

WIN – Improving the position of Women in the labour markets of peripheral INdustrial regions | Interreg Danube Region Programme 2021–2027

Connecting Governance, Participation & Gender in Danube Industrial Regions

WIN Policy Brief addressing EUSDR PA10 – Institutional Capacities & Cooperation

KEY MESSAGE

Women represent a significant, often highly skilled, part of the workforce across industrial regions in the Danube Region. However, their participation in employment is shaped not only by labour market conditions, but also by the capacity of public institutions, governance systems, and stakeholder cooperation to address structural barriers.

WIN findings show that gender inequalities in labour market outcomes are closely linked to fragmented governance structures, limited coordination across policy levels, and insufficient involvement of local actors and civil society. At the same time, many effective solutions already exist at the local level but remain isolated and difficult to scale.

These conditions are shaped across governance levels. While barriers are experienced locally and enabling frameworks are set nationally and at the European level, EUSDR PA10 plays a key role in strengthening institutional capacities, improving administrative cooperation, and supporting participatory governance across the Danube Region and facilitating the transfer of effective approaches between regions and governance levels.

1. WHY THIS MATTERS

The WIN project (“Improving the position of Women in the labour markets of peripheral INdustrial regions”) highlights that addressing gender gaps in employment in industrial and peripheral regions requires not only targeted labour market and skills policies, but also effective governance systems.

These regions often face structural challenges, including limited institutional capacities, fragmented policy coordination, and insufficient stakeholder engagement. As a result, even well-designed policies may fail to reach women and women’s associations, who would benefit most.

Four key governance challenges emerge:

- Public institutions at the local and regional level often lack the capacity and tools to address gendered labour market barriers systematically.
- Coordination between policy domains (labour market, education, regional development) and governance levels remains limited.
- The involvement of civil society, local actors, and non-state stakeholders in policy design and implementation is uneven.
- Effective local initiatives often remain project-based and are not systematically transferred, institutionalised, or scaled.

At the same time, WIN demonstrates that local initiatives – when supported by strong partnerships and governance frameworks – can effectively address gender inequalities and improve labour market outcomes.

In this context, PA10 is essential for strengthening institutional capacities, improving governance frameworks, and enabling better coordination and participation. By doing so, it supports more effective, inclusive, and place-based policy responses across the Danube Region.

2. WHAT WORKS:

PA10 ACTION-ORIENTED PATHWAYS

PA10 – LINK TO OBJECTIVES 1 & 8 INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES & LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Strengthening capacities of public institutions and municipalities for inclusive and gender-responsive labour market policies

WIN shows that effective responses to gender inequalities in industrial regions depend on the capacity of local and regional institutions to design and implement context-sensitive policies. However, municipalities and public services often lack the resources, coordination mechanisms, and tools to address these challenges systematically. The aim is to strengthen institutional capacities and governance frameworks to deliver more inclusive, place-based public services.

Recommendations

- Strengthen the capacities of municipalities and public institutions to address gender equality in the labour market and skills policies
- Integrate gender-sensitive and place-based approaches into local and regional policy design
- Support capacity-building for public authorities in industrial and transition regions
- Promote the use of data and evidence (e.g., from WIN) in local policy development

PA10 – LINK TO OBJECTIVES 2 & 5 MULTI-LEVEL & TRANSNATIONAL GOVERNANCE

Enhancing administrative cooperation and policy coordination

WIN highlights that gender and labour market challenges are shaped across governance levels, but coordination between national, regional, and local actors remains limited. Opportunities for transnational learning and cooperation are also underutilised. The aim is to strengthen administrative cooperation and enable more coherent, cross-sectoral policy responses across the Danube Region.

Recommendations

- Facilitate structured cooperation between national, regional, and local authorities
- Strengthen coordination between the labour market, education, and regional development policies
- Promote transnational exchange and peer learning between regions in the Danube area
- Support transfer and adaptation of successful approaches across countries and regions

PA10 – LINK TO OBJECTIVES 5 & 7 PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Strengthening the involvement of civil society and non-state actors

WIN demonstrates that inclusive labour market policies require the active involvement of stakeholders beyond public institutions, including employers, education providers, civil society organisations, and local communities. However, their participation remains uneven and often project-based. The aim is to foster participatory governance approaches that better reflect local needs and improve policy uptake and sustainability.

Recommendations

- Strengthen cooperation between public authorities, businesses, education providers, and civil society
- Promote participatory approaches in policy design and implementation
- Support the involvement of women's organisations and local actors in governance processes
- Encourage the development of regional stakeholder networks and partnerships

3. POLICY IMPLICATION

Strengthening inclusive and resilient labour markets in the Danube Region requires not only effective skills and labour market policies, but also strong governance systems that enable coordination, participation, policy learning, and implementation.

In this context, PA10 plays a key role in:

- Strengthening institutional capacities at the local and regional level
- Improving coordination across governance levels and policy domains
- Enabling participatory governance and stakeholder engagement
- Supporting transfer and upscaling of effective local solutions

WIN findings indicate that governance capacity is a critical enabling factor for both gender equality and regional development. Effective local solutions already exist across the Danube Region, but their impact depends on stronger coordination, institutional learning, stakeholder involvement, and cooperation across governance levels and relevant EUSDR Priority Areas.

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

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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](#)

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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.

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