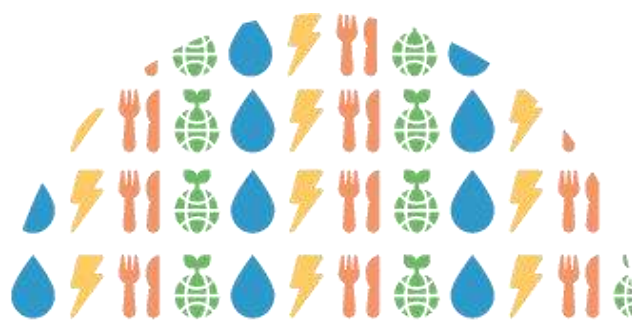




BONEX

Boosting Nexus Framework Implementation in the Mediterranean

Deliverable 5.7 Gender Action Plan

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PRIMA
PARTNERSHIP FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA



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Contents

Executive summary.....	3
Introduction	5
1 Gender dimension key concepts	6
1.1 Definitions	7
1.2 What is Gendered innovation?	8
2 Gender and Climate Change.....	10
3 BONEX gender action plan	10
3.1 BONEX gender balance.....	11
3.2 BONEX Gender Committee.....	12
3.3 BONEX dissemination and communication.....	14
3.4 Gender dimension in BONEX demonstration projects.....	19
3.5 BONEX gender survey.....	20
3.5.1 Results	21
4 Social Media Gender-Related Publications.....	23
5 Conclusions.....	26
6 References.....	28

Executive summary

Gender equality has been a cross-cutting pillar of the BONEX project, driving innovation, inclusion, and sustainability within the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystem (WEFE) Nexus framework in the Mediterranean region. From its inception, BONEX adopted a **transformative gender mainstreaming approach**, ensuring that women's participation, leadership, and knowledge systems were recognized not just as social imperatives, but as strategic enablers for more effective and resilient WEFE solutions.

BONEX key outcomes, lessons learned, and recommendations from the implementation of gender-related actions throughout the whole project lifetime (M1–M40), are presented below:

Strategic Governance and Institutionalization

- BONEX embedded gender equality in its governance through a dedicated **Task 5.6 on Gender Engagement**, coordinated by BIOAZUL, and the formation of a **29-member Gender Committee**, composed of 55% women and covering all project countries.
- Gender balance was achieved across all structures: 54% of the project team are women; 3 out of 5 work packages were led by women; and 50% of the Advisory Board are female members.
- A **Gender Monitoring Framework** was developed and updated regularly, assessing partner composition, steering groups, stakeholder participation, and public communication.

Capacity-Building and Mainstreaming

- BONEX provided partners with tools (e.g., the UN Women's Empowerment Principles Gap Analysis Tool) and webinars to strengthen internal gender policies and RRI practices.
- All communication materials and training followed principles of **gender-neutral and inclusive language**, available in multiple languages when relevant (English, French, Arabic, Spanish).

Events and Demonstration Project Implementation

- Gender-sensitive approaches were integrated into **local Demonstration Projects (DP)**, with special attention to the inclusion of women in reclaimed water, agrivoltaics, and sustainable farming practices.
- BONEX hosted and contributed to a wide range of national and international events, with gender equality prominently represented in: **National Agriculture Day (Tunisia)** and **Rural Women's Day**, the **Autumn School AURORA 2023**, the **BONEX-SureNEXUS Conference** (May 2025), where a full pillar was dedicated to "Gender and the WEFE Nexus", including an oral presentation by Antonia Lorenzo (*Assessing BONEX Through a Gender Lens*), among others.

Global Policy Engagement and Scientific Contribution

- A full chapter was submitted to **UNESCO-IHP's Global Water Security Issues (GWSI) Issue 7 on Water and Gender**, highlighting BONEX as a Mediterranean case study.
- An abstract by INRGREF was accepted at the **World Water Congress (Marrakech, Dec 2025)**, emphasizing rural women as custodians of traditional water knowledge in Tunisia.
- The BONEX experience contributed insights to EU-level discussions on gender integration in WEFE Nexus programming, including consultations with PRIMA and UfM.

Communication, Campaigns, and Visibility

- BONEX launched several impactful online campaigns to showcase female leadership:
 - **#WEFeWomenLeadership**, featuring video interviews and profiles of women like Olfa Mahjoub (Tunisia), Serena Sandri (Jordan), Yasmina Imani, and Paula Antunes.

- **#BONEXWomenScience**, calling on female researchers in the project to share their work and experiences.
- A **dedicated Gender Equality webpage** (<https://bonex-prima.eu/gender-equality/>) consolidates resources, campaigns, and updates.
- Celebratory messages and thought leadership were shared during **International Women’s Day**, **Women in STEM Day**, and **International Day of Rural Women**, reinforcing the project’s outreach and visibility.

Challenges and Forward-Looking Recommendations

- While gender was a core focus in BONEX, its **limited presence in external partner events and contributions** remains a challenge: only 1 of 51 abstracts submitted to the 2025 BONEX conference addressed gender.

Based on this, BONEX recommends:

- Making GEPs and gender indicators mandatory in future R&I calls,
- Funding **gender-inclusive technology** and female-led innovation,
- Embedding **community-driven, participatory design** to ensure gender responsiveness,
- Avoiding superficial approaches (“gender washing”) and promoting **meaningful impact tracking**.

As a final reflection, BONEX has shown that gender equality is not a checkbox exercise but a **driver of resilience, innovation, and system change**. Through structured monitoring, inclusive design, active communication, and global engagement, the project offers a scalable model for gender integration in Nexus research. As the gender pillar concludes, the project leaves behind tools, partnerships, visibility, and inspiration for future efforts—anchored in the belief that **“Women Are the Nexus.”**

Introduction

BONEX PRIMA project's main aim is to provide practical and adapted tools, examine concrete and context-adapted technological innovations, enhance policies and governance, and facilitate **WEFe Nexus practical implementation that balances the social, economic, and ecological trade-offs**.

To achieve such an ambitious goal, BONEX brings together 16 partners from 8 different European and non-European countries, and a third party, who will cooperate with the research and innovation as well as stakeholder engagement, dissemination and exploitation activities as included in the project work plan.

Within BONEX, **gender mainstreaming** has been a **key transversal priority** throughout the implementation of all these activities foreseen, with also relevance to the inclusive multi-actor approach and transdisciplinary orientation of the project.

Gender mainstreaming requires raising awareness and the elaboration of gender action plans with the corresponding monitoring. Further, it needs to make sure that stakeholders are included and verbally addressed in a gender, minority sensitive and balanced manner throughout all steps of the BONEX WEFe Framework, among others. As part of this, the multi-actor approach, the selection of WEFe solutions and the choice of assessment and performance criteria and scenarios need to ensure representation of gender and minority issues and impacts, specifically on these groups.

BONEX interventions of specific WEFe solutions, as well as communication and dissemination activities, are to be examined as regards their impact on gender and minorities. A specific task on Gender was included in WP5 (task 5.6) to ensure that gender mainstreaming is effectively applied in all stages of the project and have been implemented during the whole project duration.

In addition, BONEX was aligned with several relevant initiatives:

- The Union for Mediterranean (UfM) Water Agenda which recognises the WEFe nexus concept as the key to ensuring human well-being, reducing poverty and contributing to sustainable development, and the interlinks between water, food, energy, and ecosystems (including GHG), **which could both negatively and positively affect one another**, and the promising role of Nexus as a tool to consider synergies, the trade-off and cross-cutting issues such as gender, stakeholder engagement, rights, poverty, and transboundary cooperation.
- **Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI)** principles which consider the support of Gender Equality by all partners, not only in demonstration developments but also in near-to-market and decision-making activities. Figures 1 and 2 show the work performed on the frame of the [EU project RRI Toolkit](#) on what means Gender Equality in RRI terms and how to introduce it in your daily work:

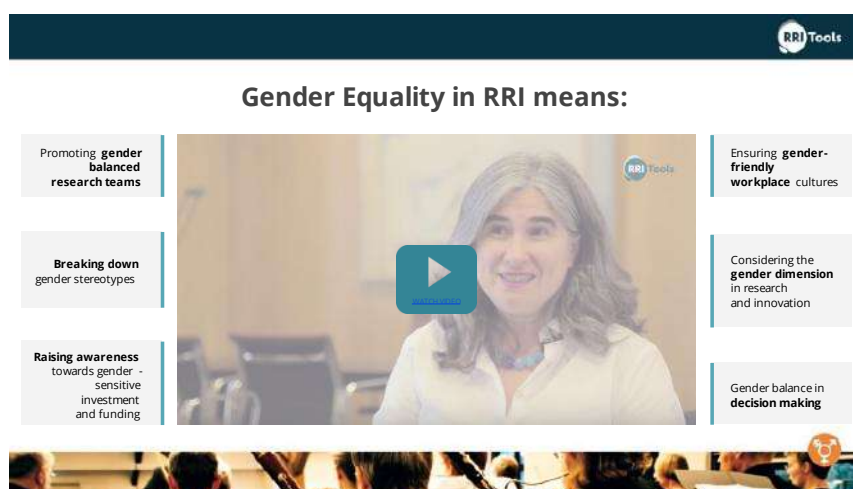


Figure 1. – RRI Toolkit (<https://rri-tools.eu/gender-equality>)^{9a}

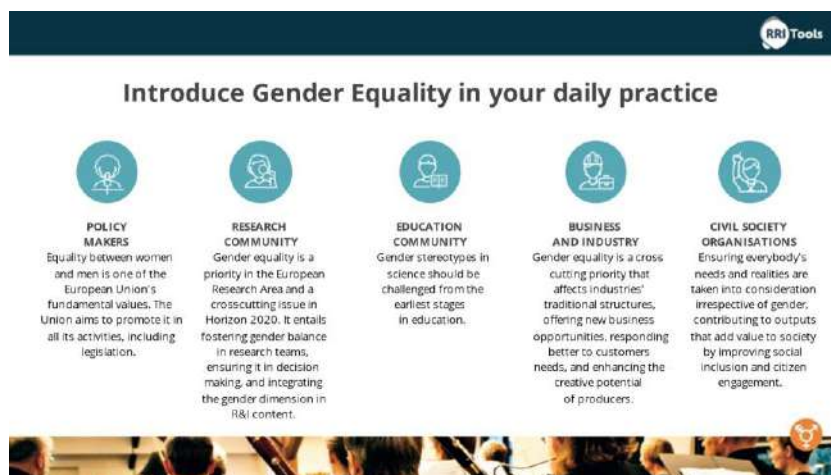


Figure 2 -RRI Toolkit (<https://rri-tools.eu/gender-equality>)^{9b}

A **Gender Committee** was formed in the frame of the project to ensure that gender issues and minorities are well represented throughout the WEFef development process, in terms of voices representation and recommendations of workable solutions. The Committee met five times to seek to ensure that gender biases of current and proposed public, private, and civil society WEFef Nexus practices and their governance were properly addressed in a way that guarantees equality between men and women and appropriate consideration of minorities. In addition, the Gender Committee has monitored any gender related issue happening in the frame of the project to propose the corrective measures if necessary.

This report summarised the BONEX Gender Action plan (proposed in the first version of D5.6 issued by M6), provides guidelines and specific actions to address and prevent potential gender biases that could occur within the project and include the gender related activities carried out in the frame of the project.

1 Gender dimension key concepts

The European Commission (EC) is a global leader in integrating the gender dimension in research and policy. Many efforts have been made in the last years to integrate sex and gender analysis into research and innovation as an effective path to add value to research, secure Europe's leadership in science and technology, and support its inclusive growth.

Despite the efforts, there are still inequalities that need urgent attention. According to the EC "*She Figures 2018*" Report (Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, 2019)², in EU Member states is still present a disproportion between women and men, in both the academia and private sector. This is even more important when related to senior levels and decision-making positions.

In academia, women make up less than 50 % of doctoral students, doctoral graduates, and academic staff. In the top academic grade, in particular, women are a clear minority and their position since 2013 has improved only slightly. A lower proportion of women working as R&D researchers (33.4% in 2015) can be observed, while often representing the majority of the R&D supporting staff. This may be one of the consequences of fewer women getting a doctoral degree, even though they are more likely to graduate at the bachelor's level than men. The average growth rate of doctoral graduates between 2007 and 2016 was slightly higher for women and it is important to point out that this increase has been observed in several specific fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) where women are strongly underrepresented.

Finally, women are still underrepresented in scientific authorship in the EU-28. The ratio of women to men in the corresponding authorship for all fields of R&D combined was 0.47 between 2013 and 2017, which is equivalent to 32% of all publications having a woman as a corresponding author.

Within BONEX, the objective was to actively work to ensure a high presence of women as authors of the project publications and articles.

In the private sector, the situation is not better. In 2016 in fact, in two-thirds of the countries analysed, 8.1% of women were employed under precarious working contracts compared to 5.2% of men.

In the vast majority of countries, women working in scientific R&D earn less on average than men, with the gender pay gap being barely wider than in the total economy.

Furthermore, the results of the Interim evaluation of H2020 found that fewer funded research proposals than expected, incorporated sex and gender analysis. This is correlated to the lack of knowledge about how to effectively consider a gender perspective and conduct gender and sex analysis, in addition to the absence of training on gender issues (European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, 2017)¹.

Therefore, The EC and PRIMA Foundation are truly committed to going on supporting gender equality, and this has been reflected in specific actions taken within the Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe programmes:

- For some entities, it is mandatory to have a **Gender Equality Plan** implemented to be eligible for funding.
- Gender balance is one of the **evaluation criteria** assessed by evaluators to prioritise and rank proposals which are above the threshold.
- This is needed to **balance project teams and leading roles** for gender equality.

Balanced teams bring several benefits to the workplace. For example, having women and men on the teams means highlighting the different points of view and approaches that emerge from different life experiences. This multiplicity of perspectives supports the creation, and innovation processes and helps organizations to better take advantage of new opportunities. It also encourages organizations to challenge gender stereotypes.

- The **gender dimensions** should also be considered during the **project implementation phases**.

The integration of gender dimensions into research activities contributes to increasing the added value to the project results, outcomes, and impacts, not only at the societal level, but also in terms of market penetration of the project results. It helps researchers and managers to rethink and reshape the current behaviours and attitudes and develop solutions that are best suited to the needs of specific target groups.

BONEX project was committed to integrating sex and gender aspects into the foreseen research and innovation activities, including equal opportunities for women and men, and considering the gender dimension of research contributing to excellence in research.

We truly believe that an inclusive science needs innovative research methods, meaning that excellent research considers sex, gender, and intersectionality.

1.1 Definitions

It is important to get familiar with the specific nomenclature related to gender and sex dimensions. Table 1 includes the definitions of several key concepts to understand the gender dimension.

Table 1.- Key concept definitions

Key concept	Definition
Sex	Sex refers to biological characteristics that distinguish between males and females.
Gender	Gender refers to sociocultural norms, identities and relations that (1) structure societies and organisations and (2) shape behaviours, products, technologies, environments, and knowledge.
Gender identity	Gender identity is the personal sense of one's gender. Gender identity can correlate with a person's assigned sex at birth or can differ from it. Gender expression typically reflects a person's gender identity, but this is not always the case. While a person may express behaviours, attitudes, and appearances consistent with a particular gender role, such expression may not necessarily reflect their gender identity (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_identity) ¹⁶ .

Gender bias	Gender bias is the often unintentional and implicit differentiation between men and women by placing one gender in a hierarchical position relative to the other in a certain context, as a result of stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity.
Gender mainstreaming	Gender Mainstreaming Gender mainstreaming is a strategy towards realising gender equality. As written on EIGE's official webpage, "it involves the integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures and spending programmes, to promote equality between women and men, and combating discrimination" (https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/what-is-gender-mainstreaming) ⁶ . Gender Mainstreaming is the gender equality strategy, which means that project objectives and results are defined in such a way that the wishes and needs of men and women are equally valued and favoured through the project activities.
Gender Sensitivity	A gender-sensitive policy, activity or project that ensures a balanced gender relationship through equal distribution and sharing of power between women and men in the project.
Gender pay gap	The gender pay gap (GPG) is the difference between the average gross hourly earnings of paid women and men employees expressed as a percentage of the average gross hourly earnings of paid men employees. (More information may be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/structure-of-earnings-survey) ⁷ .
Climate equity [adapted from ICLEI and WRI]	Climate equity ensures that all people have access and opportunity to benefit from climate actions, while not bearing an unequal burden of the impacts of climate change. This requires a holistic approach to equity in climate work that divides the burden of responding to climate change amongst those who contribute the most to the issue while sharing the opportunities and benefits that equitable climate action presents with those that are most impacted.
Gender Disaggregated Data	Data that can be broken down by gender groups - men, women and gender minorities - to allow for analysis of the different challenges they face.
Inclusive Climate Action (ICA)	The consideration of how people and communities may be impacted by climate change and climate actions, given their well-being, prosperity, and location in a city. Implementing innovative and transformational actions that tackle both climate change and social injustice
Inclusion / Inclusivity	The practice of including relevant stakeholders and communities, particularly marginalised groups, in the policy-making and urban governance process, to ensure a fair policy process with equitable outcomes despite their differential needs.
Intersectionality	'Intersectionality' describes overlapping or intersecting categories such as gender, sex, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation and geographical location that combine to inform individuals' identities and experiences. Researchers and engineers should not consider gender in isolation; gender identities, norms and relations both shape and are shaped by other social attributes.
<i>Sources:</i> European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, 2020 ³ European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, 2020 ⁴ M.S. Ujeyo, et. al, 2017 ¹⁰	

1.2 What is Gendered innovation?

Gendered Innovations was initiated at Stanford University in July 2009. Within FP7, the EC funded an Expert Group working on "Innovation through Gender/Gendered Innovations" (2011-2013), aimed at developing the gender dimension in EU research and innovation. The U.S. National Science Foundation joined the project in January 2012. From 2018 to 2020, the Horizon 2020 Expert Group, Gendered Innovations (G12), updated and expanded the Gendered Innovations methods and case studies.

According to the [Gendered Innovations project](#), “*Gendered Innovations harness the creative power of sex, gender, and intersectional analysis for innovation and discovery. Considering these approaches may add valuable dimensions to research. They may take research in new directions*”¹².

The goal of the project is to provide scientists, researchers, and engineers with practical methods for sex and gender analysis, as well as several case studies as concrete illustrations of how sex, gender and intersectional analysis leads to innovation. To match the global reach of science and technology, methods of sex and gender analysis were developed through international collaborations.

Gendered Innovations stimulate gender-responsible science and technology, enhancing the quality of life for women, men, and non-binary worldwide, and adding value to research and engineering, society, and business. For a summary, see [Sex and Gender Analysis Improves Science and Engineering](#) (Tannenbaum, et.al, 2019)⁹. See also [Gendered Innovations 2: How Inclusive Analysis Contributes to Research and Innovation](#)⁹.

AGRICULTURE: EMBEDDING GENDER NORMS IN INNOVATION PROCESSES



The challenge

Agricultural innovations tend to affect women and men differently. Most innovations focus on resolving technical problems, such as raising yields, withstanding environmental stress and managing poor soil or seeds. Such innovations often fail to account for (1) how gender norms influence the implementation of technical solutions or (2) how the implementation of technical solutions will influence gender norms. Consequently, innovations may not reach women and may even amplify gender inequality.

Method: analysing gender

Gender experts across the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) created Enabling gender equality in agricultural and environmental innovation (Gennovate), aimed at developing gender-transformative approaches that embed gender norms in innovation processes.

These include:

1. fostering critical examination of gender roles, norms and relations;
2. recognising and strengthening positive norms that support equality;
3. promoting the position of women, girls and marginalised groups;
4. transforming underlying social structures, policies and widely held beliefs that perpetuate gender inequality.

Gendered innovations

1. **Gill nets in Bangladesh.** Gender-related cultural and religious expectations prohibit women in rural Bangladesh from harvesting fish, even from their own ponds. Such tasks are seen as the responsibility of men. Women are also reluctant to enter ponds because they get their saris wet. To support gender equality and to ensure food security, WorldFish, a part of the CGIAR, introduced gill nets in the poorest parts of Bangladesh. The nets, which women can make themselves, are used to catch the nutrient-rich mola fish. Crucial to the success of this project were initiatives addressing gender consciousness to ensure that husbands, in-laws and neighbours supported the new role of women in cultivating fish and catching them with gill nets.
2. **Embedding gender norms in innovation processes.** CGIAR gender experts have proposed in-depth research methods to include gender norms in large-scale agricultural research and development (R & D) programmes. In a 4-year project (2014–2018) sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, they collaborated in Gennovate to develop extensive methodologies, reports, articles, briefs and videos as resources for research teams, and to understand how gender norms and innovation processes in the management of agriculture and natural resources influence each other in diverse rural settings.

The EC report *Gendered Innovations 2: How inclusive analysis contributes to research and innovation* (2020)⁴, prepared by the Gender Expert Group, includes 15 case studies (Annex A) from several different fields of research as well as policy recommendations and methods for implementation of gendered innovation.

The expert group describes the added value as follows, “Integrating sex and/or gender analysis into research and innovation:

- adds value to research in terms of excellence, creativity, and business opportunities.
- helps researchers and innovators question gender norms and stereotypes, and rethink standards and reference models.
- leads to an in-depth understanding of diverse gender needs, behaviours, and attitudes.
- addresses the diverse needs of citizens of the European Union and thereby enhances the societal relevance of the knowledge, technologies and innovations produced.
- contributes to the production of goods and services better suited to new markets.”⁴

Figure 3 -Case study included in the EC Gendered Innovations 2

The expert group have developed different methods for supporting Gendered innovations. General methods included:

- Analysing sex
- Analysing gender
- Intersectional approaches
- Co-creation and participatory research
- Asking about gender and sex in surveys.

The detailed methodology can be found in Annex B of the policy review [Gendered Innovations 2: How inclusive analysis contributes to research and innovation by the European](#) (2020)⁴.

2 Gender and Climate Change

According to UN Women:

the climate crisis is not “gender neutral”. Women and girls experience the greatest impacts of climate change, which amplifies existing gender inequalities and poses unique threats to their livelihoods, health, and safety.

Women highly depend to the access to natural resources to secure food and water for their surveillance and the one of their families.

Climate change negative effects- including global warming, sea-level rise and changes in seasonal rainfall - are strongly affecting availability and quality of water for agriculture, which is the most important employment sector for women in low- and lower-middle income countries. As global average, 45% of the agriculture workforce are women.

This situation is putting more and more pressure on women and also girls, that may leave school to help their mothers. In the worst situation, the increasingly unliveable conditions force them to migrant. According to UN Environment, it is estimated that 80% of people displaced by climate change are women.

Furthermore, an increase in extreme weather events such as floods and droughts will have severe consequences on global health and infrastructure.

Women are often the most impacted by climate change but, despite the disproportionate risks that they face, their unique skills and knowledge are key in responding to the climate crisis.

Therefore, the climate actions to be proposed and delivered should be rooted in the principles of inclusivity and equity and response to social inequalities.

As an example, CARE proposes a [gender continuum](#) as a self-assessment program quality and learning tool to position a project according to the level of gender integration, from harmful to transformative. The tool is to be used by any staff involved in project management, design, implementation, and/or monitoring evaluation and learning, throughout the project lifecycle.

HARMFUL	NEUTRAL	SENSITIVE	RESPONSIVE	TRANSFORMATIVE
Programming that ignores the economic/ social/political roles, rights, entitlements, responsibilities, obligations, and power relations associated with being female and male; as well as the dynamics between and amongst men and women, boys and girls	Programming that works with gender norms. Reinforces and may take advantage of pre-existing gender inequitable structures, systems, and divisions in society relating to gender. Does not consider how gender roles and relations can impede the achievement of programming outcomes, or how programming can negatively affect gender roles and relations.	Programming that adapts to gender norms. Works around existing gender differences and inequalities to ensure equitable allocation/ services/support aligned with the pre-existing gender differences, structures, systems, and power divisions in society. Aware of the effect of leveraging inequitable gender norms for the outcomes of programming.	Programming that challenges inequitable gender norms. Responds to the different needs and constraints of individuals based on their gender and sexuality. Opens space for discussing, challenging, and engaging with inequitable gender structures, systems, divisions, and power relations. Provides the opportunity for participants to question, experiment and challenge gender inequities.	Policies and programs that change inequitable gender norms and relations to promote equality. Not only has the ambition to transform gender, but has the resources, willingness and capacity to institutionalise transformative programming.

Figure 5 - CARE Gender Continuum – Retrieved from [CARE, 2019, Gender Marker Guidance Note](#)

3 BONEX gender action plan

As previously mentioned, a specific task (task 5.6) on **Gender mainstreaming and management** was included within WP5. It has been active during the whole project duration, and all partners contribute to its implementation.

The main objectives of this task were: to challenge gender stereotypes and to reinforce the involvement of women in science and research, technological developments, marketing and management activities; to achieve gender balance in our project and the partners' teams, encouraging consortium members to implement gender equality measures in their organizations; to understand the role of gender in the WEFE Nexus conversations and to identify any gender related issue that needed to be addressed.

This Gender Action Report (D5.6 final version) documents the extent to which actions promoting gender equality have been performed throughout the project.

The activities carried out in the frame of the project had been organised as follows:

3.1 BONEX gender balance

The balance in the **project team and the members of the Gender Committee** has been assessed continuously (six times) to acknowledge gender balance, as well as a tool to include improvements, if needed.

A first assessment of the balance in the project team was performed during the proposal preparation phase leading to the 45% of women in the project team, of a total of 47 persons named. A second assessment have been performed in month 6, October 2022, and the situation has slightly changed. The last assessment, May 2025, reported that the project team is composed of 84 managers, researchers, technicians, administrative staff etc., of which 54% are women.

Moreover, women are well represented in the BONEX decision-making bodies. The coordinator is a woman as well as the leader of 3 of the 5 WPs. In addition, women represent 50% of the Operational Project Coordination team and 50% of the Advisory Board as can be seen in table 2.

Table 2.- Gender balance BONEX management bodies

Partners	Total	Women (%)	Men (%)
WP leaders	5	3 (60%)	2 (40%)
Operational Project Coordination team	4	2 (50%)	2 (50%)
External Advisory Board	4	2 (50%)	2 (50%)

This data shows the positive progression of the project in terms of women participation, with a balance team where women have occupied leadership roles and have actively participated in all project activities. However, as included in section 3.5 of this report, the perception of the project participants is not totally aligned with what is presented by the figures.

In the case of the Gender Committee composition, the first assessment (October 2022) showed that 65% of the 34 members were women. In May 2025, 22 of the 36 members were women, meaning the 61%. It can be concluded that the Gender Committee has under representation of men, and this could be based on the understanding of the Gender Committee as a "women" committee and not as a committee in charge of monitoring gender issues which affect both, men and women, even though that was clarified from the very beginning.

In addition, disaggregated data on the gender balance in the participants to the BONEX workshops have been collected. The summary of total attendees to the four workshops organised in each country is included in the following table.

Table 3.- Gender balance among workshops attendees

Country	Total attendees	Women (%)	Men (%)
Italy	111	25%	75%
Jordan	114	37%	63%
Lebanon	164	27%	73%

Morocco	149	40%	60%
Portugal	165	44%	66%
Spain	149	31%	69%
Tunisia	291	48%	52%

These figures lead to an average of a participation of 35% of females, which is slightly lower than the expected 40%. This is reflecting the reality of the sectors represented in BONEX and the type of actors participating which are male dominated and with underrepresentation of women in the leadership and decision-making bodies.

Furthermore, efforts have been made to achieve gender balance as well in the invited speakers to project the workshops. In total, 146 speakers have been invited to the 28 workshops organised in the seven countries implementing the Demo Projects. The gender balance has been achieved with a female speakers participation of 40%.

In terms of the job opportunities being created by the project for researchers, they have been occupied in majority by women. From the 28 positions reported by the consortium, 21 were given to women, meaning 75% of the total.

Finally, one of the gender objectives of BONEX was to encourage the authorship of women in the articles published within the project. From the 14 publications, 50% of main author and 41% of the total 51 authors are women.

3.2 BONEX Gender Committee

As part of BONEX's commitment to gender mainstreaming, a dedicated **Gender Committee** was formally established at the beginning of the project as described in the Project Management and coordination work package (WP5), in the dedicated Task 5.6 Gender mainstreaming and management, with representatives from all project partners.

The main goal of the committee was to ensure that gender considerations are embedded in all project deliverables, activities, and governance structures; to identify and respond to imbalances or discriminatory patterns in participation; to promote good practices in gender-sensitive communication, dissemination, and stakeholder engagement; and to encourage partner organisations to adopt Gender Equality Plans (GEPs), aligning with EU and PRIMA guidelines.

The committee has been essential in monitoring gender balance, raising awareness, and facilitating institutional learning on gender equality across the WEF Nexus framework. As previously mentioned, the committee was formed by representative from all project partners and the third party.

The committee has met six times during the project lifetime:

- **Gender Committee 1 (Dec 2022):** Launched the Gender Action Plan (BONEX Deliverable 5.6) and established expectations for all WPs to integrate gender considerations. A strategy to promote gender balance in workshops, speakers' panels and any project event was discussed, particularly targeting male-dominated sectors like agriculture.



Figure 1.- BONEX Gender Committee meeting December 2022 (Source: BONEX)

- **Gender Committee 2 (June 2023):** Focused on updating gender balance data, engaging partners in gender campaigns (e.g., Women in Science, WEFEM), and preparing specific dissemination materials.

First data on women participating in the project workshops was presented as shown in Figure 2, as well as the of gender perspective in DP survey (figure 3).

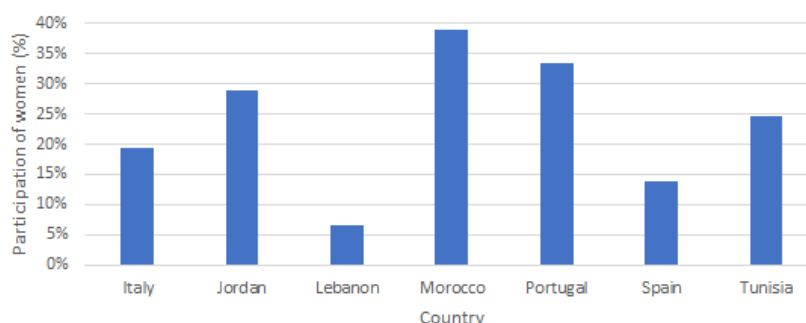


Figure 2.- BONEX disaggregated data on women attendance (Source: BONEX)

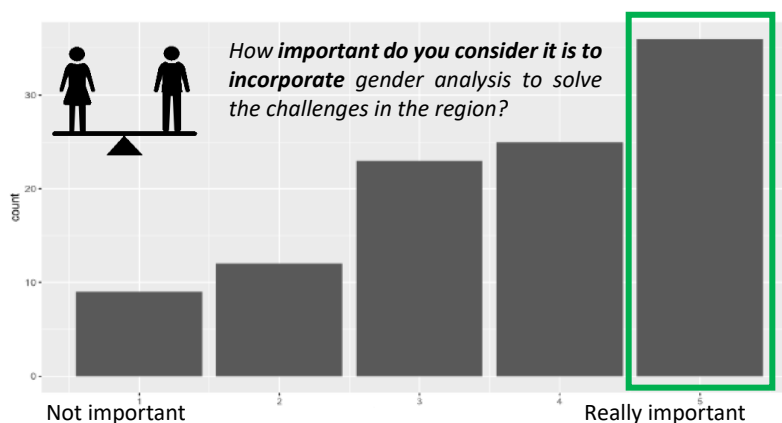


Figure 3- Module 4 survey outcomes (Source: BONEX)

- **Gender Committee 3 (Oct 2023):** Reviewed updated gender statistics (52% women in the project team), presented reports from partners with or without GEPs, and reinforced the use of tools like the WEP Gap Analysis and the RRI Toolkit.

It was agreed to share best practices from partners on gender-related initiatives in their organisations, starting with BIOAZUL.

A KPI questionnaire for internal monitoring was revised to be launched in November 2023 to develop more robust gender assessments.

- **Gender Committee 4 (May 2024):** Other best practices from partners such as NOVA were shared, and

promoted ongoing campaigns such as WEFE Women Leadership, and planned dedicated gender-focused webinars and communications. A Webinar on the Women Empowerment Principles was given during the meeting by Ms. Mihwa Park, WEP Coordinator UN Women (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/mihwapark1/>). The BONEX gender-focused survey was launched during the meeting.

- **Gender Committee 5 (February 2025):** just after the BONEX international conference was devoted to assessing the Pillar 2 on Gender and WEFE and to organise the pending tasks until the end of the project (August 2025).

3.3 BONEX dissemination and communication

Gender equality has been a core priority of the BONEX project, embedded in its communication and outreach efforts to promote inclusivity, empower women, and address gender challenges in the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystem (WEFE) Nexus.

BONEX integrates gender equality as a cross-cutting priority in its communication and dissemination (C&D) plan (BONEX CDP, deliverable 4.1) as well as in the stakeholder engagement strategy. This commitment is operationalized through a dedicated section of the plan and through tailored messaging, inclusive language, and gender-sensitive outreach actions.

BONEX C&D plan defines four main gender communication objectives:

- Balanced representation of women and men in communication materials, events, and visual content.
- Fair portrayal, avoiding stereotypes and promoting multi-dimensional, inclusive narratives.
- Explicit coverage of gender equality as a core theme of the project.
- Use of gender-neutral and inclusive language in all internal and external communication. The plan promotes non-sexist, inclusive, and gender-fair language, based on international guidelines from the European Parliament and the United Nations, adapted to the multilingual context of the project (Arabic, French, Spanish, English). Strategies include, among others, the use of neutral terms (e.g., “chairperson” instead of “chairman”), the avoidance of binary stereotypes, consistent forms of address (e.g., “Ms.” or “Dr.”), inclusion of both genders when relevant (e.g., “he or she”).

C&D of the gender activities and results, combined with gender equality advocacy campaigns within the project have been designed to support the capacity building of project partners in gender mainstreaming and gender equality so that the Gender Action Plan was well understood and properly adopted by them and by external stakeholders participating in BONEX activities.

BIOAZUL, as a signatory of the [Women’s Empowerment Principles](https://weps-gapanalysis.org/) (WEPs)¹⁴ initiative, established by UN Global Compact and UN Women, has carried out the business-driven Gap Analyses Tool developed by WEPs (<https://weps-gapanalysis.org/>)¹⁵, for assessing their gender equality performance and draw a strategy to advance internally in gender equality. That was a very useful exercise before starting to work on the company’s Gender Equality Plan. Partners were invited to a dedicated webinars on the WEPs initiative and Gap Analyses Tool to advance internally in the gender strategy that took place during the Gender Committee 4 (May 2024): Furthermore, advocating for gender equality alliances helped promote good practices in the research and innovation field. For this purpose, examples of successful women working in this field have also been showcased together with the identification of gender related projects and initiatives as shown in table 3.

Table 4.- Women and initiatives identified

Women and initiatives	Further Info
Begüm Mutus	(26) BEGUM MUTUS LinkedIn
Vanessa Archontidou	(26) Vanessa Archontidou LinkedIn
Maura Farell	Coordinator FLIARA project. (26) Maura Farrell LinkedIn

Soukaina Bouraoui	CAWTAR's Director (Center of Arab Woman for Training and Research). (26) Soukaina Bouraoui LinkedIn
Marcela Linková	Coordinator GENDERACTIONplus project (26) Marcela Linkova LinkedIn
Ifempower project	Home - IFEMPOWER
Collectivo Fractal	https://colectivofractal.org/
FLIARA project	https://fliara.eu/
TARGETED-MPI project	https://targeted-mpi.eu/
SWIFT project	https://swiftproject.eu/
EWA - Empowering Women in Agrifood	https://ewa.eitfood.eu/company/ewa-empowering-women-in-agrifood
SAWI project	https://aub.edu.lb/sawi/Pages/default.aspx
GENDERACTIONplus project	https://h2020.genderaction.eu/
INSPIRE project	https://inspirequality.eu/
GRASS Ceiling project	https://www.grassceiling.eu/
GILL project	https://gi-ll.eu/
SOFAR project	Sofar Project

Moreover, as part of its social media strategy, BONEX has launched specific initiatives to elevate gender visibility. Key communication actions included:

- #WEFeWomenLeadership Campaign: A series of short videos featuring women leaders from the BONEX consortium sharing their experiences, achievements, and insights in science and WEFE sectors.
- #BONEXGenderActions Campaign: Highlighting gender integration in all BONEX Demonstration Pilots, showcasing women's roles as leaders, innovators, and key actors in WEFE Nexus solutions.
- Women-Related Anniversaries: Dedicated posts for events such as the International Day of Women and Girls in Science (11 February), International Women's Day (8 March), and International Day of Rural Women.
- Promotion of Gender Events: Communication of BONEX partners' participation in gender-related conferences and workshops, reinforcing the project's active role in inclusivity discussions.
- Visibility of External Gender Initiatives: Promotion of relevant events in science, innovation, and gender equality to encourage engagement and awareness.

In addition, inclusive visual materials (e.g., posters, videos) and templates feature balanced gender representation.



Figure 4. BONEX Gender Flyer (Source: BONEX)

Within BONEX official website, there is a dedicated section to Gender equality, which showcases BONEX's gender objectives, actions, and results. It addresses persistent inequalities in the agricultural workforce and highlights BONEX's measures to integrate gender at all levels. The Gender Equality section also connects visitors to dedicated subsections where materials and updates are collected:

- Downloads: Flyers, deliverables, articles, presentations, and abstracts.
- Gender Campaigns: All communication campaigns related to gender issues.
- Latest News: Updates on events, activities, and milestones related to gender equality within the project.

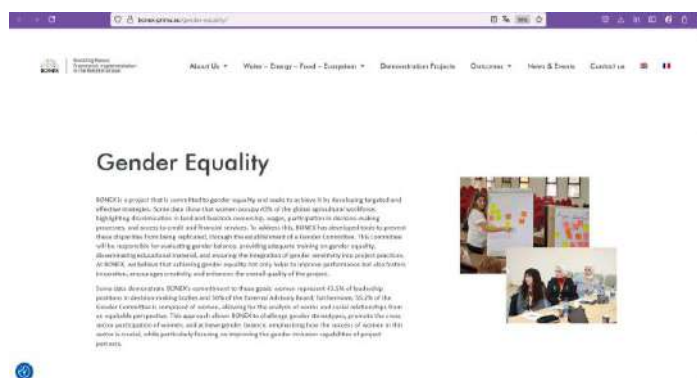


Figure 5. Gender section in the project website (Source: BONEX)

Below a list with some examples of BONEX Gender Actions organised in the frame of the project:

- **National Agriculture Day of Tunisia.** On May 16, 2023, BONEX Team members in Tunisia celebrated with the Regional Directorate of Agricultural Development of Monastir (CRDA Monastir), alongside the new Director General, Ms. Farida Joumade Mansour.
- **International Mediterranean Day.** Dr. Olfa Mahjoub from the BONEX team in Tunisia and Ms. Sara Mekada, a young woman farmer and BONEX project participant, were invited to participate actively in the event on November 28, 2023.
- **Rural women in the heart of the WEFE Nexus.** On November 28, 2023, Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and FFEM co-hosted a conference titled "Rural Women in the Heart of the WEFE Nexus," bringing together diverse stakeholders to discuss cooperation and innovation in the WEFE Nexus.
- **Autumn School Aurora 2023.** The Autumn School AURORA 2023 prioritized gender equality, with students from Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, and Germany contributing diverse perspectives to discussions on sustainable agriculture in the MENA region.
- **2nd Spanish BONEX Workshop in La Axarquía.** BIOAZUL, alongside the UAL and the UCO, hosted the 2nd BONEX Workshop in La Axarquía (Málaga, Spain) on November 14, 2023. The workshop highlighted "Agrarian Innovation for Sustainability: Gender-Equal Opportunities and Impacts in the Use of Reclaimed Water in Axarquía".
- **2nd Lebanese BONEX workshop at the AUB.** On November 23rd, 2023, the second BONEX workshop in Lebanon, highlighting gender equality. The focus was on exploring the Agrivoltaics solution within Lebanon's WEFE Nexus.
- **2nd Jordanian BONEX workshop in GJU.** On December 14th, 2023, during the workshop hosted by the GJU and IUCN-ROWA, it was emphasized gender equity in the Jordan DP focused on the Wadi Mujib Basin to develop gender-sensitive solutions for WEFE nexus challenges.

- **WEFE Nexus International Conference.** BONEX project has made gender equality a central pillar of its work, recognizing that inclusive participation and the empowerment of women are essential for the success and sustainability of WEFE Nexus initiatives. This commitment was prominently featured at the **WEFE Nexus International Conference**, held in Rabat (Morocco) on February 11–12, 2025, and co-organised with the SureNexus project. that marked a turning point for gender integration in Nexus dialogues across the Mediterranean. Uniquely structured around **three thematic pillars, Governance, Innovation, and Gender**, the event showcased the transformative role of women in WEFE governance and explicitly positioned gender not as a cross-cutting topic but as a **core domain of Nexus sustainability**.



Figure 6. BONEX international conference (Source: BONEX)

- Pillar 2, “Gender and the WEFE Nexus,” included a special session highlighting the crucial role of gender in managing WEFE resources, promoting the empowerment of women within the Nexus approach.



Figure 7. Gender pillar agenda (Source: BONEX)

- An oral presentation and poster on “Assessing the BONEX Project Through a Gender Lens: Individual and Collective Perspectives on Gender Dynamics” were presented by Antonia Lorenzo (BIOAZUL), Gabriela Abreu and Enrica Garau (University of Almería), and Irene Pérez (NOVA University Lisbon).

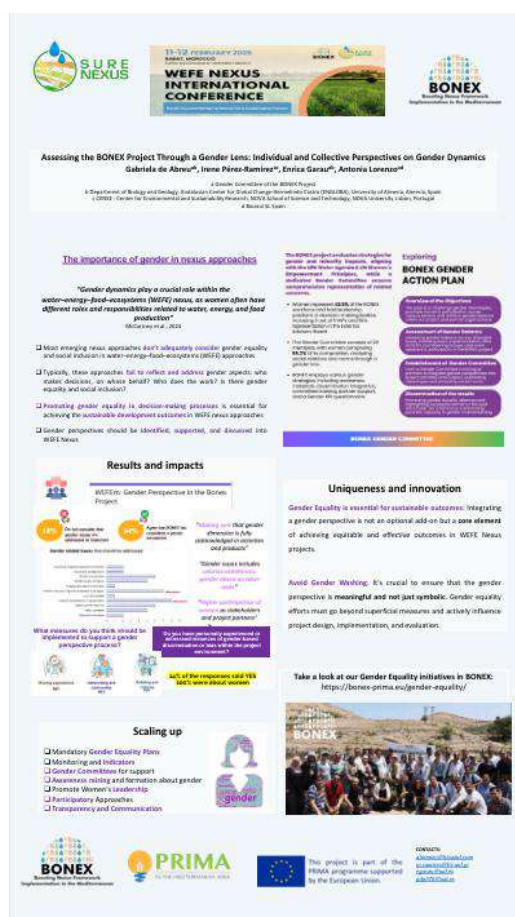


Figure 8. Gender poster (Source: BONEX)

Main key messages from the conference are summarised below:

- Women are not just beneficiaries but **key agents of change** in managing water, energy, and food systems.
- **Gender remains a missing dimension** in many sustainability and innovation projects. Only **1 of the 51 abstracts** submitted to the conference addressed gender explicitly.
- PRIMA's new programme will **require gender strategy plans** in all funded projects, ensuring meaningful integration rather than symbolic gestures. Despite important advances, gender considerations were largely absent from the other two pillars of the conference (Governance and Innovation), highlighting the **urgency of mainstreaming gender across all areas** of Nexus implementation.

The Rabat Conference culminated in a set of policy-oriented recommendations. Those directly linked to gender include:

- **Institutionalize gender equality plans** in WEFE Nexus projects and platforms.
- **Ensure equal and meaningful participation of women** in all levels of governance and decision-making.
- **Invest in women-led innovations** in fields such as clean energy, climate-smart agriculture, and water management.
- **Promote inclusive communication**, training, and participatory approaches that consider gender diversity.
- **Support cross-border and community-based women's networks** to foster leadership and

knowledge-sharing in the Mediterranean.

These policy outcomes reflect a **shared commitment to shift from tokenistic inclusion to transformative gender integration** in Nexus thinking and practice.

Moreover, the results from a gender survey carry out within BONEX (see section 3.5), revealing gaps in awareness despite high perceived relevance.

Their stories reinforced the idea that **empowering women is not optional but fundamental** for building sustainable, just, and resilient systems.

As a final Reflection, the message is clear: **“Women are the Nexus.”** Their participation enhances the legitimacy, effectiveness, and innovation potential of WEFE-related policies and practices. Achieving gender equality in Nexus governance is both a **moral imperative** and a **strategic necessity** for navigating the sustainability challenges of the Mediterranean region.

- WEFE Nexus in Egypt and the MENA Region Conference. On May 13–14, 2025, the SureNexus project organized this hybrid conference. BONEX participated with the oral presentation “Assessing the BONEX Project Through a Gender Lens: Individual and Collective Perspectives on Gender Dynamics” delivered by Antonia Lorenzo (BIOAZUL), showcasing the project’s gender-related work.
- UNESCO-IWSSM GWSI Issue 7 on Gender and Water. On February 19, 2025, BONEX submitted a proposal to contribute a chapter titled “Gender Lens in Mediterranean Research Projects: The BONEX Project” to the UNESCO Global Water Security Issues (GWSI) Series – Issue 7. The proposal was accepted on March 31, 2025, and the full chapter was submitted on June 15, 2025, for review. The issue, focusing on “Water and Gender,” will be published between 2026 and 2027.
- World Water Congress – Marrakech, Morocco. From December 1–5, 2025, INRGREF will present the accepted abstract “Women are Custodians of Cultural Heritage and Local Knowledge in Agricultural Irrigation with Reclaimed Water in Tunisia” at the World Water Congress Water in a Changing World: Innovation and Adaptation.

3.4 Gender dimension in BONEX demonstration projects

Gender equity has been a central concern in the design and implementation of the seven BONEX Demonstration Projects (DPs), reflecting the project’s commitment to inclusive innovation and responsible research. While the approach to gender varied according to local contexts and institutional capacities, all seven DPs integrated actions to promote women’s participation, challenge existing inequalities, and capture gender-disaggregated data to inform decision-making.

Below is an overview of the gender mainstreaming efforts across the BONEX DPs:

DP Italy: Gender considerations in the Italian DP were primarily addressed during the stakeholder engagement phase. Initially, invitations to project workshops were sent to institutions, which often resulted in low female representation. To address this, a revised strategy targeted individual female stakeholders directly, increasing their participation. Moreover, project partner CBR initiated an internal process to adopt a Gender Equality Plan in line with Horizon Europe requirements, complementing the already established GEP at the University of Bologna (UNIBO).

DP Jordan: the Jordanian DP demonstrated how WEFE Nexus projects can support gender equity in traditionally male-dominated sectors. A youth agricultural cooperative was established with 43% female membership (10 women, 13 men). Women agricultural engineers received training and employment opportunities through hydroponic, a technology selected for its lower physical demands and high potential for skilled labour. The cooperative ensured women’s involvement in governance and profit-sharing, while targeted capacity-building enhanced their technical expertise and leadership in sustainable farming and solar energy systems.

DP Lebanon: Gender inclusion was embedded throughout all phases of the hydroponic DP led by the American University of Beirut (AUB). Over 60% of participants in workshops and trainings were women, many of whom had no prior experience in agri-tech. Through hands-on work in system design, nutrient monitoring, and data collection, women acquired new skills and confidence. Collaborating with AUB's Gender Studies Program ensured intersectional perspectives, while gender-disaggregated monitoring tracked impacts. Some women have since launched their own rooftop gardens or engaged in community outreach, showcasing their role as innovators in climate-resilient agriculture.

DP Morocco: In Morocco, gender was considered across all project components to ensure equitable benefit-sharing. Recognizing women's essential yet often invisible contributions to agriculture and water management, the project emphasized their inclusion in all stages, from participatory workshops to field demonstrations and consultations. Women were not only present but actively engaged in co-creating solutions and decision-making processes, helping to shift entrenched norms around gender roles.

DP Portugal: While not addressed as a standalone workstream, gender sensitivity was embedded throughout the Portuguese DP. The scientific team was led primarily by women, who also facilitated participatory workshops in rural regions. Near gender parity was achieved in these events, with significant representation from female farmers and members of civil society. Women's leadership was also visible in the implementation of the Knowledge and Evidence Review (KER) tool and in biodiversity conservation strategies. Gender-disaggregated data was collected, and KPIs were developed to track the social dimensions of nature-based solutions.

DP Spain: The Spanish DP has adopted a deliberate and structured approach to gender mainstreaming throughout all phases of implementation. Special attention was given to the participation of women in stakeholder engagement activities, particularly in the selection of panellists, workshop participants, and expert interviewees. Invitations were designed to promote the presence of female representatives from farming cooperatives, public administrations, research institutions, and the agribusiness sector. In parallel, the innovation projects showcased under the DP were required to demonstrate integration of gender dimensions, especially in the composition of decision-making bodies and project teams. These efforts reflect a broader strategy to avoid gender bias and challenge stereotypes, while actively promoting the role of women in innovation, sustainability, and rural development. The DP is located in the La Axarquía Water Oriented Living Lab, which since its start exemplifies a gender-sensitive approach to sustainable wastewater reuse in agriculture and has been recognized as a driver of rural innovation and employment, including the promotion of women's integration in the water and agri-tech sectors. The inclusion of female professionals across technical, managerial, and outreach roles in the Spanish DP contributed not only to greater gender balance, but also to enriching the diversity of perspectives in the co-design and evaluation of WEF Nexus solutions.

DP Tunisia: Tunisia's DP exhibited exemplary gender mainstreaming. The coordinator—a woman—also led a work package and sat on the Gender Committee. Women represented 70% of the research and technical staff, and 50% of the national Steering Committee. At the regional level, women made up 25–38% of the stakeholder group. At the local level, the demo site was managed by a young female farmer actively involved in all project activities. Despite low representation of women in the water reuse sector in Ouardanine (about 18%), the project organized targeted events to amplify their voices, including a dedicated gender session during the national policy workshop involving CAWTAR.

3.5 BONEX gender survey

The BONEX project has committed to integrating a gender perspective as a cross-cutting dimension in its activities. These collaborative efforts aim to align with international equality standards and enhance the project's impact by ensuring equitable and inclusive participation among its members. To assess progress, perceptions, challenges in gender equality, representation, and working conditions, a gender survey was conducted among consortium members.

The survey has an introductory screen, where participants were informed about the scope of the survey, and their involvement was entirely voluntary and confidential. A link was provided with information about

participants' legal rights concerning personal data and the terms of participation. To proceed, respondents were required to click a consent button, confirming their voluntary participation and agreement to the terms, including the processing of personal data. Only those who gave consent were able to access the subsequent screening questions and complete the survey.

The survey included a mix of question types: open-ended, yes/no, Likert scale, and multiple-choice questions. It was structured into three main thematic sections:

- **Section 1: Gender dimension within BONEX (Project scale).** This section focused on the integration of gender considerations within the BONEX project. Questions explored perceptions of gender awareness, the existence of a gender plan, committees and deliverables, and how effectively the project incorporated gender dimensions into its methodology, results, dissemination, and communication strategies.
- **Section 2: Gender dimension from a personal perspective (Individual scale).** This section aimed to gather information on participants' personal views on gender-related issues, including perceived inequalities or imbalances in work distribution, team composition, and inclusion in project processes. It also asked respondents to describe any gender-related issues they had witnessed or experienced within the project.
- **Section 3: Demographic information.** This final section collected basic demographic data such as age, gender, professional profile, and country of residence.

A pre-test of the survey was conducted in May 2024 to ensure that the questions were easily understandable and could be completed within 10-15 minutes. Based on the pre-test results, several questions were modified to improve readability and clarity.

Responses were collected from 35 consortium members across different entities and countries, with anonymity assured to encourage honest feedback. Quantitative data were analysed statistically, while qualitative responses were categorised into themes, such as representation, power dynamics, and salary equality.

With regards to data analysis, the survey data was entered into an Excel database to facilitate further analysis. A qualitative approach was used, beginning with a descriptive analysis of the closed-ended questions, such as yes/no, multiple-choice, and Likert scale items, by calculating relative frequencies, which were then presented using barplots and diagrams. To explore respondents' perceptions of gender issues, we applied qualitative content analysis. Responses to open-ended questions were reclassified based on the opinions and reasons expressed by participants and then organized into thematic categories.

3.5.1 Results

The findings of the study are presented on two levels: (i) the integration of the gender perspective within the BONEX project at an institutional scale; and (ii) the individual perceptions of gender-related issues among those involved in the project.

Survey responses revealed that 94.3% of participants perceived BONEX as addressing gender issues. However, only 26.7% had reviewed the gender deliverable. Key challenges identified included unequal gender representation in male-dominated sectors, negative power dynamics, and insufficient mechanisms for addressing discriminatory behaviours and promoting women's empowerment. Recommendations included prioritising experience exchanges (68.6%), networking (65.7%), and gender training activities (62.9%). While BONEX has made important progress in integrating a gender perspective.

- **Socio-demographic characterization of the sample**

A total of 35 surveys were completed by members of the BONEX project consortium, distributed across the nine countries represented by the project members. Data was collected during 2024. Respondents completed the survey online using the Google Forms platform. The survey was available in English.

From a total of 35 members, from which 54,3 % (n=19) were identified as women, 40% (n=15) by men, and 2,9% were identified as non-binary. The age group more representative of the members that completed the survey was under 35 years old (42,9%, n=15), followed by the age group between 36-50 (37,1%, n=14).

- **Consideration of the Gender Perspective in the BONEX project**

While BONEX incorporates learning and dissemination mechanisms focused on gender equality, their effectiveness has been considered as low by several respondents as, even though they acknowledge the existence of such mechanisms but argue that the project remains largely male-dominated. This is the perception which is not reflecting a well balance team and decision-making bodies. This may be linked to the role of the male members in powerful positions within their organisations and also at project level.

Moreover, results show variability in the perceived success of the project in achieving its short-, medium-, and long-term gender-related goals. A substantial proportion of respondents believe there is still room for improvement, particularly in ensuring equal participation and representation.

Respondents identified several priority areas regarding gender equality that the project should address. The most prominent include: 1) Unequal participation and representation (23%); 2) Need for the mainstreaming of the gender perspective across all phases (20%); 3) Women's empowerment (17%); 4) Negative power dynamics.

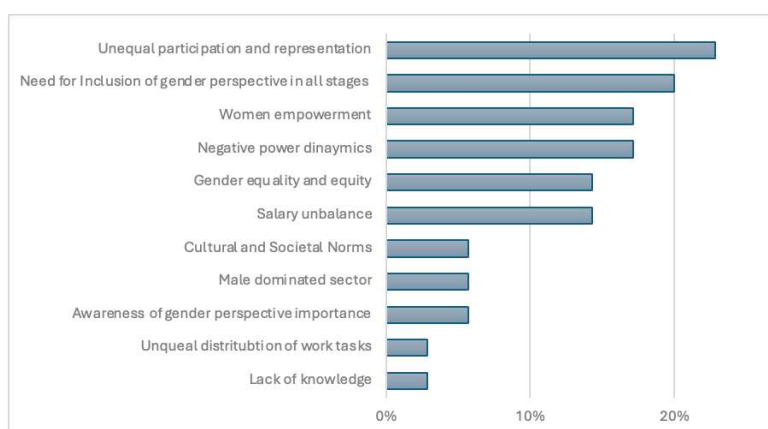


Figure 9. Key gender-related issues identified within the BONEX project. (Source: BONEX)

There are notable differences in perceptions of gender integration depending on the professional role within the project:

- Research and Development: This group was the most critical. While 70% acknowledge the inclusion of a gender perspective, only 50% believe gender issues have been adequately addressed. A lack of women in leadership roles and unequal task distribution were commonly mentioned.
- Coordination: Respondents in coordination roles were generally more positive, with 80% affirming the inclusion of a gender perspective and 70% stating that related issues had been addressed. However, they also highlighted the need for additional training and mentoring on gender matters.
- Financial Administration: This group expressed the most concern regarding pay transparency and equitable compensation. Only 60% believed that a gender perspective had been considered in the project.
- Innovation and Exploitation: Respondents in these roles were the most optimistic, 90% believed that a gender perspective had been incorporated, and 80% thought that gender issues were being addressed. Nonetheless, they also stressed the need for further training.

- **Gender Perspective at the Individual Level**

A large majority of the responders (85%) believed that the presence of women in working groups fosters dialogue, consensus-building, and greater inclusiveness during project discussions.

The analysis of participants' responses regarding gender equality and the distribution of roles within the BONEX project reveals a generally positive perception. Most respondents disagree with the idea that men are systematically assigned more prominent or qualified roles, and they also tend to reject the notion that principal investigators in the project are predominantly male. In fact, there is a strong consensus that gender is respected and valued within their respective working groups. Participants commonly expressed a high level of awareness and sensitivity to gender-related issues, indicating that, at least from their perspective, gender considerations are well integrated into daily project activities.

A separate set of data focusing more specifically on task distribution and traditional gender roles suggests a similarly encouraging outlook. Most respondents agree that roles are shared equitably between men and women, and few believe that women are relegated to less significant tasks. Only a small proportion expressed neutral or uncertain opinions on whether women are more focused on caregiving, relationships, or navigating power dynamics. Overall, the data points to a perception of fair distribution of responsibilities, though subtle traces of traditional role assumptions may persist in some cases.

When looking at the impact of gender on group dynamics and inclusion, the findings are slightly more complex. The presence of women in working groups is widely perceived as a positive influence, particularly in terms of enhancing communication and fostering collaborative dialogue. Many respondents noted that the inclusion of women improves the quality of group interaction and creates a more constructive working atmosphere. However, when it comes to expressing opinions freely or raising concerns within gender-balanced groups, perceptions were more divided. While some participants reported feeling comfortable and safe to speak openly, others expressed neutrality or even disagreement with statements related to psychological safety and freedom of expression. These mixed responses suggest that while gender balance may enhance some aspects of collaboration, it does not automatically ensure an inclusive environment where everyone feels equally empowered to speak.

In terms of Individual perceptions of gender-related issues, 40% of respondents reported having experienced or witnessed gender-based discrimination or bias within the project. The most frequently cited issues included: Male dominance in the agricultural sector, unequal payment, abuse of power and under-representation of women in leadership positions.

4 Social Media Gender-Related Publications

Gender mainstreaming within BONEX – International Women's Day 2023

- Article on the website: <https://bonex-prima.eu/gender-mainstreaming-within-bonex/>
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7039127732353421312/>
- X: https://x.com/bonex_eu/status/1633362039971229697?s=20

Women in Lebanese Agriculture

- Article on the website: <https://bonex-prima.eu/women-in-lebanese-agriculture/>
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7109839953538260993/>
- X: https://x.com/bonex_eu/status/1704074357037797630?s=20

3rd Women and Girls in STEM Forum

- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7128408203758821376>
- X: https://x.com/bonex_eu/status/1722643195278815640?s=20

Rural women in the heart of the WEFE Nexus:

- Article on the website: <https://bonex-prima.eu/rural-women-in-the-heart-of-the-wefe-nexus/>
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7161252339163549696>
- X: https://x.com/bonex_eu/status/1755486621837738140?s=20

#WEFeWomenLeadership: Yasmina Imani - International Women's Day 2024

- YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sFdHOttvB4A&ab_channel=BONEX-PRIMA
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7162369737258164224>
- X: https://x.com/bonex_eu/status/1756603983441916151?s=20

#WEFeWomenLeadership: Olfa Mahjoub

- YouTube: <https://youtu.be/tl9uIrS-Loo?si=xdXVhOi3NVvXjNEh>
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7171761659340931072>
- X: https://x.com/bonex_eu/status/1765995871240372548?s=20

PRIMA Woman Greening Food Systems in the Mediterranean Award

- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7178284640879665152>
- X: https://x.com/bonex_eu/status/1772518852729118883

#WEFeWomenLeadership: Serena Sandri

- YouTube: <https://youtu.be/mNUeIFjNhr0>
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7183343002310828032>
- X: https://x.com/bonex_eu/status/1777577185983041570

Announcement of the publication of the BONEX Gender Flyer:

- LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/bonex-prima-eu_bonex-gender-flyer-activity-7211246789859897345-POua?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop
- X: https://x.com/bonex_eu/status/1805481046953410767

Celebration of International Day of Rural Women and lunch of Gender Equality section on website:

- Website section: <https://bonex-prima.eu/gender-equality/>
- LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/bonex-prima-eu_bonex-wefenexus-genderequality-activity-7251972339997839361-PfnQ?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop
- X: https://x.com/bonex_eu/status/1846207362933145654

Calling women for the #BONEXWomenScience campaign:

- LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7287399496471244800PfnQ?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop
- X: https://x.com/bonex_eu/status/1881634892259409941

WEFe Nexus International Conference - Pillar 2: Gender and the WEFE Nexus:

- LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/bonex-prima-eu_wefenexusconference-wefenexus-genderequality-activity-7289900110853881861-dDK2?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAACek25gBg_XXIWISSTIB81Q6An8uJMbD9T8
- X: https://x.com/bonex_eu/status/1884134313219789048

International Day of Women and Girls in Science

- LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/bonex-prima-eu_bonex-womeninscience-girlsinstem-activity-7294973504830005248-

[1IQG?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAACek25gBg_XXIWISSTIB81Q6An8uJMbD9T8](https://bonex-prima.eu/1IQG?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop&rcm=ACoAACek25gBg_XXIWISSTIB81Q6An8uJMbD9T8)

- X: https://x.com/bonex_eu/status/1889207743162323280

International Women's Day 2025:

- News on the website: <https://bonex-prima.eu/women-are-the-nexus-gender-equality-for-a-sustainable-future/>
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7304033155403935746>
- X: https://x.com/bonex_eu/status/1898267442352177652

#WEFeWomenLeadership: Paula Antunes

- YouTube: <https://youtu.be/xzkN4Qy3hg0>
- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7310193870280056832>
- X: https://x.com/bonex_eu/status/1904428035668914199

#BONEXGenderActions: The Gender Dimension in BONEX Demonstration Pilots:

- Article on the website: <https://bonex-prima.eu/the-gender-dimension-in-bonex-demonstration-pilots/>

#BONEXGenderActions: DP Spain:

- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7353302805064900608>
- X: https://x.com/bonex_eu/status/1947537095909601673

#BONEXGenderActions: DP Tunisia:

- LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7358376234872975361>
- X: https://x.com/bonex_eu/status/1952610522043502625
https://x.com/bonex_eu/status/1947537095909601673

5 Conclusions

BONEX consortium is fully aware of the importance of gender mainstreaming for the project success. We truly believe that an inclusive science needs innovative research methods, meaning that excellent research considers sex, gender, and intersectionality.

Women Are the Nexus – From Commitment to Impact

The BONEX project has demonstrated a profound commitment to gender equality, evolving from a stated objective into a **strategic driver of impact**. What began as a transversal commitment has transformed into a dynamic, integrated effort that spans governance, implementation, communication, and influence beyond the project.

Key milestones—such as the creation of a Gender Committee, gender monitoring indicators, and the preparation of the Gender Action Plan ensured gender mainstreaming was not symbolic but institutionalized across all activities. This approach enabled BONEX to go beyond “gender inclusion” and embrace **gender transformation** in practice.

- **Transformative progress and influence:** The project’s gender efforts have contributed directly to several tangible outcomes:
- A strong presence of women in leadership.
- The design and implementation of gender-sensitive demonstration projects, specially in Tunisia and Jordan.
- Visibility and engagement of women farmers, researchers, and innovators across communication campaigns and capacity-building events.
- Significant participation in international dialogues on gender and sustainability through oral communications, conferences, and policy contributions (e.g. UNESCO GWSI Issue 7).
- Development of public-facing campaigns like *#WEFeWomenLeadership* and *BONEXWomenScience*, which portrayed women as changemakers, knowledge holders, and community leaders.

These achievements collectively position BONEX as a **reference in gender-responsive WEF Nexus research and practice** in the Mediterranean region.

- **Addressing structural gaps:** Despite these successes, BONEX identified enduring structural challenges:
 - In the 2025 BONEX-SURENEXUS conference, only 1 out of 51 abstracts addressed gender in the WEF Nexus, confirming the persistent marginalization of this dimension in science and policy spaces.
 - Not all partners had Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) in place at the project’s start, underscoring the need for stronger policy mandates and shared accountability mechanisms.

Recognizing these gaps, BONEX offers a **set of operational recommendations** for the wider research and innovation community:

1. **Clear gender performance indicators** in EU and regional projects.
2. **Dedicated funding for gender-responsive innovation**, especially in climate and resource governance.
3. **Capacity building and leadership mentoring for women** in STEM, policy, and community development roles.
4. **Inclusive participatory approaches** that allow women—especially rural women and youth—to shape project design, knowledge, and outcomes.
5. **Avoidance of “gender washing”**, ensuring that gender equality efforts are transformative, measurable, and embedded across research lifecycles.

A Blueprint for the Future

BONEX's work stands as a **blueprint for integrating gender into sustainability projects**. From governance structures to storytelling campaigns and scientific contributions, it has validated the central message that **"Women are the Nexus."**

"Doing the right things—not just doing things right"—as highlighted by Marta Cortegano—captures the BONEX ethos. Promoting gender equality is not a procedural requirement; it is a **moral imperative** and a **strategic necessity** for sustainable, just, and resilient WEFE Nexus implementation.

The BONEX project concludes with a renewed call to the research, policy, and donor communities: **Empower women, elevate their leadership, and integrate gender meaningfully**. Only then can we unlock the full potential of sustainability solutions in the Mediterranean and beyond.

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