

WIN

WIN - Improving the position of Women in the labour markets of peripheral INdustrial Regions
Interreg Danube Region Programme 2021-2027

Supporting Female Employment in Industrial Regions

WIN Policy Brief addressing National Stakeholders

Enabling frameworks for inclusive labour markets

KEY MESSAGE

Women represent a significant, often highly skilled, part of the workforce across industrial regions in the Danube countries. However, their participation in employment is framed by structural conditions in education systems, labour markets, care infrastructure, and persistent gender norms.

These conditions are shaped by multiple levels of governance. While many barriers become visible at the local and regional levels, national stakeholders play a central enabling role by defining the frameworks that determine place-based access to skills, employment systems, and social infrastructure across all regions.

Addressing these challenges requires coherent national frameworks and gender-sensitive, place-based policy instruments that enable equal access to employment, skills development, and career progression across regions. Advancing gender equality in the labour market is therefore a prerequisite for inclusive growth, competitiveness, and social cohesion.

This policy brief provides practical guidance for national stakeholders to support and strengthen the conditions for gender-equal labour markets in industrial regions.

1. WHY THIS MATTERS

The WIN project (“Improving the position of Women in the labour markets of peripheral INdustrial regions”) addresses persistent gender gaps in employment across industrial towns and peripheral industrial regions in the Danube area. These regions are characterised by structural challenges, including sectoral concentration, skills mismatches, and gender norms influencing education and career pathways.

A key insight from WIN pilots is that local and regional implementation is decisive for delivering change on the ground, while national frameworks are essential for scaling, sustaining, and systematising successful approaches. Effective change depends on the interaction between locally tested solutions and nationally coherent policy environments that enable their replication and long-term uptake.

WIN findings highlight that national frameworks determine whether locally developed solutions can be scale, sustained, and embedded into systemic policy change.

2. WHAT WORKS

NATIONAL ENABLING PATHWAYS

PATHWAY 1

ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION AND SKILLS

Enable access to quality employment and future-oriented sectors

This pathway requires national frameworks that shape skills systems, labour market policy, and economic transition strategies. It aims to promote the participation of women in high-quality employment and emerging economic fields.

NATIONAL ENABLING ACTIONS:

01

Promote gender-balanced labour market participation through national employment and equality strategies

04

Strengthen support for women's entrepreneurship and access to finance

02

Align national skills strategies with labour market transformation (digital, green, STEM sectors)

05

Promote place-based and gender-responsive active labour market policies

03

Expand lifelong learning, reskilling, and upskilling systems for women

06

Support structured return-to-work and career re-entry mechanisms

GOOD PRACTICE

[Equal Pay Day Slovakia](#)

Is a national campaign that serves as an important platform for open discussion on the gender pay gap. It raises awareness of the issue and promotes solutions at individual, company, and policy levels. The initiative brings together key stakeholders, including experts, employers, state institutions, NGOs, media, and the public, ensuring diverse perspectives and practical outcomes. *Equal Pay Day Slovakia* is a year-round set of activities that culminates in a main conference, creating a sustained and multi-layered approach to addressing pay inequality, advocating a gender-equal approach to income and wages.



PATHWAY 2

SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES

Reduce structural barriers to labour market participation

This pathway depends on national investment and regulation in care systems, mobility, and working conditions. It improves the labour market participation of women across all regions.

NATIONAL ENABLING ACTIONS:

01

Invest in accessible childcare and eldercare systems

02

Promote flexible working arrangements through labour regulation and incentives

03

Improve transport and mobility systems connecting peripheral regions to labour markets

04

Integrate care economy considerations into national development strategies

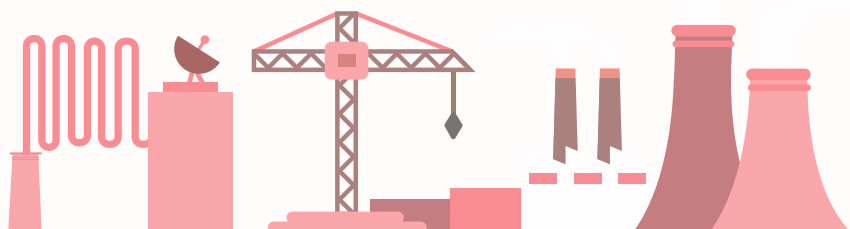
05

Promote gender-sensitive public service provision

GOOD PRACTICE

[Gerontodomaćice](#)
[Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)

This initiative in Bosnia and Herzegovina represents a transferable model, connecting care infrastructure with labour market participation. It delivers accessible eldercare services while creating flexible and part-time employment opportunities for women, especially in rural areas. Through formal training, certification, and paid positions, the initiative recognises previously unpaid care work. This approach enhances social cohesion and promotes the economic and social empowerment of women within local communities.



3. POLICY IMPLICATION

Effective national action requires coherent system-level frameworks that connect both pathways and ensure alignment between labour market policy, skills systems, and social infrastructure.

**Strengthening skills
systems and
employment pathways**

**Ensuring effective
social infrastructure
and care systems**

**Supporting local and
regional innovation
through stable national
policy environments**

*National stakeholders play a key role in **scaling, sustaining, and integrating successful local and regional initiatives into broader policy frameworks**. At the same time, they **ensure that national strategies and guidelines** are **selectively translated and implemented** at the regional and local levels.*

4. CONTACT

WIN contributes to policy development under the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), supporting evidence-based approaches to inclusive labour markets.

WIN Project – Improving the position of Women in the labour markets of peripheral INDUSTRIAL Regions, Flagship project of EUSDR PA09 2025

Interreg Danube Region Programme 2021–2027

<https://interreg-danube.eu/projects/win>

Coordinator:
Jani Kozina (ZRC SAZU), jani.kozina@zrc-sazu.si

5. WIN KNOWLEDGE & EVIDENCE BASE

This policy brief is based on findings and pilot activities from the WIN – Improving the position of Women in the labour markets of peripheral INdustrial Regions project.

Further evidence and tools include:

- [Project video](#)
- [Transnational research on gendered labour market barriers](#)
- [Case study-based research on local labour markets in WIN regions](#)
- [Pilot action documentation from seven industrial regions](#)
- [Good practice compendium on women's employment and social innovation across all 14 countries of the Danube Region](#)
- [Stakeholder interviews and policy analysis](#)
- [Policy recommendations for multi-level governance in the Danube Region](#)

Colophone

Prepared by: Jörn Harfst, Mariia Rastvorova, and Simone Kocher (University of Graz) and Jani Kozina (ZRC SAZU), on behalf of the WIN Project consortium.

Funding: The WIN – Improving the position of Women in the labour markets of peripheral INdustrial Regions project is supported by the Interreg Danube Region Programme 2021–2027 and co-funded by the European Union.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Union, the Interreg Danube Region Programme, EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators, or Priority Areas themselves.

Note: This policy brief reflects findings and recommendations developed within the WIN project and is intended to support policy dialogue within the EUSDR. It does not constitute an official position or policy document of any EUSDR Priority Area Coordinators.

© 2026 University of Graz. Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

Layout: Kocher, S.

Illustrations: PiNA, Kocher, S.

Suggested citation: Harfst, J., Rastvorova, M., Kocher, S., & Kozina, J. (2026). *Supporting Female Employment in Industrial Regions. WIN Policy Brief addressing National Stakeholders – Enabling frameworks for inclusive labour markets*. University of Graz, WIN Project, Interreg Danube Region Programme 2021–2027.