

# **GENDERACTION: A SUSTAINABILITY APPROACH TO HORIZON EUROPE CLUSTER 6**

## **Horizon Europe**

### **PILLAR II: Global Challenges & Industrial Competitiveness**

#### **Gender and Sustainability Dimensions of Horizon Europe Cluster 6: Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment**

This policy brief by GENDERACTION highlights the need for a gender dimension in the SDGs, the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as in Cluster 1. This is needed in order to achieve economic, social and ecological sustainability. **The aim is to strengthen the capacity of Horizon Europe to contribute to gender equality and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda.** This can be implemented in the Second Strategic Plan 2025-2027. It is also a response to the current design of the Work Programme in Cluster 1.

Horizon Europe sets gender equality as a crosscutting principle and aims to eliminate gender inequality and intersecting socioeconomic inequalities throughout research and innovation systems (European Union, 2021). GENDERACTION acknowledges this as an important development. In particular, this is stressed in relation to Pillar II Cluster 2 - Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society. This is also a development GENDERACTION welcomes. However, it is important to acknowledge the importance

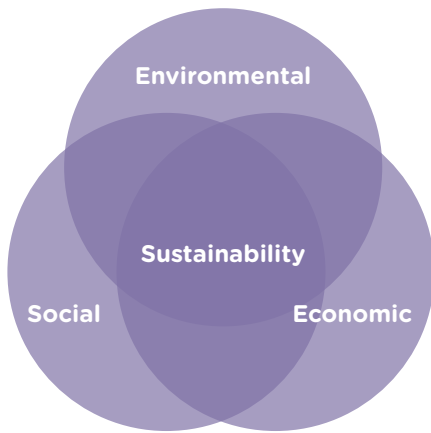
of including a gender dimension in all clusters. In the Second Strategic Plan 2025-2027, **Horizon Europe Pillar II should add the SDGs as a cross-cutting issue for all Clusters and Areas of Intervention. In order to ensure inclusiveness, an intersectional approach towards integrating a gender dimension in SDGs is crucial, in line with the overall gender equality strategy for EU (EC, 2020).**

Horizon Europe Pillar II mainly targets the impact of research and innovation,

supports the uptake of innovative solutions to address global challenges, and thus fostering change in order to achieve the SDGs. Also, moving the 2030 Agenda forward, interdisciplinary research on sustainability is crucial. Addressing the gender dimension in relation to the SDGs in Pillar II, both as a specific Area of Intervention and as a cross-cutting issue, will especially enhance EU and global policies for attaining SDG 5 (gender equality and women's empowerment). It will help to boost EU's innovation, competitiveness, security and inclusiveness, as it increases the scholarly quality and societal relevance of scientific knowledge. Further, strengthening knowledge on gender and SDGs are at the core of achieving the objectives of the Commission's plan for a new ERA, based on quality of research, especially fostering a green transition and recovery, as well as promoting gender and diversity in science more generally.

Structural change through integrating a gender dimension will be crucial for achieving the SDGs, and this entails several aspects in terms of analysis and policy coordination. Research shows how SDG outcomes are contextual, interdependent, and complex, coupling human, technical and natural systems in multiple ways (Sachs et al., 2019). It is therefore necessary to treat the SDGs as interlinked, rather than isolated, goals. The way SDGs interact is a key question in the implementation of Agenda 2030 itself. Identifying synergies, clashing interests or goals counteracting each other, is therefore highly relevant. The SDG interactions should be analysed with respect to their systemic and contextual character (Weitz et al., 2018). Therefore, the interactions between the goals and their targets, as well as interactions within the Clusters in Pillar II, are in need of an intersectional gender analysis in order to foster structural change (Widegren & Sand, forthcoming).

- A *gender dimension* in research involves a shift in perspective, away from normative and non-reflective notions on gender, e.g. asking new and different questions, collecting data differently and starting out with different theoretical perspectives. Sex and gender are separate, but interrelated, concepts. Sex generally refers to biological characteristics in humans or animals. *Gender* refers to socio-cultural processes that shape behaviours, values, norms, knowledges etc. An *intersectional approach* concerns how categories such as gender, race, sexual orientation, functionality, geography, class etc. interact and create inequalities and oppression. One category cannot be understood in isolation from others.
- Sustainability is another central concept to explore further. The three-pillar conception of sustainability – social, economic and environmental – can be understood in a somewhat similar way as intersectionality, with several dimensions interacting with each other. In order to move forward with the 2030 Agenda, there is an urgent need for more interdisciplinary research on sustainability with intersectional gender analysis that takes power structures into account. The fact that the word 'power' is mentioned only once in the 2030 Agenda, while the more individual-oriented 'empowerment' occurs abundantly, indicates a lack of awareness and knowledge on these important issues. This has consequences for the agenda's account of gender (as well as gender equality) as SDG 5 lacks analysis of the origin and nature of the gender inequality that should – ideally – be remedied by gender equality. The importance of keeping track of different understandings of gender cannot be stressed enough (Widegren & Sand, forthcoming).



## Examples of how sex and gender interact in relation to cluster 6

### Agriculture, forestry and rural areas and food systems

Women around the world are disproportionately affected by climate change, deforestation, land degradation, desertification, growing water scarcity and inadequate sanitation, with gender inequalities further exacerbated by COVID-19 (OECD, 2021). Agriculture has a key role in food production, environmental protection, landscape preservation, rural employment and food security. In one way or another, everyone's survival is dependent on agriculture. It is also one of the most widespread activities in the world and provides a livelihood for millions of people, but the differences for men and women in this area are many. While women play key roles in agriculture, their work is often not recognised and made invisible. Women are also seriously disadvantaged in regard to access to land and its ownership, the most important resource for farmers, and in terms of decision-making and planning in the agricultural sector. Agriculture is a prime example of how social,

economic and environmental sustainability interact and intersect. Adding to previous GENDERACTION documents, for example *Caring for soil is caring for life* (2020), we will show examples of how gender as well as the SDGs interact with cluster 6.

### When adding a gender lens to gender blind SDGs

One study claims SDG 5 has potential for improving household and national food security in environmentally sustainable ways, but much depends on how governments interpret key elements and whether synergies with other SDGs are established. A key question is the interpretation of elements such as equality of access to land and its ownership, to natural resources such as forests, fisheries and irrigation water, and to the control and management of these resources. The study stresses the importance of not only working in tandem with the interacting SDGs which raise gender as a concern, e.g. SDG 1 (no poverty), 2 (zero hunger), 6 (clean water and sanitation) and 13 (climate action). Interacting SDGs which have failed to recognise their potential for gender equality and food security, such as 14 (life below water) and 15 (life on land), also need to be considered. The two latter goals focus mainly on resource conservation, with little recognition of their importance for food chains or incomes of rural households, especially the poor, and their gendered aspects. The absence of a gender focus in these SDGs makes them blind to key synergies between gender equality, conservation, and food security (Agarwal, 2018).

### Feminisation of agriculture

Women constitute a substantial and growing proportion of agricultural workers. More men than women tend to leave the agricultural sector. These proportions have

been growing globally, except in northern Europe, leading to a gradual feminization of agriculture. Additionally, women provide most of the labour time for food processing and preparation. While women are key actors in food provisioning, and their involvement will increase with time, they are stymied by serious resource and social constraints (Agarwal, 2018). They represent a significant share of the agricultural labour force, but mostly in the lowest paid, most insecure jobs and without land ownership.

### **Making women's work invisible**

While women are active in rural communities, their multiple roles and responsibilities are not well recognised. Women's work in agriculture is underreported and often made invisible. This is true also for women in the so called blue economy: all the work related to the ocean, seas, coastal and inland waters (Gissi et al., 2018). Women tend to classify and report themselves as not in employment, particularly when undertaking unpaid agricultural or blue economy work, and official statistics based on census and survey instruments often underestimate women's work and its contribution to national wealth. Problems persist in the collection of reliable and comprehensive data on rural women's work in agriculture and other productive sectors because of: 1) invisibility of women's work; 2) the seasonal and part-time nature of women's work; and 3) unremunerated family (mostly women and children) labour (Lastarria-Cornhiel, 2008).

### **Unequal access to land and resources**

The most important productive resource for farmers is access to land. Women are seriously disadvantaged in this respect, due to male bias in inheritance laws, in social norms which restrict effective implementation of these laws, in land markets, as well

as in government land distribution schemes (Agarwal, 2018). In the EU, as well as globally, farms run by women are generally smaller than those run by men (EIGE, 2021). Additionally, the control women owners can exercise over their land is often more restricted than men's, for example when it comes to rights to lease or sell.

Compared to men farmers, women farmers also have poorer access to credit, irrigation, fertilizers, technology, information on new agricultural practices, and marketing infrastructure (FAO, 2011). These disadvantages multiply if we factor in climate change, since any technical advances in, for instance, heat resistant or in practices for adaptation and mitigation, are less likely to reach them (Agarwal, 2018). A growing literature on gender equality and agriculture also shows that equal access to resources and assets is correlated with economic growth (Quisumbing et al., 2014).

### **Lack of women in decision-making and planning**

Women's contribution to local and community development is significant, but rural women are in a minority in decision-making and planning. While this phenomenon is significant in all economic sectors, it is particularly present in the agricultural and blue economy sector. This is due partly to their multiple roles and workload, but also to the persistence of traditional views about women's and men's roles in society (EIGE, 2021).

### **Gender-based violence and sexual harassment are widespread issues**

Gender-based violence and sexual harassment are widespread issues in the agriculture sector. Temporary work and informal work are key factors in creating power differentials for perpetrators to carry out gender-based violence and sexual harassment

against mainly women workers (ILO). Migrant and seasonal workers are particularly vulnerable, especially as they often depend on employers for housing, transport and the right to stay in a country. Gender-based violence and sexual harassment is widespread also in the marine sector, as shown in previous GENDERACTION documents, e.g. *Healthy Oceans, Seas, Coastal and Inland Waters... and their gender Implications* (2020). Women are reported to work on vessels or offshore in supply chains and are subject to sexual abuse, as the “fish-for-sex” phenomenon has shown (women engaging in sexual work with fishers in order to obtain fish to sell and support their families). There are many shortcomings in policies and international law regarding these widespread and severe issues.

## Recommendations

It is highly recommended that Horizon Europe Pillar II add the SDGs as a cross-cutting issue for all Clusters and Areas of Intervention in the forthcoming Strategic Plan 2025-2027. In Cluster 6, the Areas of Intervention refer to the UN SDGs. However, they do not mention the gender dimension of these SDGs to bring into consideration the different baselines in the socio-economic situation of women and men as well as gender drivers and gender impacts of the innovative solutions for those SDGs. In order to take these aspects into account, it is also highly recommended that Cluster 6 and all Areas of Intervention in it are cross-read with SDG 5 specifically.

### All Clusters and Areas of Intervention in Pillar II of Horizon Europe

- Include the SDGs as a cross-cutting issue for all Clusters and Areas of Intervention.
- Include gender factors as crosscutting issues in relation to all the SDGs by

cross-reading all the SDGs with SDG 5 (gender equality and women’s empowerment).

- Include an intersectional approach and make sure women and men are not addressed as homogeneous groups but their heterogeneity is systematically included.
- Interdisciplinary research on sustainability, integrating the economic, social and ecological dimensions, is crucial for moving the 2030 Agenda forward. Encourage interdisciplinary research through dedicated calls, in order to increase, deepen and broaden the knowledge needed for efficient sustainable development.
- Include a power analysis of the origin and nature of the gender inequality that should be remedied by policies and measures for gender equality.
- Keep track of different understandings of gender and gender equality and foster competence to make distinctions between different accounts of the concepts.
- Include gender scholars in the relevant research domain in the research team where relevant.
- Include gender experts among project evaluators.
- Ensure gender balance and gender training among project evaluators.
- Strive for gender balance at all levels in research teams and in decision-making in the Commission.
- As deep structural changes are required in order to reach the SDGs and since current research funding structures might disadvantage radical ideas with potential to systemic change, alternative ways of reviewing research proposals should be investigated.
- The transformative claim of the 2030 Agenda requires knowledge interactions between relevant stakeholders, involving a wider range of actors than those

traditionally involved in knowledge production and decision-making. Collaborative research processes, such as the SDG Synergies Approach or *citizen science* (see Kullenberg et al., 2016) need to be promoted in future calls.

- RPOs/HEIs need to recognize how sustainable conditions for researchers/teachers and students are linked to how knowledge production can contribute to the transition to a sustainable world, given the negative effects of unsustainable working conditions on the quality of R&I. This calls for structural change with an intersectional approach, as developed in previous GENDERACTION Policy Briefs.
- Work programmes promoting the development of gender knowledge on SDGs should encourage analysis of interactions between targets. Efforts for sustainability more thorough than a superficial box-checking require not only in-depth knowledge based on various indicators, but also a systemic understanding of trade-offs and co-benefits between the goals. This needs to be acknowledged in future calls. The assessment of SDG Relevance should be integrated in the evaluation of applications.

## Cluster 6

- Include SDG 5 (gender equality and women's empowerment) as a cross-cutting issue in Cluster 6 and all areas of intervention in it.
- Encourage research on gender-based violence and sexual violence and harassment in agriculture, marine- and water-related fields and in rural communities as a whole, through dedicated calls.
- Monitor and analyse funded projects that produce and cross-analyse sex-disaggregated data on women's participation in and contribution to agriculture,

marine- and water-related fields (paid and unpaid work included), and their access to key resources and assets, as well as on their inclusion in sustainability efforts together with root causes and risk factors for these inequalities.

- Encourage citizen science. When applicable, recommend funded projects to involve women who are locally active in agriculture, soil management and food security as well as in marine or water-related fields or actions. The Commission should monitor and analyse such projects. The findings should be taken into account when forming the Second Strategic Plan 2025-2027.

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