stored electronically for the maximum period of seven years after publication.	YES	NO

#### D.1.4 Qualitative feedback from WINBLUE Labs

I am aware that I can request access to, correction, deletion or restriction of processing of personal data, or I can object to the processing and transfer of personal data, by sending a written notification to the address Ana Rotter, Fornace 41, 6330 Piran or an e-mail address to <a href="mailto:ana.rotter@nib.si">ana.rotter@nib.si</a> and that I can file a complaint with the supervising authority if I believe that the processing of personal data is in breach of the General Data Protection Regulation.	YES	NO
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#### Any concerns about the study?

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study these should be addressed to Ana Rotter ([ana.rotter@nib.si](mailto:ana.rotter@nib.si)). If the matter remains unresolved, please contact the project coordinator Dr. Patrizia Grifoni ([patrizia.grifoni@irpps.cnr.it](mailto:patrizia.grifoni@irpps.cnr.it)), Institute for Research on Population and Social Policies, Italy.

Signed ..... (Interviewee)

Print name ..... Date .....