



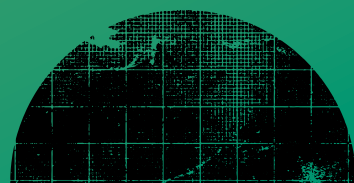
**IN
SITU** place-based **innovation** of
cultural and creative industries
in **non-urban** areas

Exploring Gender Roles in Non-urban Cultural and Creative Industries: Insights from the IN SITU Project



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I. **Short Overview** of the IN SITU Project

Project Objectives and Scope

IN SITU – Place-based Innovation of Cultural and Creative Industries in Non-urban Areas is a four-year project funded under the Horizon Europe Programme (Grant Agreement no. 101061747) that combines research and experimental actions to advance the innovation-related practices, capacities, and potentials of Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) based in non-urban and rural areas of the European Union (EU). The Consortium involves 13 partners from 12 countries, consisting of research institutions, cultural academies, a European cultural network, and a national cultural foundation.

The IN SITU project is structured around six Labs, which function as place-based research and innovation environments in non-urban regions across Europe. These Labs bring together local stakeholders, cultural actors, and researchers to explore and support cultural and creative practices within their specific territorial contexts. The six IN SITU Labs are located in the Azores archipelago in the mid-Atlantic Ocean (Portugal); the western coastal periphery (Ireland); the West Region (Iceland); Rauma and Eurajoki on the west coast and the Baltic Sea archipelago (Finland); Valmiera County (Latvia); and Šibenik-Knin County (Croatia).

The project aims to:

- Challenge dominant urban-centric perspectives on cultural economies by taking non-urban areas seriously as spaces of cultural production and innovation.
- Widen understanding of the value that CCIs in rural and peripheral areas add to their communities and territories.

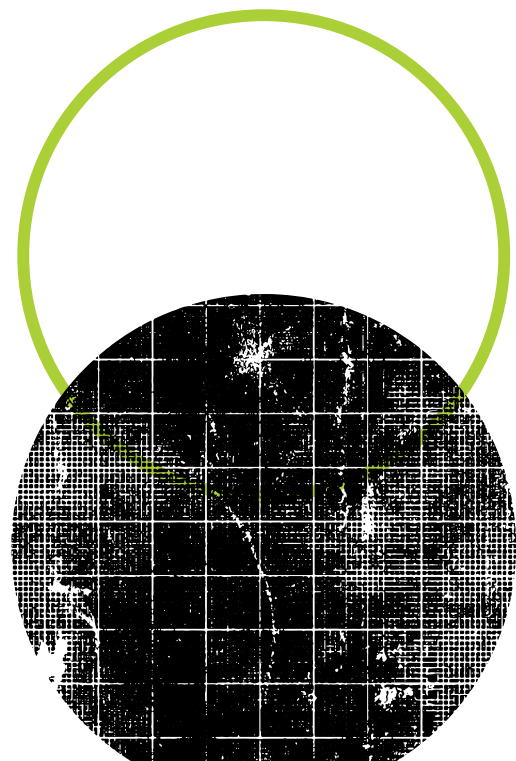
- Analyse new CCI business practices and collaborative governance models that produce arts and culture-based development with real community impact.

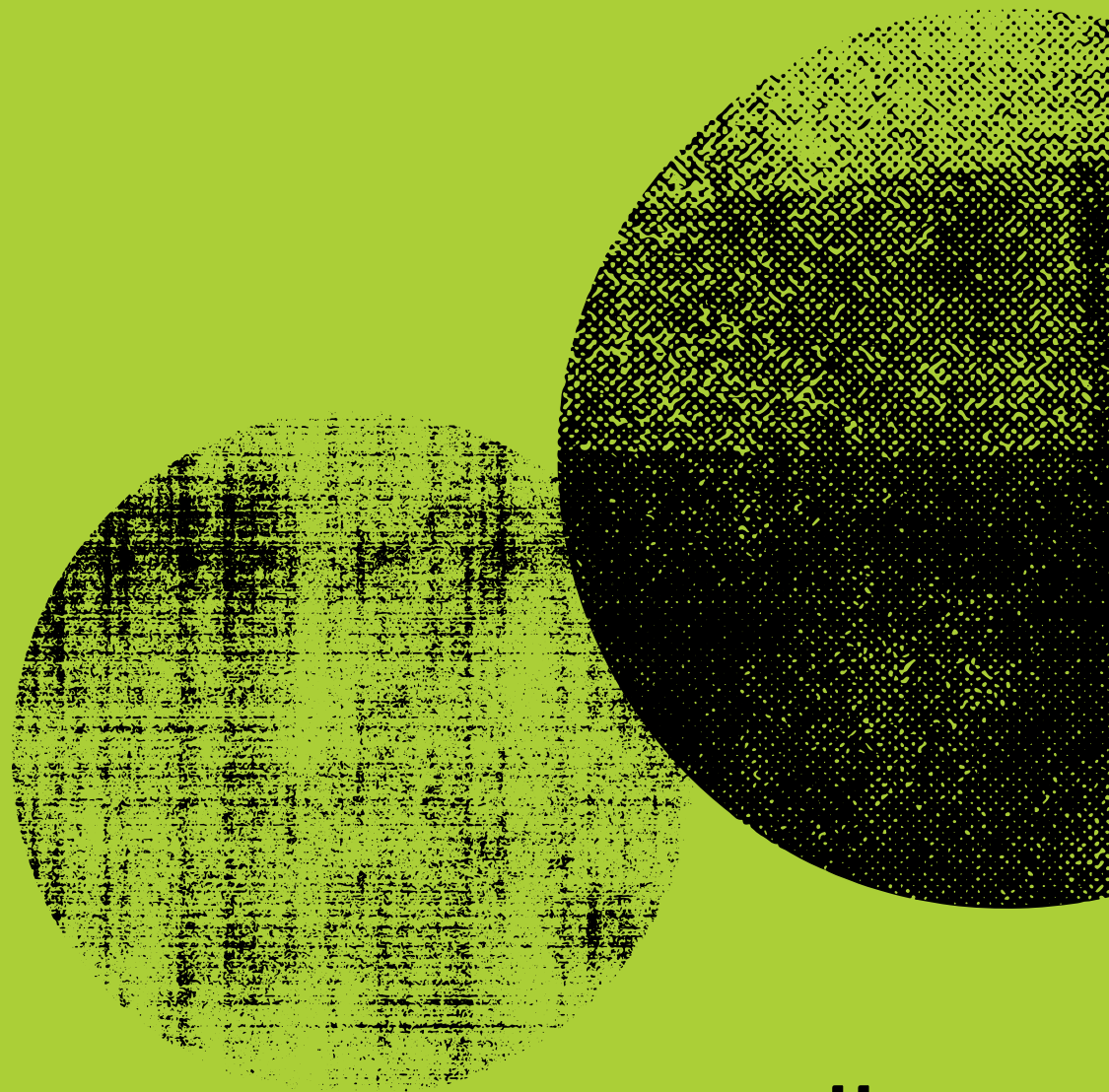
Within this context, gender is recognised as a key dimension of analysis. It is not treated as an add-on, but as something that shapes how cultural initiatives are developed, how people participate, and how access and opportunities are distributed.

The IN SITU Concept Guide (IN SITU, 2024) approaches gender as both a social construct and a system of power. It refers to the roles, expectations, and attributes socially assigned to individuals, while gender identity relates to how each person identifies, which may differ from their biological sex.

This booklet provides an accessible overview of how the gender dimension has been addressed throughout the IN SITU project. It brings together data and insights to highlight key patterns, challenges, and opportunities across cultural and creative industries in non-urban areas — from the wider European context to organisations and project activities.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that although this booklet adopts an inclusive understanding of gender that goes beyond binary categories, the empirical data collected throughout the project reflects a significantly stronger presence of cis female and cis male, with comparatively limited representation of trans, non-binary, intersex, queer, and other gender-diverse individuals. This should be taken into consideration in reading and interpreting the analysis presented in this booklet.





II. **Gender Equality:** Historical Context, Rural Disparities, and Policy Frameworks

Brief Historical Perspective on Gender Equality in Europe

In rural contexts, women have long contributed to cultural and creative practices, particularly through crafts and artisanal work. However, such contributions have often gone unrecognised within formal cultural sectors. This helps explain why women's presence in recognised cultural roles, especially in leadership positions, has remained limited.

Gender inequalities in cultural and creative industries are thus shaped not only by gender itself but also by place. In non-urban areas, geographic isolation, limited infrastructure, and reduced access to funding and professional networks influence both how cultural work takes place and who participates. These conditions tend to reinforce traditional gender roles and make women's work less visible and less valued, especially when it occurs in informal or domestic settings. They may also contribute to environments where different forms of gender-based discrimination, exclusion, and violence persist, particularly in informal or precarious working contexts.

Despite the perception of cultural and creative sectors as open and progressive, inequalities remain pervasive, affecting not only women but also trans, non-binary, queer, and other gender-diverse individuals, whose experiences often remain less visible within both policy frameworks and cultural institutions.



It is precisely this ethos of progressiveness that obscures existing inequalities and even pushes sexism and other forms of discrimination beyond the boundaries of the unspeakable – but not beyond the boundaries of the possible.”

— Walther, Heinicke & Kegler, 2023, p. 5

These inequalities are also reinforced by the nature of creative work:



CCIs are marked by persistent gender inequalities that are amplified by the precariousness, informality and requirements for flexibility which are widely noted features of contemporary creative employment.”

— Walther, Heinicke & Kegler, 2023, p. 7

Women are more often found in lower-paid, part-time, and project-based roles, and are still underrepresented in leadership positions.

CCIs in non-urban areas can support women's economic independence and participation, but only if gender is actively considered in how these initiatives are designed and implemented.

Policy Frameworks for Gender Equality in Europe

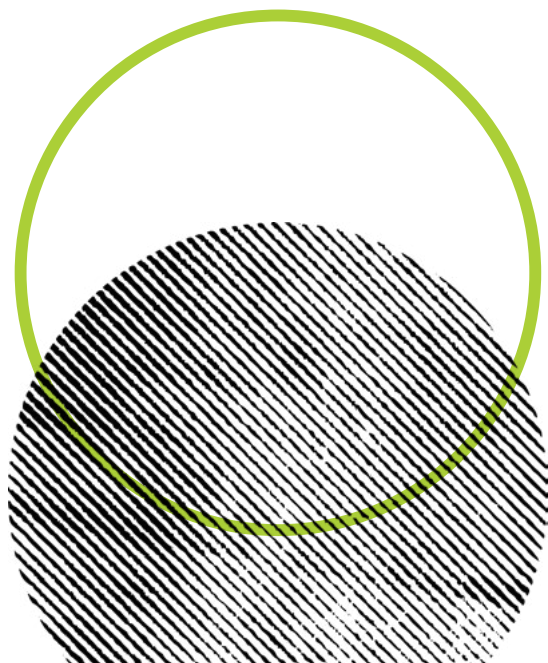
Gender equality is a core principle of the European Union (EU) and is embedded in its legal framework. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union establishes equal pay as a fundamental right, while the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights prohibits discrimination based on sex (European Union, 2012, Art. 21; European Parliament, 2025).

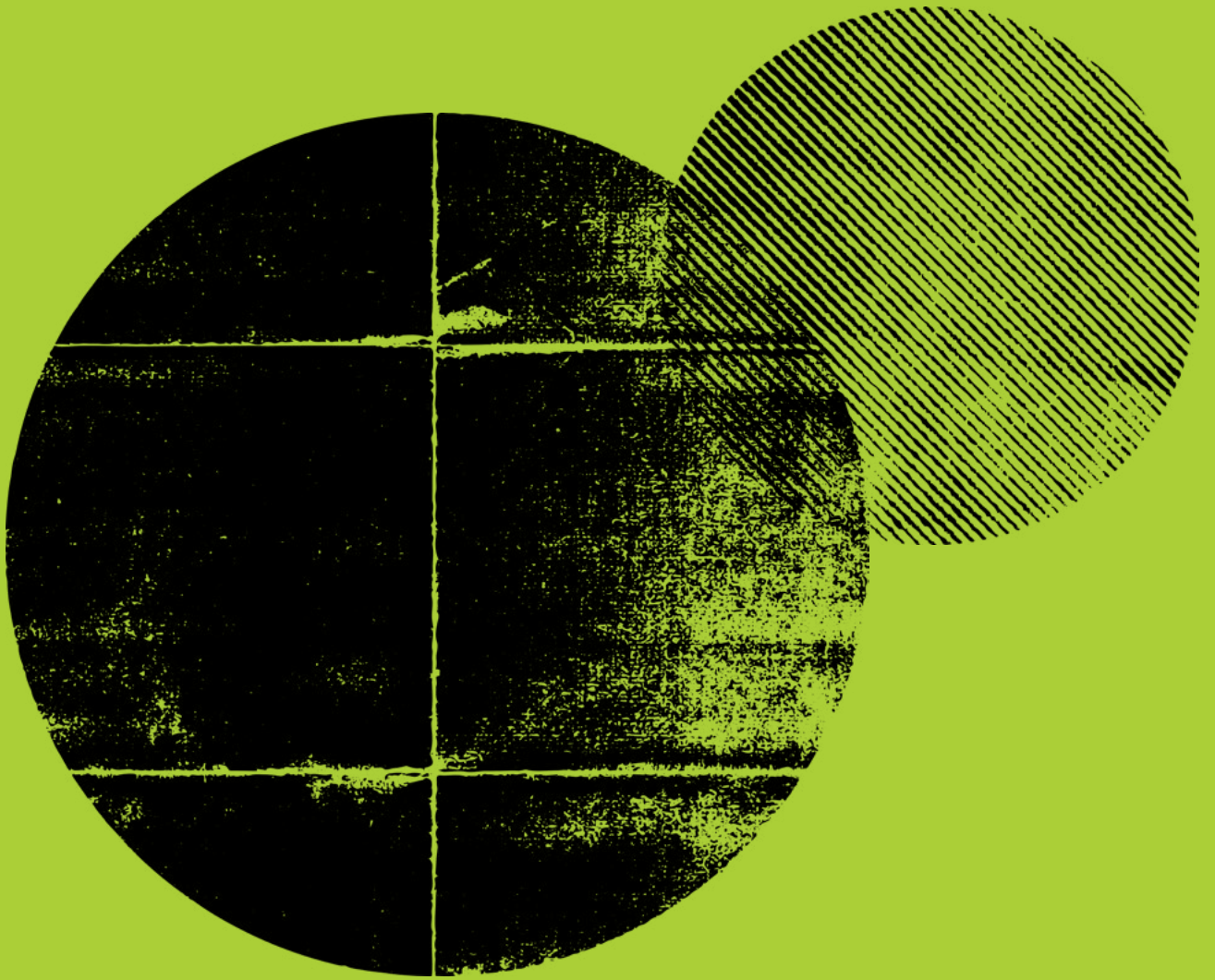
This commitment is further advanced through policy frameworks such as the European Commission's *Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030*, which builds on previous initiatives and translates the *Roadmap for Women's Rights* into concrete action (European Parliament, 2025). The Strategy adopts a dual approach, combining targeted measures with systematic gender mainstreaming across all policy areas, and sets out key priorities including combating gender-based violence, promoting economic empowerment and equal pay, supporting work–life balance and equality in care, ensuring equal participation in the labour market and decision-making, and strengthening institutional mechanisms for gender equality (European Commission, 2026).

At the policy level, gender mainstreaming is applied across EU programmes and funding instruments, including Horizon Europe, ensuring that gender perspectives are integrated into research and innovation processes (EIGE, n.d.).

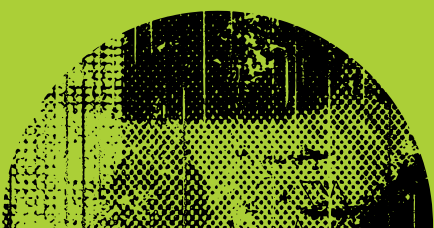
Under Horizon Europe, all funded projects are required to adopt a Gender Equality Plan and to integrate the gender dimension throughout their activities. In the IN SITU project, this is reflected in its methodological approach, monitoring processes, and in the analysis presented in this booklet.

In the context of cultural and creative industries, these frameworks support measures that promote participation, visibility, and access to opportunities (EIGE, 2019; Menzel, 2021). In non-urban areas, they also emphasise the importance of adapting policies to different territorial contexts, ensuring that cultural development and innovation are inclusive and accessible beyond urban centres (Walther, Heinicke & Kegler, 2023).





III. Methodological Approach to the Gender Dimension Analysis of the IN SITU project



This booklet is based on a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collected throughout the IN SITU project.

Qualitative data include insights from project reports produced by the IN SITU partners and interviews with case study representatives.

Quantitative data were collected through a monitoring system that recorded participation in IN SITU activities, including workshops, events, and other project-led initiatives. This monitoring was carried out using instruments such as forms and structured reporting templates, providing information on who participated, in what roles, and across which

regions. It offers a structured way to observe patterns of involvement, leadership, and engagement over time, complementing the qualitative insights from reports and interviews. By combining these data, the analysis captures both the overall trends and the specific nuances of gender dynamics within the project.

Together, these data sources provide a broad understanding of gender dynamics, combining overall patterns with individual experiences (Creswell, 2009).

The analysis follows a three-level framework:



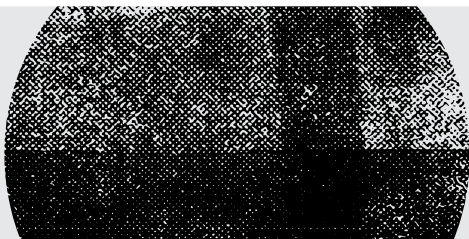
Although broader terms such as *women* and *men* are used throughout the booklet in historical and conceptual discussions, the empirical analysis presented in the following sections follows the predefined gender categories adopted within the IN SITU data collection framework. Accordingly, references to *female* and *male* in the analysis of

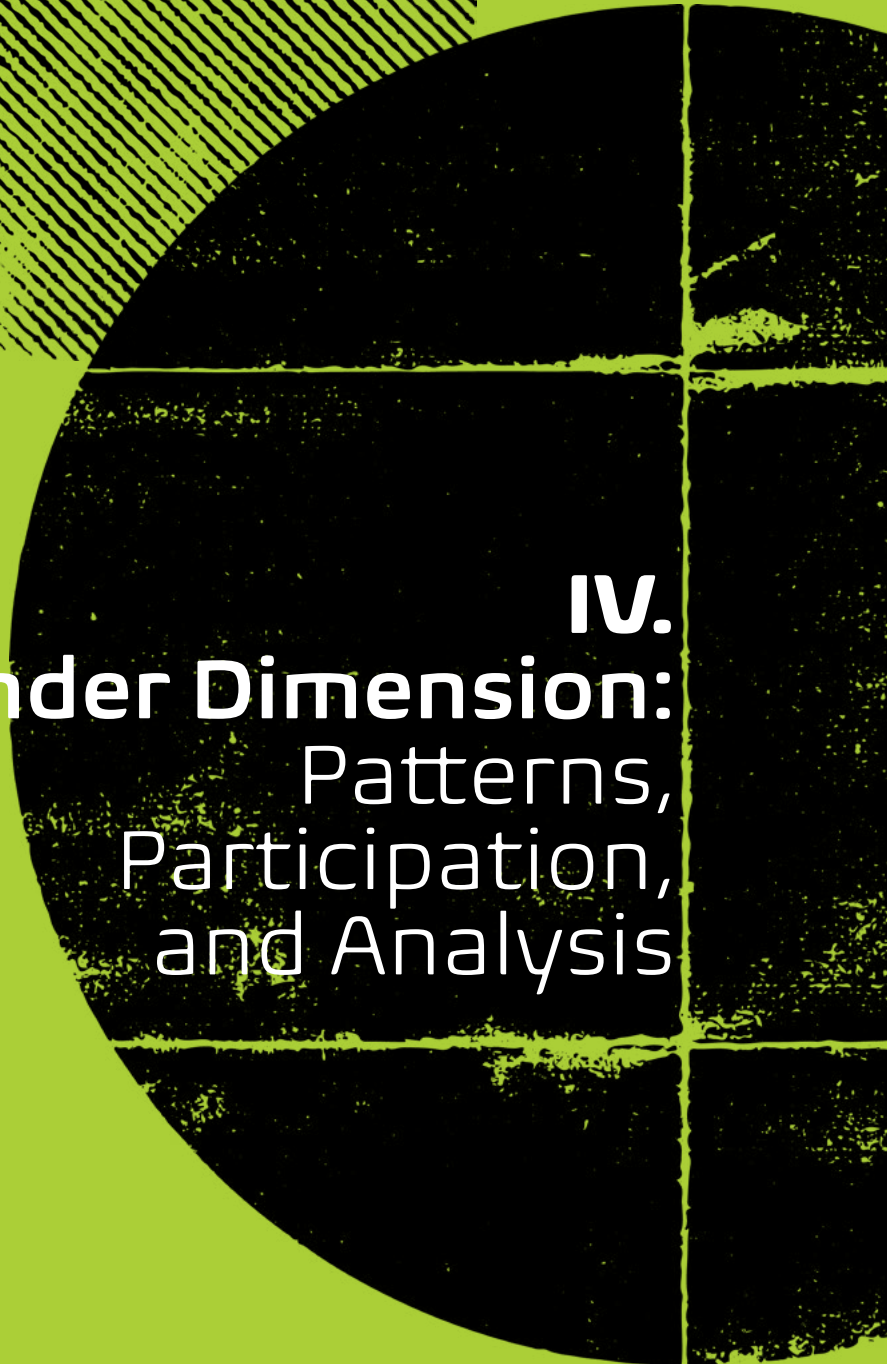
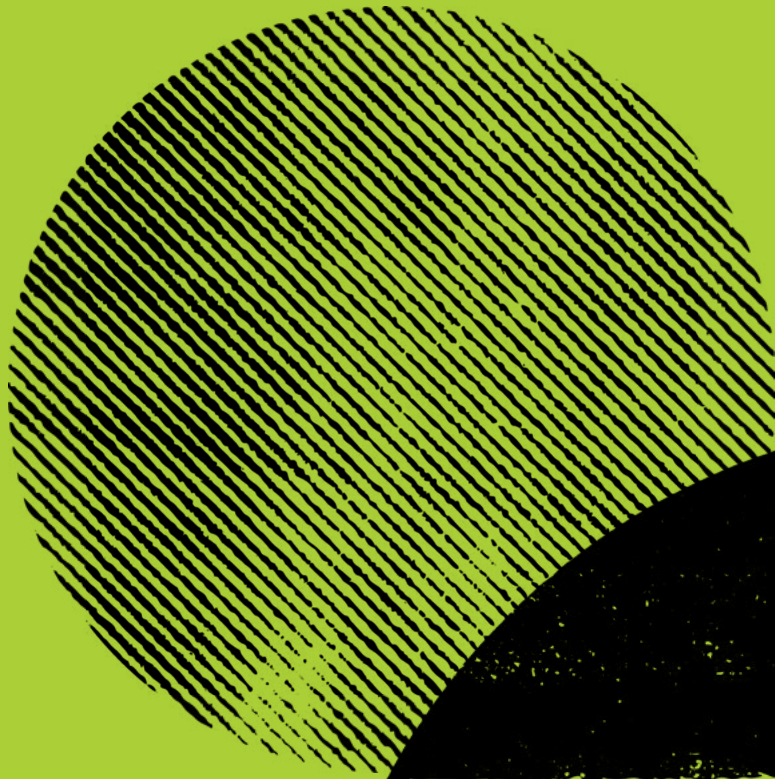
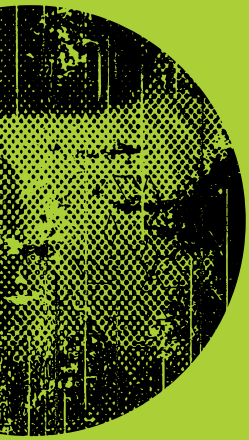
quantitative data specifically refer to the *cis female* and *cis male* categories included in the project's monitoring and data collection processes.

Gender data was collected through self-identification using the categories presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Gender categories used in IN SITU

Gender Category	Definition
CIS FEMALE / CIS MALE	Cisgender refers to individuals whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned at birth (Aultman, 2014).
TRANSGENDER	“An adjective to describe people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. People who are transgender may also use other terms, in addition to transgender, to describe their gender more specifically.” (GLAAD, n.d.-a)
NON-BINARY / GENDERQUEER	Individuals whose gender identity is not exclusively male or female and may vary over time or reject binary categories (Richards et al., 2016).
INTERSEX	“Intersex refers to someone with one or more innate sex characteristics, including genitals, internal reproductive organs, and chromosomes, that fall outside of traditional conceptions of male or female bodies.” (GLAAD, n.d.-b)
OTHER GENDER	Any gender identity not captured by the categories above (self-described).
I DO NOT WISH TO DISCLOSE	Participants who prefer not to share their gender identity.





IV. Gender Dimension: Patterns, Participation, and Analysis

1. The CCI sector in non-urban areas

Cultural and creative industries play a key role in non-urban areas, contributing to local economies, community life, and cultural expression.

Across European regions, women are strongly represented in cultural and creative occupations, particularly in non-urban contexts where these activities are closely connected to local communities.



[...] despite the high number of women graduates in education and training in the cultural sphere, they are more often employed in low-paid jobs and still struggle to advance their careers, because of several persistent inequalities such as (horizontal and vertical) segregation patterns and/or the phenomenon of the gender pay gap."

— Walther, Heinicke & Kegler, 2023, p. 7

Women's strong presence within the sector does not necessarily result in equal opportunities, recognition, or influence over decision-making processes. Gender shapes how work is organised within the sector. Women are more often involved in roles related to cultural production, communication, education, and coordination, while men tend to be more represented in technical, digital, and leadership positions. These patterns reflect persistent forms of inequality, even within a sector often perceived as open and progressive.

As highlighted in IN SITU research, this perception of openness can sometimes obscure existing inequalities:



[...] sexism appears to be widely tolerated in the CCIs, described internally as an unpleasant but accepted reality."

— Walther, Heinicke & Kegler, 2023, p. 5

In non-urban areas, these dynamics are further influenced by local conditions. Limited access to funding, infrastructure, and professional networks can reinforce existing inequalities, while traditional gender roles may continue to shape expectations and participation.

At the same time, innovation in these contexts often takes different forms. Rather than being driven by technology alone, it is frequently expressed through cultural, social, and organisational practices rooted in local realities. Non-urban areas can be



remarkably innovative, even in the absence of agglomeration benefits."

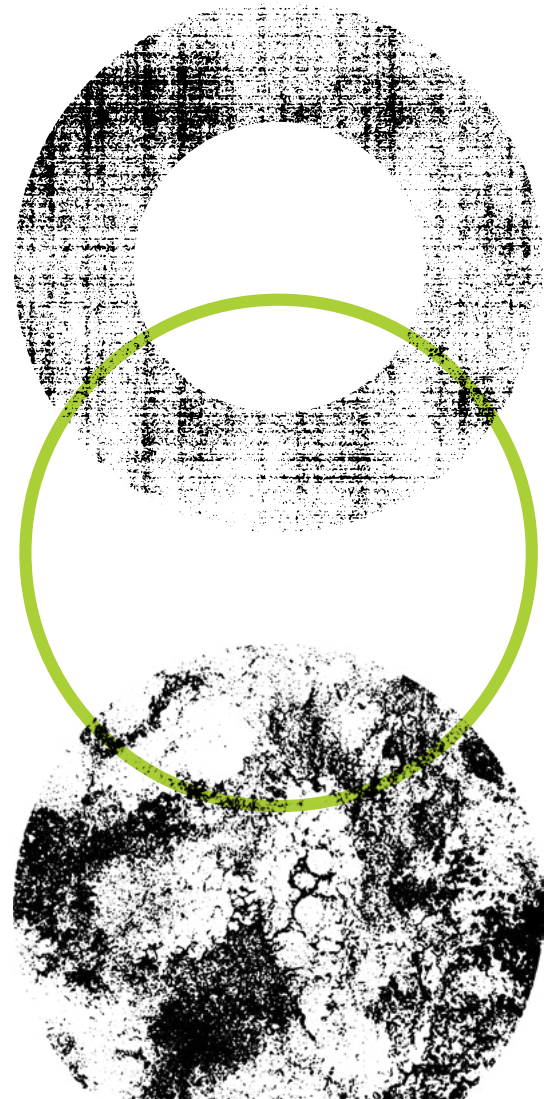
— Tessarin, Cortinovia, Castaldi, & Boschma, 2023, p. 11

This broader understanding of innovation is important, as it makes visible forms of contribution that are often overlooked by conventional indicators. However, not all contributions are equally recognised.

Traditional measures of innovation, such as patents, tend to reflect high-tech and research-intensive activities, where men are more strongly represented. In contrast, forms of innovation more common in CCI, including cultural production, social innovation, and community-based practices, are less visible in these metrics. As a result, women's contributions to innovation in non-urban CCI may be underestimated.

At the same time, differences in access to skills and resources continue to shape participation. Women are more frequently present in roles requiring lower to medium levels of digital skills, while their representation in more specialised technical areas remains more limited. In non-urban contexts, where access to training and infrastructure may be more constrained, these differences can be further reinforced.

Despite the perception of CCI as inclusive spaces, inequalities remain embedded in their structures and everyday practices. Participation alone does not ensure equality, as access to resources, visibility, and decision-making continues to be unevenly distributed.



2. CCI at an organizational level

This level focuses on how gender is reflected within organisations operating in the cultural and creative sector. While the previous section looked at broader patterns across the sector, this level shifts the focus to how these dynamics are experienced in practice, within organisations, projects, and everyday working environments.

Cultural and creative organisations play a key role in shaping how work is organised, who takes on different roles, and how opportunities are distributed. They are often spaces of collaboration, creativity, and experimentation, but they are also influenced by wider social structures and existing inequalities.

Understanding gender at this level means looking beyond overall participation and examining how responsibilities, visibility, and decision-making are shared within organisations. It also involves considering how organisational structures, working conditions, and access to resources can influence participation in different ways.

Cultural Mapping: Who Leads?

The cultural mapping produced within the project provides an overview of gender distribution across CCIs, organisations, and events and festivals in the IN SITU Lab regions. The data refers to individuals in leading or representative roles, such as founders or directors.

Across both data collection moments (2018–2022 and 2023–2024), a consistent pattern emerges: cis male representation is higher than cis female representation across all categories.

This imbalance is most visible in CCIs and events and festivals, while non-profit cultural organisations tend to present a more balanced distribution.

Three main trends can be identified:

- Persistent gender imbalance in leadership roles, with higher representation of cis males
- Variation across categories, with non-profit cultural organisations showing more balanced distributions
- Differences across organisational settings, reflecting how organisational structures and sector characteristics shape participation



Insights from case studies: What Do the Interviews Tell Us?

Interviews with case study representatives provide a closer look at how gender is understood and experienced within cultural and creative organisations. The semi-structured format allowed participants to reflect not only on their working conditions but also on how gender is perceived, addressed, and sometimes overlooked in their everyday practices.

Across most cases, gender equality is framed less as a deliberate objective and more as an assumed outcome of openness. Participation is frequently described as accessible to all, with several initiatives presented as being “for everyone”.

In several instances, participants explicitly acknowledged that gender was not considered during the design of their projects:

“No, it’s not designed to. We didn’t think about that in that moment.”

“I don’t imagine that was part of the conversation.”

In this sense, equality is often understood as something that will naturally emerge from inclusive environments, rather than as a dimension requiring intentional planning or reflection.

“We think that we are equal... but still we are not. It is a men’s world.”

This highlights a gap between the idea of inclusivity and the realities of gendered experience.

In some cases, gender is present but not explicitly framed as such. Instead, it is embedded within broader values such as respect, diversity, and inclusion:

“When we talk about respect, consent, diversity... we are talking about gender issues.”

“It is always implicit... it’s a profoundly feminist project because... everyone should have the right to the same things.”

These accounts suggest that gender can be actively present in practice, even when it is not formally recognised or articulated.

At the level of everyday practices, recurring patterns emerge in how roles are distributed. Women are frequently associated with organisation, coordination, and community engagement:

“It’s always the women that take the initiative and organize things and make something happen... it’s always the women that volunteer to take the steps.”

While these roles are essential to the functioning of projects, they are often informal and less visible. At the same time, men tend to be more present in technical or specialised roles:

“The percentage of female professionals in these [technical] areas is still very low.”

Even in contexts where women are highly present, this does not necessarily translate into equal visibility or recognition:

“There could be at least two or three men. And it’s wow, they are coming here.”

“When two men sort of turn up, everyone is so happy to see them... as if 50, 70 females are less valuable than two male members.”

These examples point to a disconnect between participation and recognition.

The interviews also reveal differences in how gender is perceived. Women more frequently describe how gender shapes their experiences and the need to challenge expectations:

“We are proving that you don’t have to be a man or with a man to [do this type of work].”

“It is totally different... that I’m living... as a woman. It’s totally different... if I would be a man.”

In contrast, male participants tend to frame gender in more general terms:

“It doesn’t really matter... it is based on the people.”

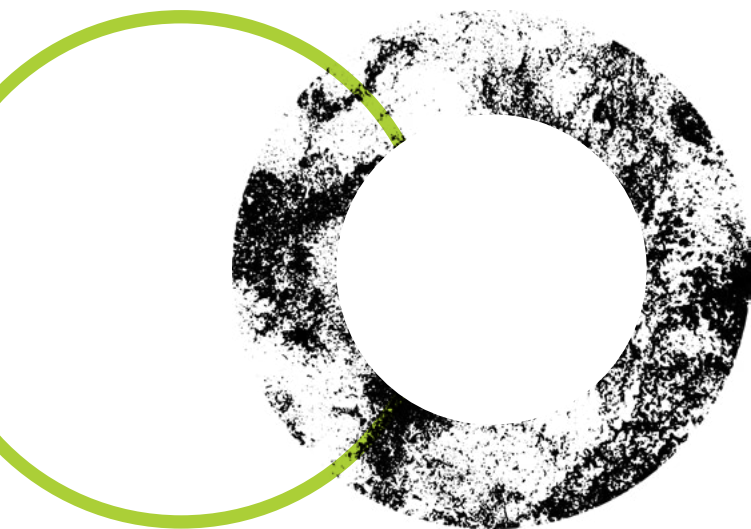
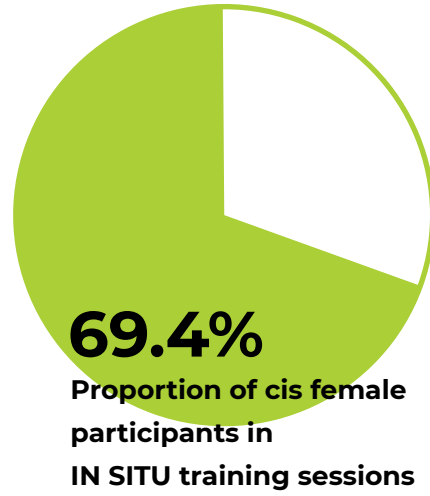
While this reflects a commitment to fairness, it may also make it more difficult to recognise structural inequalities.

Rather than offering a general overview of the sector, these interviews capture situated experiences, shaped by specific organisational and territorial contexts. They reveal how gender is not only a structural issue, but also something negotiated in practice through decisions, interactions, and ways of working.

Training and Capacity-Building

Training sessions delivered across the six IN SITU Labs between 2023 and 2024 provide additional evidence on gender participation patterns. These sessions, which addressed topics including entrepreneurship, funding, digitalisation, sustainability, and cross-sector collaboration, were predominantly attended by women.

This strong female participation in capacity-building activities is consistent with the broader pattern identified in the interviews, in which women are described as more actively involved in cultural and community-based activities. While encouraging, this pattern also raises questions about the structural conditions that make women more likely to seek out training — and whether this motivation reflects a response to existing barriers and inequalities.



across activities, although their presence is visible in specific contexts such as the IN SITU Camp and the Summer School.

A share of participants selected “I do not wish to disclose” or did not provide a response, particularly in activities such as surveys and interviews, which reflects differences in participation formats and data collection approaches. Overall, the distribution highlights consistent patterns of participation

across activities, with a strong presence of cis female participants alongside a meaningful contribution from cis male participants across formats.

In addition, the project ensured that gender was consistently addressed in key meetings, with approximately 10% of the time in Kick-off and Consortium Meetings dedicated to the Gender Dimension.

Key Findings

→ Strong female participation across activities

Women consistently represent the majority of participants across most IN SITU activities, particularly in participatory and community-based formats.

→ Gender dynamics vary by activity format

More participatory and collaborative formats tend to engage more women, while more formal contexts show more balanced participation.

→ Structural inequalities remain in CCIs

Gender inequalities persist across the sector, particularly in access to recognition, resources, and decision-making positions.

→ Inclusive approaches create more equitable spaces

Participatory formats and IN SITU Labs demonstrate the potential of inclusive approaches to foster more balanced and diverse participation.

→ Limited visibility of gender diversity

While inclusive gender categories were used, the collected data remained predominantly centred on cis female and cis male participation.

→ Gender as a cross-cutting dimension matters

Integrating gender throughout the project contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of participation and representation.



v. Recommendations

The findings of this report point to a gap that recurs across all levels of analysis: the gap between what gender equality requires in practice and what happens within cultural and creative industries in non-urban areas. Women participate actively — but this participation does not automatically translate into equal recognition, visibility, or influence. Moving beyond this gap requires action at multiple levels.



“The cultural sector can act as a role model in the area of gender equality and collectively reflect on the gender system, and eventually even break down gender as a social construct.”

— Tessarin, Cortinovia, Castaldi, & Boschma, 2023, p. 33

For EU Programmes

EU-funded programmes play an important role in ensuring that the gender dimension is integrated into projects from the outset. The IN SITU experience suggests there is room to strengthen how these principles are applied in practice.

- Use Gender Equality Plans as ongoing reference points throughout the project, not merely as administrative requirements to be fulfilled at the proposal stage.
- Provide clearer and more practical guidance on implementing the gender dimension, particularly for projects operating in non-urban or rural contexts with limited prior experience.
- Strengthen evaluation approaches by examining how roles, visibility, and access to opportunities are distributed in practice — going beyond compliance with formal requirements.
- Recognise the diversity of project contexts. Flexible support mechanisms that accommodate different territorial realities, including non-urban settings, will be more effective than standardised approaches.



For Policymakers

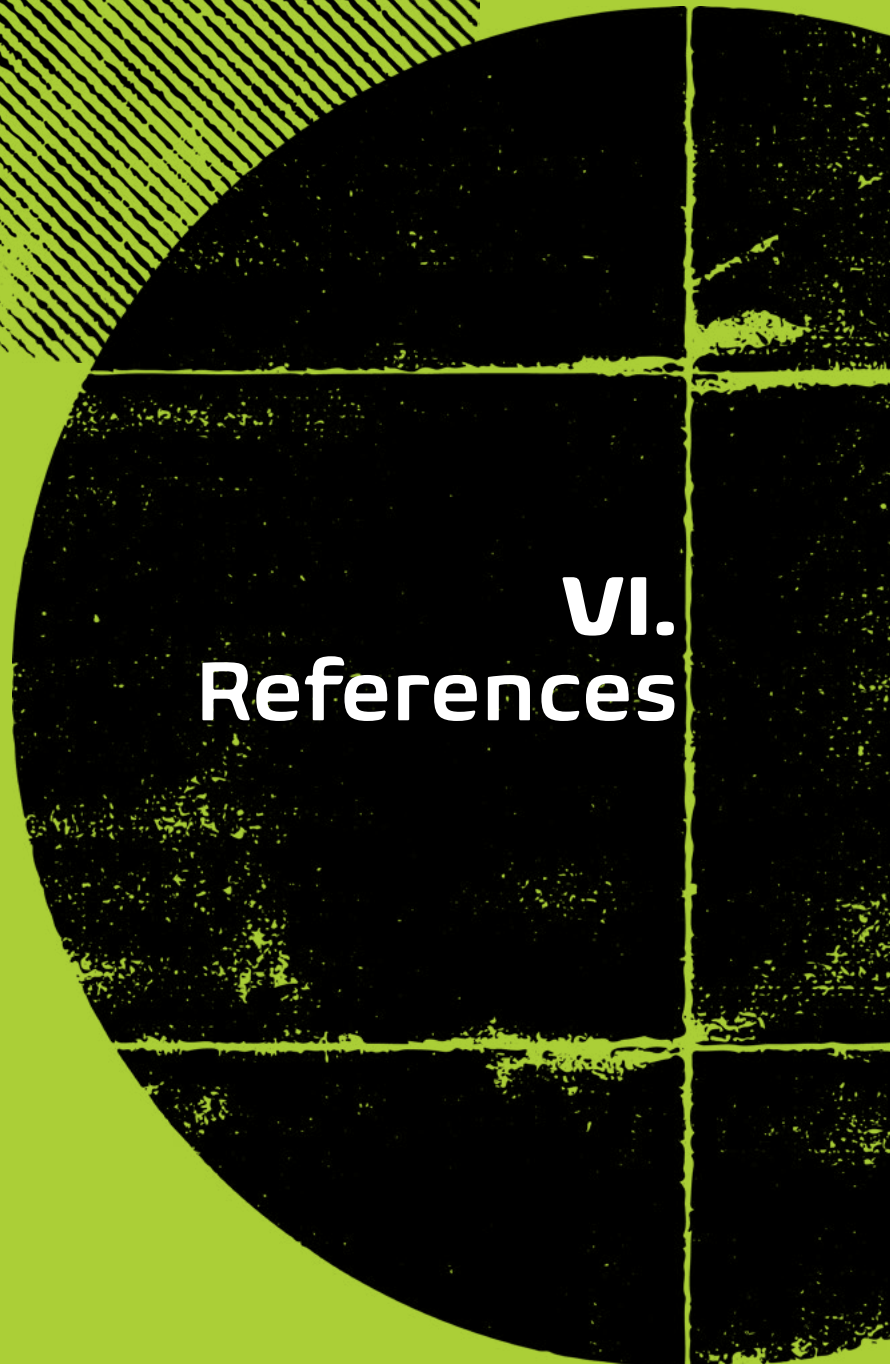
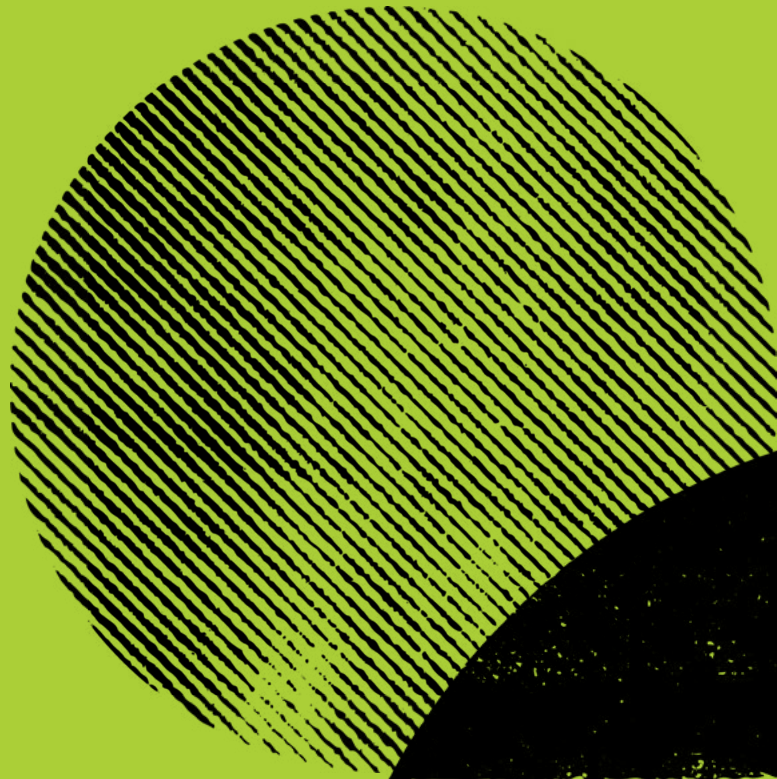
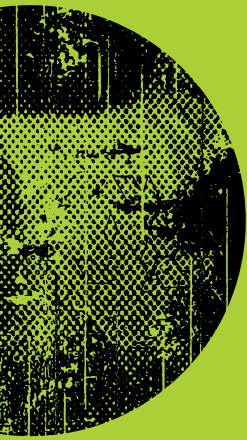
Policies aimed at supporting CCIs need to go beyond counting participants and instead examine who occupies positions of visibility, leadership, and decision-making — and whether structural conditions enable equal access to those positions.

- Recognise and value non-technological forms of innovation, including cultural production, community-based initiatives, and collaborative practices — areas where women are strongly represented but often overlooked by standard innovation metrics.
- Support access to digital and technical skills for women working in CCIs. As the data shows, women are underrepresented in more technically specialised roles; targeted training can help address this imbalance.
- Adapt policy measures to the realities of non-urban areas. Geographic isolation, limited infrastructure, and restricted access to professional networks require context-sensitive approaches rather than one-size-fits-all solutions.
- Support local initiatives, facilitate connections between actors, and improve access to training and funding in non-urban areas — particularly where informal networks and limited resources are the primary shapers of opportunity.

For Organisations

Organisations play a central role in shaping how gender equality is experienced in practice. Gender equality is often recognised as important — but is not always reflected in everyday practices. Addressing this gap requires moving from implicit commitments to explicit action.

- Adopt formal tools such as Gender Equality Plans, supported by dedicated working groups or gender committees that ensure gender considerations remain present throughout project design and implementation.
- Create spaces for reflection: workshops, facilitated discussions, or internal conversations where gender equality is explicitly discussed. Introducing these early in project development helps build shared understanding.
- Review working conditions. The project-based and often unstable nature of CCI work can create uneven experiences, particularly for those in more precarious positions. Clearer expectations and fairer task allocation can help.
- Value the full range of contributions within organisations — including coordination, communication, and community engagement. These roles, disproportionately performed by women, are central to how cultural initiatives function and should be recognised and remunerated accordingly.
- Support access to digital and technical training, while ensuring that existing non-technical expertise is equally valued.



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IN SITU: Place-based innovation of cultural and creative industries in non-urban areas

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