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Stimulating and Connecting the FINEST Experimentation Practices and Spaces

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Gender Action Plan v.2

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Disclaimer

Executive Summary

The FINEX project builds on key innovation actors driving the green and digital transition - EIT Digital (Europe's largest digital innovation ecosystem), HEC Paris (one of France's oldest élite higher education Grandes Ecoles in commerce), the Cleantech Group (the world's leading authority on cleantech innovation) - pairing them with cross-border Research & Innovation centres of excellence, who have been deploying experimentation testbed, living labs, sandboxes, and acceleration tools to turn leading research into market ready innovations - FINEST CoE, KIOS CoE and GATE CoE - as well as, Lithuania's leading Cleantech innovation ecosystem – Sunrise Valley Science and Technology Park (STP), and Riga Technical university (RTU) - the largest Latvian university, also soon to be a EIT Digital Centre, and with a specific specialised 'Innovation Ecosystem Development Unit' a leading actor in local and national digital and cleantech technologies innovation ecosystems with various international education, business support, research and networking programmes.

Key Objectives of the FINEX project are: 1. To stimulate and interconnect the six targeted Innovation ecosystems as Europe's Cleantech powerhouse, enhancing their gender-inclusiveness, openness, competitiveness, and global potential. 2. To jointly develop world-class experimentation spaces and the promotion of a better aligned EU regulatory, fiscal and legal framework. 3. To identify and support Cleantech domains and innovators requiring the development of experimentation spaces capable of supporting the quick deployment of disruptive and novel Deep Tech and solutions with the potential to help Europe achieve Climate and Industrial leadership.

The aim of the Gender Action Plan (GAP) is to provide a framework to maximise and closely monitor the gender dimension in the FINEX project at three levels: (i) within the consortium and (ii) across coordination and support activities of the project, (iii) in the wider context of the FINEX project innovation ecosystem and cleantech domains. The GAP provides: (i) main objectives to be achieved; (ii) a monitoring methodology; (iii) the status of gender-balance in the consortium and project; and (iv) basic guidelines on how partners can make their activities and outputs more gender-responsive.

In M12 we already know that gender-balance among cleantech and deeptech sectors' leadership is similarly very unbalanced, as it is in technology-oriented work-life in general. Stakeholders of the FINEX project (big majority of them are companies) have explicit gender-policies and programmes mainly if their founders and top-leaders are females.

The present deliverable is directly related to the work performed under WP2 in Task 2.1 Gender Action Plan continuous development, and Task 2.2 Monitoring and promotion. It is also related to Task 1.2 Multidisciplinary Expert Advisory Board (MEAB) setup and engagement under WP1. As a general note, the inclusiveness and gender equality dimensions are part of each WP and activity performed under this project. According to the FINEX project work plan (Annex I), the GAP will be updated next time in M18.

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List of Terms and Definitions

Table 1 Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Gender	The socially and culturally constructed ideas of what it is to be a male or female in a specific context.
Gender gap	The disparity between females and males, or boys and girls, conditions or positions in society based on gendered norms and expectations.
Gender lens	A perspective that pays particular attention to how gender differences and relations are relevant for investments and projects.
Gender mainstreaming	The process of integrating a gender lens into all aspects of an organisation's strategies and initiatives, as well as its culture, systems and operations.
Gender bias	Prejudiced actions or thoughts that affect a person or a group of people based on their perceived gender.
Gender Equality Plan	Building blocks of a GEP deals with publicity, resources, data handling. Training and certain content-wise areas

List of abbreviations

Table 2 Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
BSR	Baltic Sea Region
CDE	Communications, Dissemination and Exploitation
Cleantech	"Cleantech refers to new technology and related business models offering competitive returns for investors and customers while providing solutions to global challenges. (…It] embraces a diverse range of products, services, and processes across industry verticals that are inherently designed to: Provide superior performance at lower costs; Greatly reduce or eliminate negative ecological impact. Improve the productive and responsible use of natural resources."[1]
Deep tech	"Deep tech is technology that is based on cutting-edge scientific advances and discoveries and is characterised by the need to stay at the technological forefront by constant interaction with new ideas and results from the lab. Deep tech is distinct from 'high tech' which tends to refer only to Research & Development intensity." - EISME standard definition
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
GA	Grant Agreement
General Assembly	GeA
IE	Innovation Ecosystem[2]
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LC&D.IE	'Less connected and developing innovation ecosystems' - i.e. 'IE' categorised as 'Emerging innovator' or 'Moderate innovator' by the RIS and/or EIS
M	Month
S&IL	Innovation ecosystems categorised as 'Strong innovators' or 'Innovation leaders'
PC	Project Coordinator
R&D	Research and Development
SC	Steering Committee
WP	Work Package

[1] https://www.cleantechforeurope.com/explainers/what-is-cleantech

[2] https://eismea.ec.europa.eu/programmes/european-innovation-ecosystems_en#european-innovation-ecosystems

1. Introduction

As listed in the project's objectives, FINEX seeks to enhance (among other things) the gender-inclusiveness of cleantech technologies in innovation ecosystems.

WP 2 is specially dedicated to embedding in all FINEX activities a more inclusive and gender equal approach, ensuring female-led actors from within all target groups and in particular investors and deep tech emerging innovators and startups are properly represented and actively engaged in the project activities. This is done via the deployment of assistive techniques considering Females' need by using participatory design throughout the project activities (WPs 3-7). Furthermore, since there really is currently no gender-balance but more like 30 percentage's female minority in the STEM[3]-oriented cleantech innovation ecosystems, we need also to understand the cultural factors, such as unequal access to career development, mentorship, and sponsorship programmes that limit female's progress as entrepreneurs and corporate leaders.[4]

Task 2.1 focuses on the continuous development of the Gender Action Plan (GAP). The process is iterative, with the first deliverable submitted in M3, followed by updates in M12 and M18. Task is led by the Aalto, one of the four FinEst Centre's founders, already working on cross-border research and experimentation spaces with TalTech. This plan would build in the guidelines of CKIC's WECLIM Equally Handbook for gender-smart climate programmes. The main outcome would be to closely monitor the gender dimension (i) within the consortium, (ii) across our coordination and support activities, and (iii) in the wider context of the FINEX project IEs and deep tech domains.

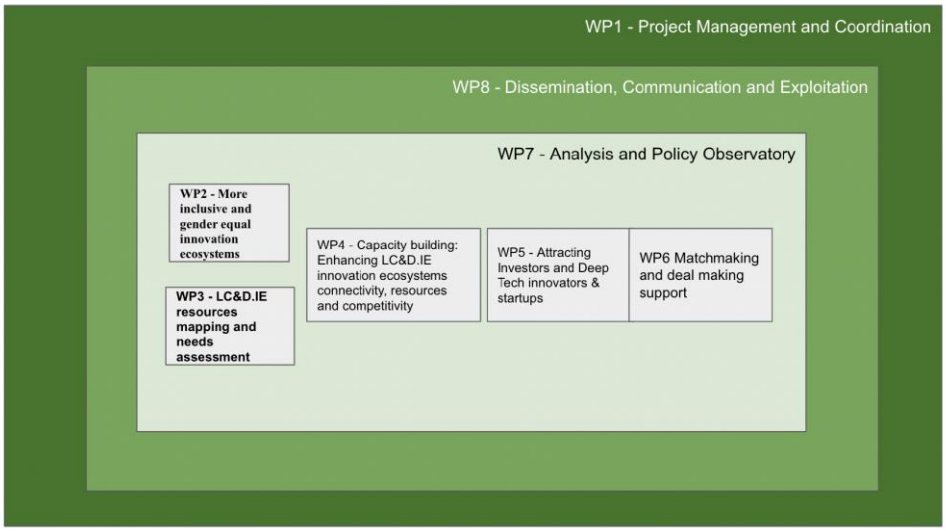
Traditionally innovation ecosystems and teams focusing on innovation have been often dominated by not just males but STEM-oriented men, and despite the intention to integrate more female into the innovation teams and ecosystems, this has in practice seen as challenging. As a result, many of the innovation ecosystems as well as actual innovations fail to recognize and take into account factors such as diversity in general, particularly the gender-balance. In practice, this decreases the possibility of the innovation ecosystems and innovations, among others, to address the relevant characteristics as well as needs and wants of female as well as any other group that is underrepresented. Among the direct consequences of this is that their requirements and viewpoints are not considered sufficiently in the functioning of the ecosystems or in the design or use of innovations. Not only may this result in innovations that are, in the worst-case scenario, less safe to use by these groups, biased, or otherwise disadvantage towards females and other underrepresented groups, but also in the loss of significant understandings, and market segments for businesses. Diverse teams also contribute to more innovative solutions.

[3] STEM=Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

[4] https://www.cleantech.com/the-next-frontier-of-green-growth-female-leading-the-cleantech-transition/

Overall, gender equality is an area that needs to be considered at different levels and dimensions of innovation ecosystems as well as in the different stages of innovations. Cleantech is no exception to this, already as many, if not most, of the stakeholders of these ecosystems and innovations emerging from the ecosystems belong to these so far often underrepresented groups.

Figure 1 Work Packages of the project



For more info, see the webpage of the project https://finestcentre.eu/project/finex/

1.1 Scope and objectives

The aim of the Gender Action Plan (GAP) is to provide a framework to maximise and closely monitor the gender dimension in the FINEX project at three levels: (i) within the consortium and (ii) across coordination and support activities of the project, (iii) in the wider context of the FINEX project innovation ecosystem and cleantech domains. The GAP provides: (i) main objectives to be achieved; (ii) a monitoring methodology; (iii) the status of gender-balance in the consortium and project; and (iv) basic guidelines on how partners can make their activities and outputs more gender-responsive.

In other words, the scope and objective for the gender action plan is to embed in all FINEX activities a more inclusive and gender equal approach, ensuring female-led actors from within all target groups and in particular cleantech emerging innovators and startups are properly represented and actively engaged in the project activities. This is done via the deployment of assistive techniques considering female's needs by using participatory design throughout the project activities.

In the FINEX project team equal rights have been adopted regardless of gender, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability. The project itself is largely led by female, and all the people working on the project have been selected on the basis of the required expertise and have exceeded the minimum 50% target of female on Horizon Europe project-related boards, expert groups and evaluation committees.

Furthermore, in the further academic research dealing with gender-balance, it is worth noting the following terminological finding of the Gender Task Force of the FINEX project. So far, we have been talking of “equality” between the genders. However, it is crucial to separate the terms of equality and equity. “Equality” refers to similar resources given to all stakeholders, whereas “equity” refers to resources or support given based on the actual need of the particular stakeholders, instead of the same support for everybody. For example, in a short-term perspective, a female specialist having a newborn baby in a cleantech company might need more (paid) maternal leave (and (paid) paternal leave for her husband) than equal working conditions compared to her male colleagues. The figure below illustrates the difference of the terms.

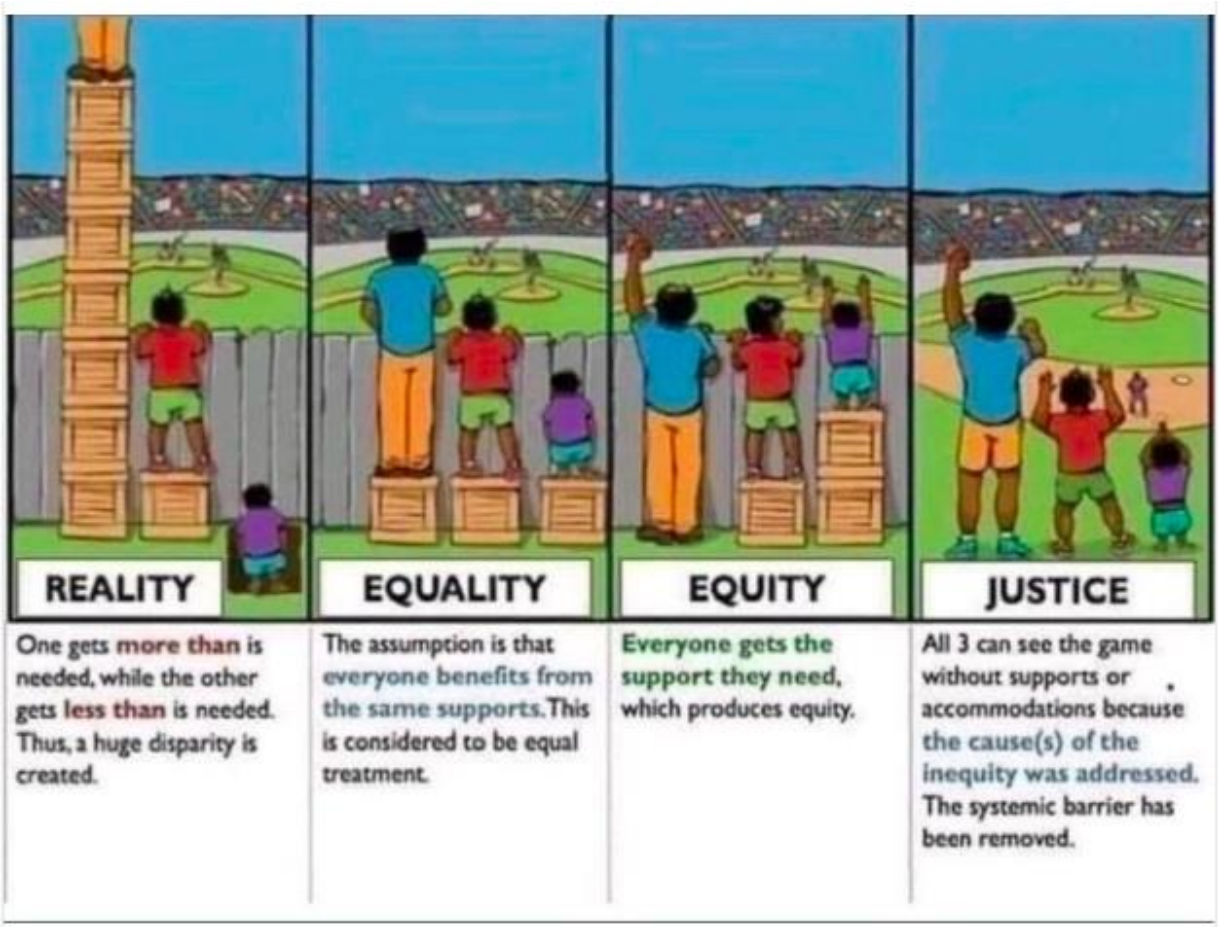


Figure 2 The difference between equality and equity. Angus Maguiren for IISC (Interaction Institute for Social Change).

1.2 Relation to WPs, tasks and other deliverables

As the Gender Action Plan is embedded in all FINEX activities, it emerges in many of the tasks and deliverables by providing a framework (Task 2.1) to follow in conducting the tasks and development of the deliverables. In addition, as the implementation of the plan is monitored (Task 2.2), during which the plan itself is also updated (Task 2.1), it plays a significant role throughout the project’s timeline.

Regarding Task 1.2, the Gender Action Plan impacts the selection of the board. Similarly, in task 1.4 the plan plays a role in monitoring that particularly the KPIs regarding gender equality are met, and that

when considering risks, their possible differential impact to different genders is considered. It is also of importance to make sure that the dissemination activities (Task 1.8) also take gender factors into account, such as making sure to engage with also experts that are female.

Regarding WP3, the Gender Action Plan emerges in Task 3.1 in requiring that coordinated actions also contain participants of different genders. In Task 3.2, when identifying barriers to hamper the development of an innovation, gender-based factors should be also considered. Regarding task 3.3, the organised workshops should aim for gender-balanced participation, an aim also applicable to the use-cases and experimentation pilots (Task 3.4).

The Gender Action Plan is of relevance in mapping the innovation ecosystems capabilities and competences (Task 4.1). By cultivating a more gender-balanced environment, this can also lead to additional capabilities and competences within the ecosystems, since more diverse environments enable to consider different perspectives and viewpoints, which may otherwise go unnoticed. This is also of importance to consider in identifying the best practices concerning, e.g., living labs or identifying missing expertise (Task 4.2), as well as in reinforcing those capabilities and competences (Task 4.3).

Similarly, when attracting and accelerating cleantech innovators (WP5) it is crucial also to seek to attract a diverse and gender-balanced group of innovators (Task 5.1) as well as to ensure that this objective is also considered in matchmaking innovators and establishing cooperation across different actors (Task 5.2). Finally, the established helpdesk should also be knowledgeable of gender-related matters regarding innovation development (Task 5.3). Related to WP5, recruitment and matchmaking innovative cleantech solutions (Task 6.1) and formulating as well as deploying FINEX action plan (Task 6.2 and 6.3) also benefit from the gender action plan as it enables to take gender-aspects into account in the process, already by drafting relevant KPIs regarding the matter.

Finally, the gender action plan also seeks to offer a contribution in the form of the plan itself, functioning as a resource for sister projects and initiatives (Task 7.1) and impacting policy formulation (Task 7.2) also regarding innovation ecosystems more broadly.

2. FINEX Gender Action Plan (GAP)

Integrating and accounting for the gender dimension, the FINEX project recognises and adheres to the Gender Equality Act and looks at equal opportunities as an ingredient of the project's success. In November 2021 TalTech as the PC introduced a comprehensive Gender Equality Principles and Action Plan for 2021 –2025 and the Guidelines for Equal Treatment, that are followed in this project.

FINEX will account for the gender dimension at three levels: (i) within the consortium, (ii) across the coordination and support activities, and (iii) in the wider context of the FINEX project innovation ecosystem and cleantech domains.

The GAP provides: (i) main objectives to be achieved; (ii) a monitoring methodology; (iii) the status of gender-balance in the consortium and project; and (iv) basic guidelines on how partners can make their activities and outputs more gender-responsive. The gender dimension will be considered, for example, in our reviews of materials, in the design and presentation of our materials, in conducting and analysing the leadership interviews, and in engagement planning and communication.

2.1 GAP framework

This section provides the main objectives of the GAP and KPIs to be achieved in the FINEX project at three levels: (i) within the consortium, (ii) across the coordination and support activities, and (iii) in the wider context of the FINEX project innovation ecosystem and cleantech domains (Table 2).

Table 2 FINEX GAP framework

Level	Objectives	KPIs
Consortium	Equal rights are adopted regardless of gender, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability. All the people working on the project have been selected based on the required expertise and have exceeded the minimum 50% target of female on Horizon Europe project-related boards, expert groups and evaluation committees	The project is coordinated by a female
		> 50% of the project Team is composed of female
		~ 50% MEAB members are female
		~ 90% of GTF members are female
	Proper representation and active engagement of female-led actors from	At least 50% of the invited participants of the organised events are females

Coordination and support activities	all target groups and in particular investors and cleantech emerging innovators and startups in the project activities	At least 50% of the participants of the organised events are females
Wider cleantech innovation ecosystem	Activation of female (and female-led) investors, entrepreneurs, startups, and other stakeholders	Half of the penta-helix stakeholders across the FINEX six regions/countries contacted in task T3.1 are female.
	Promotion of gender-balanced teams among innovators and within IEs	Special focus in all communication materials is put on the promotion of gender-balanced teams among cleantech innovators and IEs when contacting them in task T5.1; when recruiting cleantech innovative solutions in task T6.1; when formulating the FINEX Action Plan in Task 6.2; and when supporting the IEs in Task 6.3

2.2 How to achieve the KPI's

In order to achieve the KPIs included in the GAP framework, the FINEX program should adopt the following measures in contacting, engaging and supporting the cleantech IEs:

- Monitoring diversity and gender-matters in ecosystems (e.g., leadership profiles, preparatory / specialist positions and processes)
- Reflecting, identifying, and rectifying possible gender-based biases in the composition of the consortium, committees, boards, and organized workshops
- Communicating to and attracting wider spectrum of ecosystem stakeholders by also making sure that the communication material and channels appeal to wide range of audiences
- Institutionalizing gender-related aspects to permanent ecosystem functions by collecting feedback from stakeholders and monitoring performance in the above-mentioned areas and taking measures to address identified problems or areas where development is lagging behind

In addition, the penta-helix stakeholders can be advised by FINEX to pay attention to the following gender equality and equity areas:

- Creating awareness of the gender-specific objectives as well as of gender-based implications to innovation design and use more broadly
- Reviewing policies and processes related to the functioning of the ecosystems to make sure they do not explicitly or implicitly discriminate against different genders
- Ensuring equal treatment in areas such as salaries as well as consideration of factors caused by issues such as childcare to enable equal opportunities in areas regarding career building
- Sharing best practices that they have identified regarding gender-related issues
- Considering gender-related aspects in the development and use of specific cleantech innovations
- Identifying and removing gender-based biases from ecosystem operations and processes
- Investors' promotion-oriented vs. prevention-oriented parlance towards start-up founders (male/female)[5]
- Establishing further objectives regarding diversity and gender within the different components of the ecosystem and ecosystem stakeholders

2.3 GAP monitoring

The monitoring is managed on three levels explained in the following. Aalto will monitor gender equality against the GAP informed by the TalTech Gender Equality Plan, and PC's and other partners' experience in education, research and academic publishing.

In addition, the GTF representing all project partners has been created at the project start, in order to ensure sufficient attention is given to the gender dimension in local IEs. The GTF members are responsible for monitoring and maintaining gender equality against the GAP in their local coordination and support activities.

[5] "We Ask Men to Win and Female Not to Lose: Closing the Gender Gap in Startup Funding" by Dana Kanze, Laura Huang, Mark A. Conley and E. Tory Higgins, **Academy of Management JournalVol. 61, No. 2** (2018). https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2016.1215

Aalto with all project partners is also engaging the MEAB that is responsible for screening the gender equality dimension on the wider IE level. The topic will be raised by the PC of the project at every MEAB meeting asking for feedback and support from MEAB members.

The DCEM is responsible for monitoring and maintain the gender balance in all dissemination, communication and exploitation materials and activities.

The monitoring is done against the GAP framework presented above; the analysis and results are presented at the Project Progress Meetings (every six months). The updates are integrated into the next versions of the GAP (at M18 D2.3).

2.3.1 FINEX Gender Task Force

FINEX project has nominated a specific group, the Gender Task Force (GTF), to observe and support project partners to follow and implement the Gender Action Plan. GTF also contributes to the GAP development, upgrade and enforcement on a local level. The group contains ten female members, one per partner. The group will meet (online) twice a year to prepare the updates of GAP. The group chooses one representative to lead the group. A secretary of GTF is the WP2 leader (Aalto), who invites the group to the meetings, produces and coordinates the materials for the meetings, and reports to PC.

Table 3 GTF members

Country	Organization	Representative
Cyprus	KIOS Research and Innovation Center of Excellence	Christiana Papamichel
Estonia	TalTech - FinEst Centre for Smart Cities	Kaija Veskioja / Carina Bitšikov
United Kingdom	Cleantech Group	Lucy Chatburn
Finland	Aalto University – Business school (BIZ)	Niina Mallat
France	HEC Paris	Barkha Awan
Finland	EIT Digital	Lea Myyryläinen
Lithuania	Sunrise Valley Science and Technology Park (SUNRISE STP)	Evelina Šalavėjienė
Bulgaria	Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” (GATE CoE)	Lidia Vitanova
Latvia	Riga Technical University (RTU)	Paula Vanaga

2.4 Status

2.4.1 Consortium

In FINEX project team, equal rights have been adopted regardless of gender, race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability. All the people working on the project have been selected based on the

required expertise and have exceeded the minimum 50% target of female on Horizon Europe project-related boards, expert groups and evaluation committees. The project coordination at TalTech is led by a female. Also, her substitute during her maternal leave (2025) is a female. Several females have participated in the design of the proposal, and around 60% of the project Team is composed of female.

In addition, the GTF representing all project partners, has been created at the project start, consisting only of female to ensure sufficient attention is given to the gender dimension. During the first year of the project, among the GTF members there have been severe discussions about the actual female majority of the GTF when one the central aims of the FINEX has been *the balance* of genders. There has been two central and mitigating notions in these discussions. First, the female majority in the GTF has been taken as a compensating element against the general male-majority in the cleantech IEs. Second, the male secretary of the GTF has been a balancing factor, since the secretary prepares all the topics the GTF handles. Furthermore, the project's MEAB is built ensuring equal participation of men and female.

2.4.2 Participation and Gender Balance in Project Events

The consortium is actively working to ensure balanced participation of female across all project activities. In line with the guidance promoted by Aalto, special attention has been given to inviting and involving more female in the organised events. From February and August 2025, several events were held across national and European levels. As seen in the results, gender balance has been successfully achieved in several cases, however, further effort is needed to increase female's involvement particularly in Latvia and Cyprus who show a clear underrepresentation of females.

- **WP2 Task 2.1 GTF meeting**
  10 participants attended (9 female and 1 male)

- **WP3 Task 3.2 Cleantech Priority Areas Selection and Validation:**
  National workshops were carried out in all FINEX target countries. Gender balance was achieved in Estonia and in Cyprus. However, in Latvia the representation of females was low. The Finnish and Bulgarian workshops had more balanced ratios, while the Lithuanian workshop showed a strong female majority.
  - Finland – 5 participants (2 female, 3 male)
  - Estonia - 11 participants (6 female, 5 male)
  - Latvia - 7 participants (1 female, 6 male)
  - Lithuania - 12 participants (8 female, 4 male)
  - Bulgaria - 5 participants (3 female, 2 male)
  - Cyprus - 4 participants (3 female, 1 male)

- **WP3 Task 3.3 Policy Lab workshops:**

Four European-level workshops were conducted (Energy Security, Mobility, Infrastructure Resilience, and Governance). Across the series, 51 participants engaged. Overall, the majority of Policy Lab workshops achieved or exceeded the target for female participation:

- Energy Security – 16 participants (8 female, 8 male)
- Mobility - 13 participants (4 female, 9 male)
- Infrastructure Resilience - 10 participants (7 female, 3 male)
- Governance - 12 participants (8 female, 4 male)

- **WP4 Task 4.2 Test, validate and identify Deep Tech workshops:**
  Three workshops were held with 6–8 participants each. Gender balance was successfully achieved in all three sessions:
  - Workshop 1 – 6 participants (3 female, 3 male)
  - Workshop 2 - 8 participants (4 female, 4 male)
  - Workshop 3 - 7 participants (4 female, 3 male)

- **WP5 Task 5.2 FINEX Regional Dialogues:**
  Six events were organised at both local and European levels, with participation ranging from 3 to 37 attendees. Results were mixed:
  - Finland – 4 participants (3 female, 1 male)
  - Estonia - 23 participants (8 female, 15 male)
  - Latvia - 37 participants (3 female, 34 male)
  - Lithuania - 17 participants (8 female, 9 male)
  - Bulgaria - 15 participants (10 female, 5 male)
  - Cyprus - 19 participants (5 female, 14 male)
  - European-level dialogue – 15 participants (10 female, 5 men)

2.4.3 Preliminary findings in the gender-balance among the stakeholders

The objective of coordination and support activities is to ensure representation and active participation by different genders within participants and stakeholders across the WPs. The objective at the wider cleantech innovation ecosystem level is to promote gender-balanced teams among innovators and within IEs.

During July-Aug 2025, Aalto has pre-studied the public online sources of all the 127 cleantech stakeholders in the six IE ecosystems of the FINEX, recognised by the partners and listed by the EIT Digital. Roughly 90% of the cleantech stakeholders listed, are commercial companies, mostly SMEs. Only 16% of the stakeholders are something else than private/commercial companies. A few clusters, networks and tech parks are listed (Cyprus and Latvia). A few public authorities or publicly owned innovation companies were found in Finland and Cyprus.

Table 4 FINEX stakeholders

IE	Stakeholders	Share, %	Commercial companies	Share, %
BU	13	10	13	100
FI	22	17	15	68
CY	13	10	7	54
LI	24	19	21	87,5
LA	20	16	15	75
ES	36	28	36	100
Total	127		107	avg 90%
%	100	100	84	

There is a big majority of companies among the FINEX stakeholders, compared to very small portion of investors and public regulators. Also, majority of the governmental units are not regulators but infrastructural enablers.

According to literature and for example EIGE's (European Institute of Gender Equality) statistics, gender-balance in European leadership has been improved in the last ten years - the representation of female on the boards of the largest listed companies has improved in the EU from one in five to one in three.[6]

The male-majority among the 127 stakeholders is clear, at least based on their website or other public online sources. In other words, FINEX resources do not enable to clear out the factual gender-balance in every FINEX stakeholder. Instead, our observations are based on what they present on their website or other public online source. It seems that in Nordic countries the stakeholders are willing to present their gender-balanced approach, unlike in the rest of the Europe. It also seems that an explicit gender-policies and programmes only exists when there is a female leadership in the stakeholder.

Based on the academic literature and reports of dedicated networks or domain-wise units, it seems evident that it is not just the numeric minority of female, but several processual factors that hinder gender-diversity in the cleantech field. Unequal access to career development, mentorship, and sponsorship programmes limits female's progress.

The GAP is considered in the preparation of the coming activities. The current status will be presented in this D2.2, and in D2.3 GAP v.3, due M18.

[6] https://eige.europa.eu/newsroom/news/why-more-female-company-boards-good-business