Winblue

EMPOWERING WOMEN AND MAINSTREAMING
GENDER EQUALITY IN THE BLUE ECONOMY

EMFAF-2022-PIA-WBE-101112278

EMFAF-2022-PIA-WBE-101112278
WOMEN IN THE BLUE ECONOMY

D1.5 Summary of qualitative feedback from WINBLUE Labs

D1.5. Summary of qualitative feedback from WINBLUE Labs

Technical references

Deliverable	D1.5. Summary of qualitative feedback from WINBLUE Labs
Work package No. and Title	WP1 DETECT & COLLECT – filling data gaps and creating the European Union (EU) inclusive blue economy observatory
Task No. and Title	T1.3 – Qualitative feedback from WINBLUE Labs
Start Date:	01.11.2023
Revision Date:	26.07.2024
Release Date:	31.07.2024
Deliverable Leader	NIB (National Institute of Biology, Slovenia)
Main Authors	Ana Rotter (NIB) and Ernesta Grigalionyte-Bembič (NIB)
Authors	
Contributors	Project partners
Internal Review by	Ana Rotter (NIB), Patrizia Grifoni (CNR), Noemi Biancone (CNR)
Status (F: final; D: draft; RD: revised draft)	F
Dissemination level	Pu - Public
Document ID / File Name	WINBLUE_D1.5_summary_V1
Abstract	This deliverable provides summary of the 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 was done in the period February – July 2024.
Title and number of connected deliverables	D.1.4. Qualitative feedback from WINBLUE Labs
Explain Deliverable Dependency/ Connection	Deliverables D1.1, D1.2 and D1.4 will be used in drafting an open access publication on women position in the blue economy sector.
Title of connected external documents	See Bibliography
Reference of the document and the link (if available)	See Bibliography

Table of Contents

Objective and Responsibility

The sole responsibility for the content of this publication lies with the authors and contributors. Views and opinions expressed are, therefore, only those of the author(s) and contributors and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. The European Commission (EC) is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

Copyright/Legal disclaimer

The following is an acknowledgement of the authors of the document. This deliverable in WINBLUE may not be copied, reproduced, or modified in whole or in part for any purpose without written permission from the WINBLUE Consortium. In addition, an acknowledgement of the authors/contributors of the document and all applicable portions of the copyright notice must be clearly referenced in any document using all or parts of this deliverable. All rights reserved. This document may change without notice.

Objective and purpose

The main aim of this summary analysis of the qualitative data provided by the WINBLUE project partners, which was collected through semi-structured interviews. The qualitative data provides a detailed insight into the status of women in the selected WINBLUE blue economy sector, the obstacles they face when entering or trying to advance in the sector, and possible measures to improve the status of women in these sectors.

WINBLUE sector	Contributing partner
1. **Blue (marine) biotechnology**	*BCC (IT), NIB (SI), UNISA (IT)*
2. **Fisheries and aquaculture**	*ACA (FR), ANFACO (ES), ASSOITICA (IT), BCC (IT), NIB (SI), UNISA (IT), VEDA (BG)*
3. **Sustainable coastal and marine tourism**	*ACA, ISDI (MT), UNISA (IT)*
4. **Offshore renewable energy**	*PLOCAN (ES), VEDA (BG)*
5. **Cutting-edge marine technologies**	*ACA (FR), ISDI (MT), PLOCAN (ES)*
6. **Other sectors (marine education, marine policy, port management, navigation)**	*VEDA (BG)*

Data collection methods

Data was collected using a semi-structured interview template created by the head of WP1, NIB. In the period from July 2023 to February 2024, WINBLUE project partners conducted interviews with the participants of 5 selected WINLBUE blue economy sectors – marine (blue) biotechnologies, fisheries and aquaculture, sustainable marine tourism, offshore renewable energy and cutting-edge technologies. In addition, a small number of interviews were conducted with representatives of other blue economy

sectors such as shipping and marine education. These interviews also provided important information and complemented the interviews conducted in the blue economy sectors selected by WINBLUE.

Interviewees were asked 18 questions, divided into 5 thematic blocks:

1. **Organizational context**
- Interviewees position in the organization.
- Gender relevance in the organization.
- WINBLUE project relevance for the organization.
- GEPs relevance.
- Initiation of a dialogue on gender equality.

2. **Management processes**
- Gender-specific difficulties for employees in career advancement.
- Personal experience.
- Gender in promotion.
- Gender in recruitment.
- Improving recruitment and promotion.

3. **Sensibilisation**
- WINBLUE material.
- Training topics.

4. **Implementation**
- Obstacles to the implementation of WINBLUE project.
- WINBLUE supporting allies.
- Expectations of the WINBLUE project.

5. **Additional information**
- Additional information provided by the interviewee.
- Additional questions asked by the interviewer.

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 to 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.

THE KEY AREAS FOR CHANGE/ACTION

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
  - Stereotypical thinking about women's personality as well as physical appearance. Women are often not seen as independent enough. Women are still considered bringing bad luck (e.g., on ships).
  - 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.
  - 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 paid 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 having 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.
- Policymakers and public administration and authorities (local, regional, national and European), including funders.
- 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 combining 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 an 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.