

**Interreg
Danube Region**



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Output 2.2

Transnational Road Map and National Action Plans

**Strengthening the capacity of the educational and
training system under a gender perspective**

This document is issued by the consortium formed for the implementation of the Fem2forests project by the following partners:

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- Foundation for Improvement of Employment Possibilities PRIZMA (PRIZMA), Slovenia
- University of Ljubljana, Biotechnical Faculty (UL(BF)), Slovenia
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Disclaimer

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Objectives

The forestry sector in the Danube region must secure a sustainable workforce while opening its doors wider to under-represented groups—above all, women. Although recent years have brought progress, female participation in forestry education and careers remains disproportionately low. At the same time, the transition toward a modern, sustainability-oriented forestry offers fresh opportunities to attract and retain young women.

Within the EU-funded Fem2forests project, partners have developed a Transnational Innovation Roadmap that blends scientific evidence, best practices and the lived experiences of students, graduates and employers. Building on the roadmap's findings, this National Action Plan (NAP) translates transnational insights into a set of concrete, nationally tailored measures designed to:

1. Strengthen gender awareness in educational and training institutions.
2. Spark girls' and young women's interest in forestry study and career pathways.
3. Remove gender-specific barriers to entry, progression, and leadership in the sector.
4. Foster long-term retention of women through inclusive policies and supportive work environments.

The NAP draws on key project outputs—including the cross-country alumni study (O2.1) and previous deliverables (D1.3.1, D2.1.1)—to offer a catalogue of actionable interventions, timelines and roles for schools, vocational centers, universities, employers, and policymakers. It also sets out a common evaluation framework so that lessons learned from pilot actions at national or sub-national level can be captured, compared and scaled across the Danube region. Each country specific NAP also builds on the National Action Plans developed under the Fem4Forest initiative and re-evaluates their pilot actions aimed at forestry professionals.

By operationalizing the roadmap's recommendations within the national context, the NAP aims to boost the innovative capacity and future viability of forestry—through greater diversity, gender equality and the meaningful participation of women at every stage of education, training and professional practice.

1.2 Relevance and Need for Innovation

The necessity to attract more young women to a career in forestry and to secure equal access is a central area of action for a sustainable forestry sector in the Danube region and beyond. As the transnational alumni study of female graduates (O2.1) clearly shows, the proportion of female professionals in forestry education pathways and careers remains low despite positive developments. In many countries, traditional role models, structural disadvantages, and stereotypical ideas about the "male" profession of forestry influence perceptions and actual career paths for women.

The results of the preliminary study (Fem4Forest) and the current needs and barriers analysis (D1.1.1) emphasize that the fundamental motivation or qualification of young women is not lacking. Rather, as country-specific analyses also show, they face various obstacles: lack of visibility of female role models, insufficient information about career paths, stereotypical ideas of physically demanding "men's work," lack of practical training, low flexibility of work models, and insufficient institutional support for balancing work and family. In order to address this problem and improve the situation for women in the forestry sector, it is necessary to resort to innovative concepts and approaches. To this end, the definition of innovation developed by Fem4Forest is used:

An **innovation concept**, therefore, means: New to the forest sector, new to the place, new for the country; A best practice, an institution, collective actions, governance arrangements, special financing/educational/informational/organizational means; a transfer of knowledge from other sectors to forestry sector; creation of forest female professional organization/ representation/ department. Innovation needs are particularly evident in the areas shown in table 1.

Table 1: Innovation Areas

Innovation Area	Brief Description
Structural Change and Visibility	Present forestry as a modern, diverse sector and highlight female success stories; embed female role models in education and public outreach.
Early and Continuous Career Orientation	Offer low-threshold, continuous activities from kindergarten to university (e.g., mentoring, Girls' Days, camps, digital platforms) to break stereotypes early and open real decision-making space for girls.
Practical Training and Mentoring	Expand hands-on experience, targeted mentoring programs, and networks to reduce uncertainty, build confidence, and ease the transition into the workforce.
Flexibility and Compatibility	Introduce flexible work models, part-time options, family-friendly structures, and transparent career paths to attract and retain women; currently limited mainly to pilot projects.
Systematic Promotion of Gender Awareness	Embed gender perspectives structurally in educational institutions and companies through gender-awareness training, gender-sensitive teaching materials, targeted support measures, and inclusion of girls and women in decision-making.
Innovative Communication and Support Formats	Use digital tools, social media campaigns, storytelling, and peer-to-peer networks to reach, connect, and retain young women over the long term.

The National Action Plan addresses the need for innovation by adopting a participatory approach that systematically integrates scientific evidence, best practices, and the experiences of its target groups. It presents a catalogue of practical solutions adapted for national implementation and sets out concrete planning steps that educational institutions, employers, and policymakers can jointly carry out. In doing so, the NAP helps to sustainably enhance the innovative capacity and future viability of the forestry sector in the Danube region—through greater diversity, gender equality, and the targeted inclusion of young women at every stage of education, training, and professional practice.

1.3 Structure of the Roadmap and National Plans

This document is divided into the following key chapters:

- Introduction, Objectives and Need for Innovation
- Analysis of Country specific needs
- Summary of recommendations and future actions

Each National Action Plan incorporates a reassessment of Fem4Forest NAP and pilot activities, an analysis of country specific needs, a description of planned pilot actions and recommendations and future actions that go beyond the project scope.

2 Country Specific Needs

Although recent data confirm a gradual rise in the proportion of female forestry students throughout the Danube region, progress is uneven and intertwined with broader demographic trends. Most partner countries report modest but steady gains in women's enrolment, yet Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia grapple with an overall contraction in student numbers that risks diluting these gender advances.

Differences in perceived career readiness further expose national contrasts. Austrian alumnae largely consider themselves "fit for practice", whereas their Bavarian counterparts still sense a confidence and skills gap vis-à-vis male peers, and many Serbian students voice clear doubts about their preparedness for the labour market. Concurrently, social, technological and economic shifts—ranging from digital forest inventories to the bio-economy and other green-job niches—are opening fresh entry points for women. Yet these opportunities seldom reach pupils outside forestry schools; knowledge of career paths among non-forestry students remains strikingly low, and gender-based differentiation during field courses or internships continues to erode the sense of belonging. The persistent stereotype of forestry as physically demanding "men's work" thus survives, even as the profession itself diversifies.

To translate rising interest into sustainable participation, partner countries converge on a package of mutually reinforcing actions:

- Early and continuous career guidance in schools, underpinned by visible female role models

- Mandatory practical modules and structured mentoring to close the theory–practice gap
- Proactive communication of emerging fields (climate services, circular bio-economy, digital technologies)
- Systematic gender- and diversity-training across all educational stages

A coordinated push along these lines can address both structural and cultural barriers, strengthen the talent pipeline and help build a resilient, gender-balanced forestry sector for the entire Danube region.

2.1 Austria

Survey and round-table discussions to identify barriers and needs for greater participation of girls and young women in forestry training and careers

At the start of the Fem2forests project, a questionnaire survey was conducted among female students at forestry and non-forestry schools, as well as among female forestry students of Boku University. A total of 87 girls and young women took part in the questionnaire survey. To round off and supplement the survey, round-table discussions with stakeholders were also held.

The analysis of the questionnaires completed by female pupils at forestry and non-forestry schools and female students, together with the findings from the round-table discussions, revealed the perceptions that girls and young women have of the forestry sector, the image associated with it, and highlights the areas where further action is required.

Positive developments:

- Many students feel well prepared for their future careers and are confident they will find a job.
- Stakeholders generally observe a positive trend, particularly in terms of the proportion of female students and their skills and competences.

Opportunities for the forestry sector and for women in forestry:

- Social and economic changes (e.g. in forest ownership structures – ‘new forest owners’) are bringing fresh perspectives to the sector. These align well with the interests of many young people and open new opportunities, for example in forest wellness, forest therapy, forest tourism or innovative approaches to timber production.
- Technical developments and new technologies are transforming work in the forestry sector. This is creating new career paths, and the work is increasingly moving away from heavy physical labour. This opens additional opportunities for women.

Based on the results, a number of areas were identified in which measures should be taken in future:

- Motivation, support through mentoring and role models can help girls and young women to develop a clear vision of their future careers and to put this into practice.

- Overcoming gender stereotypes through communication and raising awareness is important for breaking down traditional gender roles.
- The perception of an outdated sector is to be replaced by a modern image of a forward-looking sector. To achieve this, the various fields of activity and career opportunities must be presented clearly and vividly.
- Provide more information about forestry careers: particularly in schools that do not specialise in forestry, there is still too little information available about careers in the forestry sector. Very few pupils have so far received information on this subject or considered working in this field. There is a need to provide more engaging, clear and accessible information about forestry careers, tailored to the relevant target group.

Forestry in career guidance

Providing more information about job, training and career opportunities in the forestry sector – both in general and specifically for girls – is also a key task for career guidance.

Within the framework of career guidance, there are already initiatives and campaigns that provide information across the entire forestry value chain. Furthermore, the Austrian career guidance system is characterised by well-established networks, such as the 'i-bobb' network, which facilitates regular exchange between career guidance institutions. This is complemented by training and further education programmes for teachers in the context of career guidance. Local events such as career fairs or open days are also well received. They enable direct and effective contact with students and offer the opportunity to provide first-hand information on training and career opportunities. Career guidance is also firmly embedded in primary and secondary school curricula.

At the same time, the system also has a number of weaknesses. For instance, there is currently a lack of comprehensive, engaging and target-group-specific teaching materials tailored specifically to careers in the forestry and timber sector. Furthermore, some teachers have only limited knowledge of the sector. Traditional, gender-stereotypical perceptions of occupational and professional fields further reinforce the already low participation of girls and women in forestry training. The comparatively low presence of representatives from the forestry and timber sector at career fairs also contributes to potential target groups being reached less effectively.

Furthermore, financial constraints within the sector make it difficult to implement large-scale information and awareness-raising initiatives. Last but not least, attitudes that are still somewhat traditional within the forestry sector itself can also pose obstacles to engaging younger target groups – particularly girls and women.

Overview of the approaches and solutions compiled in Fem2forests aimed at increasing the participation of girls and young women in forestry training and careers

Forestry is often perceived as physically demanding and male-dominated work. This perception deters many young women from choosing training or a career in this sector. To attract more

women to forestry, the sector's image must be transformed, more information specifically for girls and role models must be made available, and awareness of gender-equality-oriented structures and measures in training and the workplace must be raised. Schools, businesses and policymakers, as key stakeholders, also play an important role in this regard.

The following areas could be targeted to attract more girls and young women to the forestry sector:

Changing the image of forestry

- A more modern, sustainable and diverse portrayal of forestry as a career field
- PR campaigns that raise the profile of women in forestry
- Emphasis on topics such as climate protection, sustainability and technology
- Personal stories from women in forestry careers shared via social media and school visits
- Events such as Girls' Days, career fairs or field trips featuring female role models

Providing information about careers at an early stage and showcasing role models – many girls know too little about training and career opportunities in forestry

- Cover topics relating to forests and forestry as a career path within career guidance activities in schools
- Invite women working in forestry (e.g. female foresters) to give talks or take part in joint projects
- Establish mentoring programmes between schoolgirls and professionals
- Build networks of (young) women in forestry or specifically invite young women to join networks

Provide more practical experience and mentoring – many girls know little about practical work in the forest

- Work placements and job shadowing through collaboration between schools and businesses
- More field trips and practical exercises as part of the forestry training
- Structured mentoring programmes with a focus on female leadership
- Platforms that connect schoolgirls with women working in forestry from different regions

Making forestry education more gender-equitable

- Adapt content to reflect contemporary issues (e.g. GIS, drones, sustainability)
- Use gender-sensitive teaching methods
- Employ more female teachers, guest speakers and female role models
- Create learning environments that promote gender equality

Establishing a work culture that promotes equality

- Gender-neutral language and imagery in job advertisements
- Flexible working arrangements (part-time, hybrid working)
- Measures to increase the number of women in leadership roles
- Training on equality and inclusive leadership

Strengthen political support and cooperation

- Long-term change requires support from policymakers and institutions.
- National strategies to attract girls to careers in forestry
- Incentives for companies to promote gender equality
- Support for projects in rural areas
- Cooperation between schools, universities, government departments and forestry companies

2.2 Bavaria

Results from the student survey (D1.1.1)

The survey shows that the most effective barriers preventing girls from taking up studies in the forestry sector are gender-specific stereotypes associated with forestry professions and a lack of visibility of female role models in the forestry sector. Several female forestry students also cite sexism and a male-dominated work environment in which women are not taken seriously as possible barriers to pursuing a career in forestry. Interestingly, those with experience in the forestry sector seem to have a stronger awareness of gender-related barriers through their educational pathway than the female students in secondary schools. Most forestry students report having experienced gender-specific challenges or prejudices during their forestry training or field stays. Similarly, 66% of respondents state that they were treated differently because of their gender during their training/internships. Many of the female forestry students report experiences of sexist behavior (e.g., inappropriate comments, physical advances, etc.) and emphasize that they are not taken seriously by their male fellow students because they are seen as weak or as not capable due to their gender ("They asked me whether I, as a woman, could even hold a chainsaw."). Further gender-specific challenges include aspects of female hygiene such as menstruation or toilet visits, which are not respected or are even mocked by teachers/supervisors during excursions or fieldwork. One student pointed out a lack of flexibility in forestry degree programs (e.g., mandatory full-time internships), which makes it very difficult for students with children to organize work-life balance. Several respondents state that they are eventually accepted by their male peers after demonstrating what they can do in physical work in the forest or in hunting activities.

Results of the round tables (D1.1.1)

The majority of participants at the first round table considered improved, more effective career promotion for forestry professions to be a very effective measure to attract young people to the forestry sector. This should highlight career opportunities in the forestry sector and be designed to target audiences more appropriately than before. Difficulties in implementing a more effective marketing strategy as well as in conducting information events are the limited financial and personnel resources at forestry training institutions. Participants also emphasized that further training opportunities in forestry professions should be communicated more intensively to improve career orientation. In addition to personal conversations at career fairs as well as websites and print materials, social media should also be used more frequently as communication channels. Most measures to improve the inclusion of women and girls in career orientation and training for forestry professions fell into the category of “events” and were aimed at school classes. Participants at the round table agreed that women can be recruited for forestry professions if interest and enthusiasm for the field are sparked at secondary schools. According to the participants, information events are considered an effective measure, ideally when they can take place directly at secondary schools. Another suggestion by participants to improve career orientation was an expanded offering of regional career fairs for forestry professions, which could be organized by forestry offices and the Bavarian forestry company. This would help raise awareness of forestry professions among schoolchildren in rural regions who cannot travel far to career fairs. The introduction of a Girls'/Boys' Day for forestry professions was regarded by all round table participants as a positive and desirable measure to improve career orientation for young women and girls. For implementation of the Girls'/Boys' Day, a first concept is to be developed in 2025 by the equal opportunities officers of the agricultural and forestry administration and the forestry offices of Bavaria. This is planned as an interdepartmental Girls'/Boys' Day for agricultural and forestry professions. However, the successful implementation of the campaign continues to depend on the capacities of individual forestry enterprises and forestry offices. To strengthen networking between female students and lecturers in forestry training institutions and thus facilitate entry into the forestry profession, participants suggested establishing a university group within the “Women in Forestry” network. This group does not yet exist but could make a valuable contribution to better integrating young women into the forestry sector. Participants agreed that mentoring should be promoted more strongly to attract young forestry professionals. Through mentoring, young people get the chance to get to know the forestry profession and receive guidance and support from forestry professionals, which can be very important when entering the profession. An improvement of existing mentoring in the forestry sector could be achieved through centralized administration of mentoring offers so that a larger pool of potential mentors and mentees can be utilized.

Strengths, weaknesses, challenges and barriers in the forestry education and training system

Strengths:

Statistical data show that the proportion of women entering forestry training has already increased in recent years. This indicates a growing interest among women in the forestry sector in Bavaria, which is a promising aspect. The strengths of the forestry education and training system in Bavaria lie in the variety of pathways to a forestry qualification. Young people can choose between vocational and academic schools and, due to the permeability of the education system, always have the opportunity to qualify for trainee programmes to take on leadership positions. Vocational schools offer young people in-depth practical training to prepare them for practical tasks in the field. Students who choose to pursue university studies can experience a broadly diversified curriculum with many practical exercises at the two forestry faculties in Bavaria. Through the universities' cooperation with research institutions such as the Bavarian State Institute for Forestry Research, students also have the opportunity to draw on applied scientific research in the forestry sector.

Weaknesses:

Despite the comprehensiveness of the forestry education system, there are some disadvantages. At vocational schools there is a clear lack of structured support systems for young women in vocational training, such as mentoring programmes or targeted career counselling, as well as a lack of female role models among teaching staff. This lack of representation can prevent female learners from fully taking advantage of opportunities in forestry-related occupations. Additionally, gender-specific stereotypes about physical demands and leadership roles exacerbate the challenge of attracting and retaining women in the field. Higher education institutions in the forestry sector do take measures to promote equality, such as the 'Bayern-Mentoring', but measures to raise awareness of gender-based inequalities in forestry training and to encourage women to pursue a forestry career remain insufficient. Further problems in university forestry education are overly theoretical curricula and too few opportunities for practical field experience and direct exchange with forestry professionals. Forestry students who aspire to a leadership position with the Bavarian State Forests must complete a two-year training programme – the 'Referendariat' – but are not guaranteed a position afterwards. If there are not enough vacancies at the Bavarian State Forestry Administration, only the trainees with the highest grades receive employment. This weakness can be considered a significant barrier for young people to pursue a career in forestry.

Challenges:

The forestry education system in Bavaria faces several challenges that must be overcome in order to attract more women to careers in forestry. One of the biggest challenges at vocational schools is gender inclusion, since the proportion of men is very high and support structures to create a more inclusive environment for women are lacking. At higher education institutions, students incur high costs for personal protective equipment, chainsaw licenses, hunting licenses and hunting equipment. Currently there are no scholarships or grants to help students cover these expenses. The lack of practical experience and opportunities to network with

forestry professionals at universities represents a major challenge for students to achieve a successful transition into working life. Another challenge for forestry training in Bavaria is the low awareness of the diversity of forestry occupations and the advantages of working in the forestry sector.

Opportunities for improvement:

Concrete recommendations for improving the forestry education and training system with a focus on diversity and inclusion as well as the current needs of the labor market in the forestry sector:

- *Changes to existing curricula:* Introduction of more strongly integrated mandatory internships during studies to promote students' exchange with experienced forestry professionals and provide them with the necessary skills for practical work. In addition, integrating curriculum-based courses to promote gender equality at all levels of forestry education is a key to change.
- *Adjustment of the 'Referendariat'-system of the Bavarian State Forests:* Increase the attractiveness of the Referendariat by emphasizing the high employment prospects after completion, despite the absence of a formal job guarantee. Awareness among graduates and students of the excellent labor market opportunities for Referendare should also be strengthened — even if they are not immediately hired — because this additional qualification significantly increases their attractiveness to employers and opens up diverse career paths. Additionally, female teachers should be included in the teaching staff. Training to promote diversity: Trainings that foster diversity and help young women build their self-confidence and communication skills during forestry training should be available at forestry educational institutions in Bavaria to better prepare women for professional life.
- *Mentoring:* Improve the existing mentoring programme at the University of Applied Sciences and create supportive programmes for women at vocational training sites.
- *Networking opportunities:* Establish local networks at forestry universities. Funding opportunities: Introduce scholarships to cover the high costs of forestry training at Bavarian universities and to finance support programmes for women in forestry such as Bayern-Mentoring.
- *Role models — increase the visibility of women in forestry:* Introduce regular talks by female forestry professionals for students to showcase the career paths of female role models and encourage young women to enter forestry professions.
- *Promote an image change:* Raise awareness of the "modern" profession of the forester / forestry specialist, which allows compatibility of work and private life, offers a broad field of activity and provides a stable source of income.
- *Marketing of forestry professions:* To promote forestry careers, highlight the advantages of working in the forestry sector and emphasize the positive impacts of forestry on climate and nature conservation. Strengthen gender-sensitive advertising to encourage

women to complete forestry training. From the analysis of the empirical data collected at the start of the project in the student survey and in the round tables, various barriers and possibilities for improvement to promote girls and young women for the forestry sector emerge. For example, the lack of visibility of female role models in the forestry sector is addressed by the series of discussions between women working in forestry and students, which provides students with the important opportunity to form (professional) networks. Another effective measure to improve the deficit of female role models is the use of the ambassadors specially trained in the project. These increase visibility, break down stereotypes about the physical requirements of forestry work and can make direct contact with girls and young women at events such as Girls' Day and inspire enthusiasm for the profession.

2.3 Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a long tradition of forestry education, which includes vocational secondary schools with a forestry orientation and higher education through forestry faculties (A2.1). This educational pathway enables the development of competencies ranging from technical and operational skills to research and managerial expertise, representing a key strength of the national system (A2.1). Faculties in Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Bihać and East Sarajevo offer study programmes at the bachelor's and master's levels, while doctoral studies are available only at the faculties in Sarajevo and Banja Luka. All programmes apply the ECTS system and are aligned with European qualification frameworks.

The analysis of local needs from D1.1.1 (student questionnaires and round tables with stakeholders) identified several key challenges in forestry education. Students and stakeholders highlighted the lack of modern teaching methods, the shortage of practical learning tools and resources, and the insufficient integration of a gender perspective in both secondary school and university programmes. In addition, young people—especially girls—often do not perceive forestry as an attractive career option due to stereotypes, the limited visibility of role models, and unclear career pathways. These findings clearly reflect the weaknesses of the national system identified in A2.1: outdated curricula, the lack of gender-sensitive initiatives in secondary schools, and insufficient links between education and the labour market.

Research conducted through student questionnaires and stakeholder round tables in Bosnia and Herzegovina also revealed a significant disparity in awareness and interest regarding forestry careers. Forestry students typically come from rural areas and are strongly influenced by traditional personal networks within their families.

The main identified barriers include:

- **Deep-rooted prejudices:** The profession is often perceived exclusively through timber harvesting or as "heavy physical work" considered unsuitable for women.
- **Gender inequality:** Although female students often demonstrate academic excellence, they remain underrepresented in the labour market and in field-based work, and frequently face uncertainty regarding employment after graduation.

- **Lack of practical training:** Students highlighted a significant gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, expressing an urgent need for field experience to better prepare them for the professional environment.

A key strength of the national system lies in the existence of a complete educational chain, extending from vocational secondary schools to higher education institutions such as the Faculty of Forestry at the University of Sarajevo. In addition, at the university level there is political willingness to implement gender equality through specific action plans and educational initiatives.

However, several weaknesses remain evident:

- **Lack of coordinated promotion:** The sector is still presented in a traditional manner and struggles to attract new target groups, particularly girls.
- **Gaps in secondary schools:** Forestry secondary schools often do not implement gender equality initiatives nor curricula that challenge existing stereotypes.
- **Geographical isolation:** Many forestry secondary schools are located in smaller, underdeveloped municipalities with poor infrastructure, which contributes to the continuous decline in student enrolment.

Stakeholders emphasized the need for comprehensive information campaigns that use social media to attract younger audiences and counteract stereotypes.

The forestry education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina has a long tradition and strong connections with public forestry enterprises. Despite this, curricula remain largely outdated, focusing on conventional forest management while neglecting modern topics such as climate change, digital mapping, or biotechnology.

Key opportunities for improvement include:

- **Curriculum reform:** Introducing modern subjects such as artificial intelligence in forest monitoring, drone technologies, and the bioeconomy.
- **Dual education models:** Increasing the participation of private and public enterprises in practical training so that students spend more time in real working environments.
- **Digital transformation:** Developing online platforms and field simulation tools to make education more accessible to remote communities.

In response to the identified challenges in forestry education and the perception of the sector among young people, two pilot activities were implemented during the project: **“Women in Forestry – Stories that Inspire”** and **“Inspiration Hub – Stories from the Faculty of Forestry.”** These activities were designed as a practical response to the findings of the needs assessment (D1.1.1), which highlighted the lack of visible role models, limited promotion of the sector among young people, and the presence of gender stereotypes in perceptions of the forestry profession.

The pilot activity **“Women in Forestry – Stories that Inspire”** gathered more than 40 young women and girls and focused on promoting the professional experiences of women already working in the forestry sector. By presenting their career paths, challenges, and achievements,

the activity aimed to increase the visibility of women in the sector and demonstrate the diversity of possible professional roles—from fieldwork and forest management to research, education, and nature conservation. These stories play an important role in breaking stereotypes that often portray forestry exclusively as a physically demanding profession unsuitable for women. At the same time, they provide young people—especially girls—with concrete and relatable role models that can influence their perception of possible career choices.

The second pilot activity, **“Inspiration Hub – Stories from the Faculty of Forestry,”** focused on presenting nine individual career stories (six women, three men). Through authentic student experiences, the initiative aimed to bring forestry closer to prospective students and to demonstrate that it is a dynamic and modern sector that opens opportunities for employment in fields such as nature conservation, sustainable resource management, and emerging technologies. This activity also contributes to increasing the visibility of study programmes and enables young people to more easily identify with individuals who have already taken the first step in that professional direction.

Working with young people represents a key element for the long-term development of the forestry sector. Young people are the future professionals who will manage forest resources in the context of increasingly pronounced global challenges such as climate change, ecosystem degradation, and growing demands for the sustainable use of natural resources. For this reason, it is essential that the education system and the forestry sector actively work to bring this profession closer to new generations by using modern communication channels, positive examples from practice, and approaches that highlight the social and environmental importance of forestry.

By combining inspiring professional stories with authentic alumni experiences, these pilot activities contribute to strengthening career orientation in the forestry sector, reducing stereotypes, and encouraging greater interest among young people in education and employment in this field. In this way, they represent a small but important step towards modernizing the way forestry is presented to younger generations and towards creating a more inclusive and attractive sector in the future.

There is a clear need for the continued implementation of such initiatives, as the current perception of forestry as an unattractive industry dominated by men leads to a lack of interest among young women in pursuing careers in this sector. By integrating digital learning tools and authentic personal stories of women working in forestry, the project aims to replace outdated images with a vision of forestry as a key **“green job”** of the future. The implementation of these educational and promotional measures is essential to ensuring the long-term sustainability and resilience of the forestry sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina. .

2.4 Croatia

Forestry in Croatia has a long tradition and well-organized educational programs, ranging from vocational training to doctoral studies. High scientific and technical standards in forestry education ensure continuity in the training of professionals, while cooperation among educational institutions, through long-term promotion of study programs in primary and

secondary schools, helps inform students and raise awareness about forestry as a profession and the sector in general.

However, in recent years, a decline in student enrolment at the Faculty of Forestry and Wood Technology has been observed. At a roundtable held in June 2025 as part of the *Fem2forests* project, educators from secondary forestry schools highlighted a similar situation. In Croatia, there is a trend of decreasing numbers of students enrolling in forestry schools, partly due to demographic decline. Therefore, one of the key conclusions from both roundtables was the need for more intensive promotion of forestry. Increased interest in forestry can be achieved through targeted promotion from an early age, which would foster better understanding and interest in this profession among young people. A focus on early education and the promotion of forestry in rural areas could attract new students and future professionals, ensuring a continuous supply of qualified workforce in this important sector.

Findings from a survey conducted among female secondary school students and university students, as well as discussions at stakeholder roundtables (D1.1.1), show that the existing negative public perception is one of the main challenges facing the forestry sector. Positive media representation is essential for changing attitudes and highlighting the complexity and importance of sustainable forest management.

Raising awareness of gender equality, integrating it into secondary school and university curricula, and promoting gender equality are crucial for creating a more inclusive working environment and a more positive image of forestry that will attract young women to the sector.

It has been shown that expanding competencies and developing green jobs further attract women to the forestry sector. Green jobs, which include sustainable practices and environmental conservation, offer new career opportunities that appeal to young women. Improving awareness of these opportunities can help reduce fears of unemployment and increase interest in forestry related fields of study.

The lack of visibility of successful women in forestry, as well as the underestimation of women's abilities and contributions, have been identified as major barrier when choosing a career in the forestry sector. Promoting successful role models and increasing the visibility of career opportunities within forestry are key to changing perceptions and encouraging more young women to pursue this profession.

Based on these findings, several key objectives can be defined at the national level:

- One of the main goals is to increase the overall number of female students while also improving the perception of forestry careers among young women through promotional and awareness-raising campaigns.
- Partnerships with various stakeholders in the forestry sector have been proven to be essential. Cooperation between educational institutions and companies in the sector can lead to a better understanding of the needs and visions of the industry.
- Modernization and revision of curricula in line with the needs of the forestry sector are necessary, taking into account current changes and challenges. Educational programs, combined with other fields related to forestry, could offer better prospects, especially for women in the sector.

The proposed implementation measures at the national level are directed precisely toward these identified goals. Emphasis is placed on creating support systems through discussions with forestry professionals and networking among female students. The focus is also on strengthening practical, field-based, and experiential learning through pilot activities such as “Tools for Girls in Forestry Education” and the “National Forestry Ambassadors Program.”

2.5 Czech Republic

Findings from the National Needs and Barriers Analysis (D1.1.1)

The identification of the specific needs of the Czech Republic is based on the national needs and barriers analysis conducted as part of the Fem2Forests project (D1.1.1). This analysis combines the results of student questionnaires and discussions held during national roundtables with stakeholders in the forestry sector.

The discussions were attended by representatives from academia, the forestry sector, public administration, and students of forestry programs. The aim was to identify factors influencing the decisions of girls and young women regarding the study of forestry and their subsequent professional careers.

Findings from the Czech section of the report show that there are no significant formal barriers to girls entering forestry education in the Czech Republic. Access to study programs is open to both women and men, and the proportion of women in forestry-focused study programs is stable or gradually increasing.

At the same time, the analysis identified several factors that may influence decisions regarding study and career orientation in the forestry sector. One of the most frequently mentioned factors is the persistent perception of forestry as a traditionally male field. Forestry is often associated primarily with physically demanding fieldwork, which may influence perceptions regarding the suitability of this field for women.

Discussions during roundtable sessions also revealed that students and prospective applicants for forestry studies often lack a clear understanding of the breadth of professional roles in the forestry sector and the career opportunities available after graduation.

The questionnaire results also show that students’ motivation to study forestry is often linked to an interest in nature, the environment, and working in the landscape, the social significance of forestry, and an interest in topics such as sustainability, biodiversity, and climate change.

These findings suggest that even though access to forestry studies is open, perceptions of the field and the level of awareness regarding career opportunities can significantly influence young people’s decisions regarding their studies and career paths.

Identified barriers to women entering forestry:

- *Gender role stereotypes*

Women are sometimes considered more suited to administrative positions
women working in the field often must first “prove their abilities”.

- *Cultural and professional stereotypes*

Certain activities (e.g., hunting or work in the wood processing sector) are still considered unsuitable for women.

- *Working conditions*

Some forestry jobs are perceived as physically demanding.

Lack of flexible work arrangements or difficulty balancing work and family life can also pose a problem.

Conclusion of Analysis D1.1.1:

Women are present in forestry education. However, the sector is still influenced by traditional gender stereotypes. Barriers are primarily of a cultural, structural, and occupational nature.

At the same time, there is growing interest in change and in supporting greater participation of women through communication about the field, mentoring, modernization of education and greater visibility of women in forestry.

Link to the Career Orientation System in the Czech Republic (D1.2.1)

The findings from the national analysis of needs and barriers (D1.1.1) must be interpreted in the context of the career guidance system in the Czech Republic described in document D1.2.1. The career guidance system in the Czech Republic is integrated into the education system and is supported by national tools focused on providing information about career options and required qualifications. The main tools include the National Classification of Occupations (NSP) and the National Qualifications Framework (NSK), which provide structured information on professional roles, required competencies and qualification requirements in individual sectors.

Career guidance is also enshrined in the legislative framework of the education system, particularly in Act No. 561/2004 Coll., on preschool, primary, secondary, higher vocational, and other education. Career guidance is provided through elementary and secondary schools, vocational education institutions, higher education institutions, and online career guidance tools. The system also includes cooperation between educational institutions and employers and other labor market actors.

An analysis of the career orientation system identifies several strengths. These include the existence of national career orientation information tools (NSP and NSK), relatively well-developed cooperation between educational institutions and employers, and an emphasis on linking education with practical experience, for example through vocational placements and internships.

At the same time, the document highlights persistent challenges. One of these is the gender imbalance in certain sectors, including forestry.

The document also points to the influence of stereotypical perceptions regarding the nature of certain professions and the suitability of specific professional roles for women and men.

The findings from documents D1.1.1 and D1.2.1 thus collectively show that the main challenge is not women's formal access to forestry studies, but rather the way the field is presented to potential students and the public and how specific career opportunities in the forestry sector are communicated.

Response of pilot activities to identified needs (D1.3.1)

Based on the findings from the national analysis of needs and barriers (D1.1.1) and the analysis of the career guidance system (D1.2.1), pilot activities aimed at supporting career guidance in forestry were proposed in the Czech Republic. These findings also directly influenced the focus of the pilot activities implemented within the Fem2forests project.

These activities were designed to enable students to have direct contact with the field of forestry and to contribute to a better understanding of study and career opportunities in forestry.

The activities carried out included Forestry Days and Open Days organized at the Faculty of Forestry and Wood Sciences of the Czech University of Life Sciences in Prague.

These events enabled high school students to obtain information about study programs and career opportunities in the forestry sector, while also providing a space for students to meet directly with industry experts and representatives from the academic community.

Another activity focused on early career orientation was the short animated film "Girls & Forests," which was used in educational activities at elementary schools. The aim of this activity was to present forestry as a field that encompasses various types of professional roles and is open to both men and women.

The evaluation of this activity revealed very positive reactions from participants. More than 96% of students reported that they liked the film, and nearly 99% agreed with the statement that work in forestry can also be interesting for girls. Approximately 40% of students reported that they were surprised to learn that women can work in forestry.

At the same time, students' responses in the evaluation questionnaires showed that presenting various types of forestry professions can broaden their ideas about the nature of work in the forest. When asked whether any specific forest-related job had caught their attention during the presentation, students gave answers such as:

- "Planting trees."
- "That girls can work with a chainsaw."
- "That girls can work in the forest."
- "Office work."

These responses suggest that even relatively short educational intervention can help broaden students' perceptions of the nature of forestry professions.

Summary

The findings of the national analysis of needs and barriers (D1.1.1) show that there are no significant formal barriers to women entering forestry education in the Czech Republic. However, the analysis also points to the persistent influence of stereotypical perceptions regarding the nature of forestry professions and to limited awareness of the range of career opportunities in this sector.

In the context of the career orientation system in the Czech Republic (D1.2.1), these factors can be interpreted as a challenge primarily related to how the field is presented and how career opportunities in forestry are communicated to young people.

The pilot activities carried out as part of the Fem2forests project (D1.3.1) were therefore aimed primarily at raising awareness of educational and career opportunities in the forestry sector and at creating opportunities for students to engage directly in forestry practice.

2.6 Romania

The Romanian pilot action on Early and Continuous Career Orientation is strongly justified by the findings of Fem2Forests D1.1.1, D1.2.1 and D1.3.1. The evidence shows that, although Romania has existing career counselling structures and several promising forestry education initiatives, girls and young women still receive insufficient, fragmented and often late information about forestry careers.

In the Romanian student questionnaire, many respondents indicated that forestry is not perceived early enough as a realistic career option. In the Romania country report, approximately 78% of respondents did not view forestry as a viable career option, mainly because of lack of passion, lack of prior consideration, the perception of forestry as a hobby rather than a profession, or the belief that forestry is a predominantly male labour field. The same report shows that many students without a forestry background were unaware of opportunities in the sector, partly because of insufficient awareness campaigns by forestry faculties.

At the same time, the questionnaire reveals clear potential for attracting girls and young women if career orientation is improved. Among Romanian respondents, the most important motivation for choosing forestry education was love and passion for nature and forests, mentioned by 35% of respondents. However, students also expressed a need for more structured career information: 56% wanted better informational materials about forestry careers, 56% wanted forestry-related workshops or field trips, and 56% wanted more examples of women as role models. In addition, 47% wanted guidance from career counsellors familiar with forestry professions, and 41% wanted job shadowing or internships.

These findings directly support the selected Romanian pilot action, "Forestry Pathways for Girls: University and Field Experience," which opens the Faculty of Forestry to high school girls through university lectures, seminars, field trips, practical exercises and peer-to-peer interaction with forestry students. The pilot responds exactly to the needs identified in D1.1.1:

more direct contact with forestry education, better understanding of real forestry tasks, more female role models, and practical experiences before students make educational and career decisions.

The roundtables with stakeholders further confirm the need for such an intervention. Romanian stakeholders emphasized that young women may be discouraged from forestry careers by their families, by gender stereotypes, and by the perception that forestry jobs are mainly occupied by men. They also noted that students often begin forestry studies with unrealistic expectations and may lose motivation in the first year when they encounter basic subjects such as mathematics, physics, topography or mechanics before reaching applied forestry content. Stakeholders therefore recommended resilience training, clearer explanations of the relevance of early courses, and stronger links between forestry education and employment.

D1.2.1 shows that Romania already has a formal career counselling and guidance framework. Career orientation is delivered through mandatory and elective classes, extracurricular activities, individual and group counselling, and initiatives developed by educational institutions in cooperation with NGOs, local authorities and other stakeholders. The main actors include the Ministry of Education, county school inspectorates, universities, employment agencies, civil society organizations and employers' associations, including Romsilva.

However, D1.2.1 also identifies important weaknesses in the national career orientation system. Career counselling is often too theoretical and does not provide enough hands-on exposure. Only 8.4% of students in technical and vocational education benefit from practical work experience, compared with an EU average of 60.1%. Counsellors and teachers may also be overloaded, insufficiently trained, or unable to dedicate enough time to career counselling. In forestry specifically, negative media coverage, overly technical language, low salaries, perceived difficulty of finding employment, and weak public understanding of forestry discourage young people from choosing forestry studies.

The strengths of the Romanian system nevertheless provide a good foundation for the pilot. D1.2.1 highlights Erasmus+ opportunities, partnerships between faculties and schools, cooperation with industry, scholarships and training offered by companies, and national programmes such as Green Week, which creates space for biodiversity, forest and environmental activities in schools. Bucovina Forestry College is also presented as a good practice, including the first Romanian girls' team prepared and enrolled for the European Students Championship Skills in Forestry in 2024.

The selected Fem2Forests pilot builds on these strengths while addressing the gaps. It transforms existing but scattered activities into a more coherent pathway: girls are not only informed about forestry, but invited to experience university life, fieldwork, practical forestry tools and interaction with students and professors. This is important because the Romanian questionnaire showed that students want workshops, field trips, job shadowing, career counsellors familiar with forestry, and women role models. The pilot therefore combines information, inspiration, identification and participation.

D1.3.1 provides the actionable framework for this approach. The Fem2Forests Toolkit states that career orientation should not only inform girls about forestry careers, but also help them imagine themselves in these roles and take practical steps toward them. It proposes a three-

stage model: Inspiration, Identification and Participation. This model is highly relevant for Romania because the national evidence shows that girls need early exposure, relatable role models, hands-on experience and confidence-building opportunities.

Several Romanian actionable solutions in D1.3.1 are directly connected to the selected pilot. The Success Story Campaign proposes storytelling around successful women in forestry, short videos, livestream Q&A sessions and school talks. Its expected impact is to increase visibility, challenge stereotypes and inspire ambition among girls aged 16–25. The Roots of Change: Forestry Role Model Network connects girls with female forestry professionals through school visits, storytelling, mentoring and a buddy programme linking younger students with older forestry students or young professionals. The Girls in Forestry Discovery Days solution proposes one-day immersive experiences in forestry faculties or forest districts, including tree measurement, drone use, wildlife monitoring and shadowing female forestry professionals.

The Romanian pilot action should therefore be understood as a practical integration of these solutions. It covers early outreach to secondary school girls, practical learning in real forestry environments, peer mentoring, female role models, university exposure and field-based learning. It also adds continuity by planning follow-up evaluation, feedback collection and mentorship circles after the university immersion and field trips.

The need for action is therefore clear. Romania does not lack forestry education institutions, nor does it lack motivated students. What is missing is an early, attractive, gender-sensitive and continuous orientation pathway that connects schools, universities, employers, students and role models. The pilot action responds to this need by making forestry visible, practical and relatable for girls before stereotypes or lack of information close the pathway. It also supports the modernization of forestry education by presenting forestry as connected to nature, climate, biodiversity, technology and future green jobs.

2.7 Serbia

The analysis of questionnaires from the survey conducted with high school students, both female and male, along with conclusions from the round tables (report D1.1.1), clearly shows that the inclusion of girls and young women in forestry is not solely a matter of individual choice. It results from a broader set of factors, including access to information, availability of professional guidance, the presence of gender stereotypes, the visibility of role models, and the connection between education and the labor market. Research based on questionnaires among male and female students, as well as discussions with stakeholders, indicates that in Serbia there is interest in nature, sustainability, and environmental protection. However, forestry is still not sufficiently recognized as a modern, diverse, and professional field accessible to women.

In research conducted in Serbia, 105 female respondents participated: 57 were from secondary forestry schools or the Faculty of Forestry (forestry-oriented students), and 48 were from other educational fields (non-forestry students). It was found that girls attending secondary forestry schools or the Faculty of Forestry more often come from backgrounds with family or direct

knowledge of the forestry sector. In contrast, non-forestry female students had limited opportunities to access information about forestry. For forestry-oriented students, the main sources of information were parents, relatives, and friends already in the sector, while for other girls, television and the internet were the primary sources. This suggests a less structured and insufficiently targeted professional orientation regarding forestry. Notably, 92% of non-forestry female respondents had never considered forestry as a career option, and 83% reported having limited knowledge of employment opportunities in this sector. This is one of the most important findings for assessing the current situation, as it indicates that forestry in Serbia is not sufficiently visible within the system of professional information provided to girls who do not have direct contact with this field through family or friendship networks (report D1.1.1).

This shows that the problem arises not only during faculty enrollment or job searching, but much earlier, at the stage when ideas about professions, personal ambitions, and expectations for a future career are formed. In this regard, forestry in Serbia is still not sufficiently present in young people's professional information, nor is it clearly presented as a modern and diverse field that encompasses much more than the traditional job of working in the forest. It was also found that the motivations of girls who choose forestry are mainly connected to a love of nature and the forest, a desire to do meaningful work, and an interest in environmental protection and ecology. One of the main problems in Serbia is insufficient exposure to the profession, a lack of specific information about jobs and qualifications, and a simplified view of forestry as a predominantly physical, traditional, and male job (report D1.1.1). This is further confirmed by round tables with stakeholders and interviews with women employed in the forestry sector, where it was repeatedly stated that prejudices and stereotypes persist, viewing forestry as a purely "male profession," especially regarding field work and management positions. The conclusions from the round tables further confirm that public perception of the sector still lags behind the real changes that have taken place. Forestry is insufficiently associated with climate change, sustainable development, work in protected areas, communication with the public, project activities, and modern technologies. As a result, girls interested in these fields are often not recognized in forestry, even though there are real opportunities to offer them a wide range of such professional paths (reports D1.1.1 and D1.3.1).

A particularly important problem, recognized by both female secondary school students and those from the Faculty of Forestry, is the gap between education and professional preparation. Although they show strong interest in the practical aspects of education, the data indicate that this is also one of the most significant areas needing improvement. Practical activities were identified as the most attractive part of their education, and 70% of respondents believe that more direct field experience is needed. Additionally, a significant number of respondents expressed the need for counseling on career development opportunities, professional practice, mentors from the sector, and better connections with employers. Many are unsure whether they will be adequately prepared for work in the sector after completing their studies, indicating that professional orientation does not end with enrollment in school or university, even for those already within the education system, but must be a continuous process throughout their education (report D1.1.1).

The conclusions from the round tables and interview results provide additional information on obstacles and problems. It has been observed that girls and young women in Serbia often feel

they must constantly prove their competence, and that their abilities are sometimes underestimated in both education and in the workplace. Women are also frequently directed toward administrative or “less demanding” jobs instead of being offered the full range of professional roles. Mentoring support, the visibility of successful women in the sector, early contact with the profession, school visits, open days, guest lectures, and field activities are emphasized as key to changing perceptions. This indicates that action is needed not only in promotion but also in changing how forestry is presented and connected to the career decisions of girls and young women (reports D1.1.1 and D1.3.1).

The report on the structure of the national career orientation system in Serbia (D1.2.1) notes that Serbia has a relatively well-developed regulatory and institutional framework for career orientation and counseling. This framework is based on the Strategy for Career Orientation and Counseling (2010), relevant laws in education, employment, youth, dual education, and related areas, as well as the Rulebook on the Standards of Career Orientation and Counseling Services (2019). The system includes actors from education, the youth sector, employment, business, and civil society. Professional orientation is implemented through teams in primary and secondary schools, centers and services at the university level, the National Employment Service, and cooperation with employers and other partners. The role of the Career Development Center at the University of Belgrade, along with its collaboration with the Faculty of Forestry, is highlighted as a concrete example of good practice. However, report D1.2.1 indicates that while the career orientation system formally exists, its application in forestry is insufficiently specific and operational. The report states that there are no documents specifically regulating career orientation and counseling in the forestry sector, and the Forestry Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia (2006) only generally mentions the need for developing an education strategy and advisory support in forestry. This means that forestry in Serbia is not yet recognized as a distinct and targeted field of professional orientation but remains part of the general mechanisms of career guidance (D1.2.1).

As strengths of the career orientation system, report D1.2.1 cites the existence of national Service Standards for Career Orientation and Counseling, the work of the University of Belgrade's Career Development and Student Counseling Center and its collaboration with the Faculty of Forestry, as well as examples of good practice such as the information point of the Center for Career Development and the event "Meeting of Profession and Science." The report also notes the availability of relevant statistical data on the forestry sector and education, which can serve as a basis for developing future strategies for professional guidance in this area.

On the other hand, the weaknesses highlighted by report D1.2.1 are crucial for understanding why girls and young women still lack a clear professional path to forestry. First, national standards for career orientation and counseling are too general, making it difficult for individual educational organizations (including secondary forestry schools and the Faculty of Forestry) to develop and improve specific activities. Additionally, funding for career orientation activities is not systematized, limiting the continuity and development of quality services. The report also notes that the Faculty of Forestry lacks a dedicated center for career development and student counseling, unlike some other faculties at the University of Belgrade. Furthermore, the lack of systematic and accessible data relevant to professional orientation planning, which are scattered across different databases and sectors, is identified as a significant weakness.

In conclusion, Serbia has a regulatory framework, but it is not sufficiently implemented in forestry. For the career counseling system to succeed, it must be tailored to the sector, financially supported, and adopted by organizations that educate future experts, such as secondary forestry schools and the Faculty of Forestry. The problems identified in report D1.1.1, such as poor information for girls outside the sector, an unfavorable image of the profession, insufficient visibility of women, the need for more practical experience, and a stronger connection with the labor market – result from the lack of specificity in the career guidance system and its limited ability to address the needs of the forestry sector and gender equality, rather than from its complete absence.

Report D1.2.1 recommends improving the existing system with more specific, sector-oriented measures. Possible directions for improvement include:

- developing a career orientation strategy based on the current state and projected workforce development in the forestry sector by qualification levels, while addressing the unequal position of women in the labor market;
- systematically collecting and disseminating examples of good career-orientation practice;
- strengthening cooperation among the Faculty of Forestry, secondary vocational schools, the National Employment Service, employers, the Chamber of Forestry Engineers, and other relevant actors;
- exploring cooperation with universities and forestry faculties from other countries to exchange experiences and improve opportunities for students' career development.

The possible directions for implementing solutions in Serbia (report D1.1.1 and O1.3), which include changing the image of forestry, modernizing education, improving cooperation with enterprises, supporting and empowering young women, and introducing regulatory, institutional, and financial mechanisms to make a career in forestry more attractive, address not only the individual obstacles identified by schoolgirls and students but also the weaknesses of the career orientation system recognized in report D1.2.1. Proposals to strengthen cooperation with secondary schools, develop new educational programs, more visibly promote professional areas attractive to women, establish new institutional support mechanisms, and create a stronger connection between education, practice, and employment are particularly important.

In conclusion, Serbia has a formal foundation for career orientation, but in the forestry sector, further sectoral development, organizational strengthening, and targeted guidance are needed. Although a system exists, it is not yet adapted to the specific needs of forestry, nor is it sufficiently aligned with goals such as gender equality, women's visibility, practical training, and the transition from education to the professional sector. It is also important to emphasize that career orientation cannot be effective if girls do not see real opportunities for employment, advancement, and professional development after completing their education. Therefore, measures for career orientation should be linked to broader sector development, stronger institutional support, an improved strategic framework, and closer connections between education and employment. For these reasons, pilot activities in career orientation within Fem2forests are justified as concrete steps toward overcoming these obstacles.

2.8 Slovenia

Findings from the survey conducted among female secondary school pupils and female students, as well as discussions at stakeholder round tables (D1.1.1), show that in Slovenia one of the main challenges is limited awareness of forestry as an educational and professional field, together with the persistence of stereotypical views about the nature of work in the sector. Among pupils enrolled in non-forestry programmes, knowledge of forestry careers is low, and forestry is often understood narrowly as physically demanding work in the forest, mainly related to logging and a traditionally “male” working environment. Even among students in forestry programmes, there is a perception that they are not sufficiently informed about the full range of employment opportunities, required competences, and career pathways offered by the sector, which points to a gap between formal education and clearly defined career options.

Discussions at stakeholder round tables also show that the diversity of forestry professions is not well recognised among young people or the wider public. Forestry is rarely presented as an interdisciplinary field that includes ecology, planning, economics, digital technologies, wildlife management, cooperation with private forest owners, research, project management and areas related to climate change, bioeconomy and green innovation. Because of this simplified view of forestry, girls often do not see the sector as a field where they could pursue their interests in natural sciences, technology, social sciences or leadership.

An important aspect emerging from the surveys and round-table discussions is the presence of stereotypes and experiences of gender-based differentiation during education or practical training. Female students report the need to provide additional proof of their competences doubts about their physical suitability for certain tasks and a perception that forestry is still seen as a traditionally male field. At the same time the lack of visible female role models and mentors in the sector is highlighted as one of the key barriers. Although individual female professionals are recognised as highly competent and committed their systematic presence in promotional materials at career events and in leadership structures is not strong enough to create a broader effect in terms of visibility and recognition.

The national career guidance system in Slovenia provides an important starting point for addressing these needs. The system includes school counselling services cooperation with the Employment Service of Slovenia and intersectoral links between the education and employment fields. Career guidance is recognised as part of the educational process and includes individual counselling diagnostic tools and cooperation with parents which allows a holistic approach to young people’s decisions about their further education pathways. This structure offers a stable framework within which gender aspects and forestry-related content can also be systematically integrated.

However the analysis shows that the implementation of career guidance is uneven in terms of content and is often dependent on project-based activities and initiatives of individual institutions. Forestry as a specific professional field is not systematically included at all levels of the curriculum so the presentation of the sector is often limited to individual events or projects. This means that girls in primary and secondary schools rarely receive in-depth structured and

gender-sensitive information about the opportunities offered by forestry. An additional challenge is that career counsellors are not always sufficiently familiar with developments in the sector new job profiles and technological changes so forestry is less often presented as a promising choice for girls.

Based on these findings several key needs can be identified at the national level:

There is a **need for early and continuous presentation of forestry as a modern technologically supported and socially relevant field** that goes beyond the traditional image of physical work in the forest. Interest in science and technical fields develops already in primary school so it is essential that girls at this stage are offered experiential practical and positive exposure to forestry.

Attention should be directed towards the **systematic reduction of stereotypes** that are reproduced both in the social environment and within educational institutions. This also includes a review of communication materials language visual representations and the way in which professions are presented.

Finally it is necessary to **strengthen the visibility of women in the sector** at different levels from field professionals and researchers to leadership positions. Findings show that direct contact with female professionals has a strong influence on girls' motivation and their confidence in their own abilities. Mentoring relationships presentations of career pathways and personal stories have a greater impact than general information campaigns as they enable identification and make career opportunities more concrete.

The proposed implementation measures at the national level are directly aimed at addressing these identified gaps. Emphasis is placed on the involvement of female professionals in career guidance activities the development of mentoring schemes and the strengthening of practical field-based and experiential forms of learning. Attention is also given to the use of modern communication channels that are familiar to young people and to the development of interactive tools that enable active exploration of professions.

The pilot activities planned in Slovenia respond directly to the identified needs. The summer forestry camp and the Nature Day provide girls with early and in-depth experiential learning about the sector through fieldwork research and laboratory tasks and direct contact with female professionals as role models. This helps to challenge stereotypes of forestry as an exclusively physical and "male" occupation and strengthens understanding of its interdisciplinary nature. The development of career guidance games and tailored information materials further enhances existing counselling practices by introducing more interactive youth-oriented approaches that encourage active exploration of career pathways. A media campaign focused on presenting the stories of women in forestry systematically increases their visibility and contributes to shaping the image of the sector as modern technologically supported and inclusive.

The identified needs require strategic and long-term integration of the gender perspective at all levels of education and career guidance. This involves changing the way forestry is presented to young people how different stakeholders are engaged and how a supportive environment is created for girls and young women who choose to enter the sector. Due to its institutionally established career guidance system Slovenia has a solid foundation for such an approach

however achieving lasting change will require systematic cooperation among educational institutions forestry organisations counselling services and the media. Through coordinated action that takes gender aspects into account it will be possible in the long term to increase girls' interest in forestry education and strengthen their presence and influence in the sector.

2.9 Ukraine

At the moment main weakness of the professional orientation system lays within the **absence of clear minimal professional orientation interventions** needed and compulsory at the school level, thus occasional, ad-hock and "selective" character of the professional orientation, which creates a gap in understanding of the comprehensive variety of the professions, thus making professional choice of children dependent on the opinion of the parents, activeness of school directors and mentors, local professional schools and universities offers.

Another weakness is related to the **absence of modern technologies and online tools**, both at school and professional education levels, which limits exposure to high-quality education and skilling.

Lack of youth support program financial resources in order to support professional education of schoolchildren and youth limits opportunities for further professional paths.

Low popularity of the forestry education due to the image of forestry and forest management as well as relatively low salaries and certain stereotypes about hardness of work do not contribute to the selection of this profession as choice of future education.

Obviously, at the moment the most complicated challenge for professional orientation and for the labour market in general is the ongoing russian war against Ukraine. In situations where long-term planning is unclear due to rapid changes, it is crucial to be adaptable and respond swiftly to unforeseen circumstances. However, maintaining this flexibility can be quite challenging.

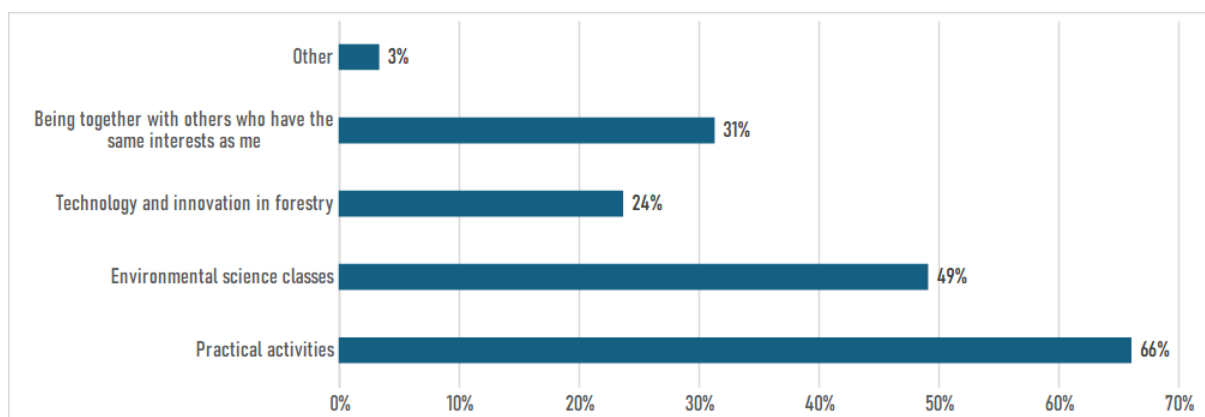
However, the challenges and barriers that can be targeted are the following:

- **Lack of knowledge and understanding** among schoolchildren and young people on the careers related to forestry, along with misconceptions and stereotypes, that work against this understanding;
- **Low involvement of women in forestry professions** that leads to low visibility of successful female professionals that might serve as role models;
- **Lack of youth support programs** and targeted activities for the youth professional orientation;
- **Low level of direct career orientation** intervention to the schools of the State Forest Resources Agency of Ukraine and State Enterprise "Forests of Ukraine" (besides the School Forestries).
- **Widespread misconceptions of forestry** as hard profession, not for women, related only to forest logging and sales.

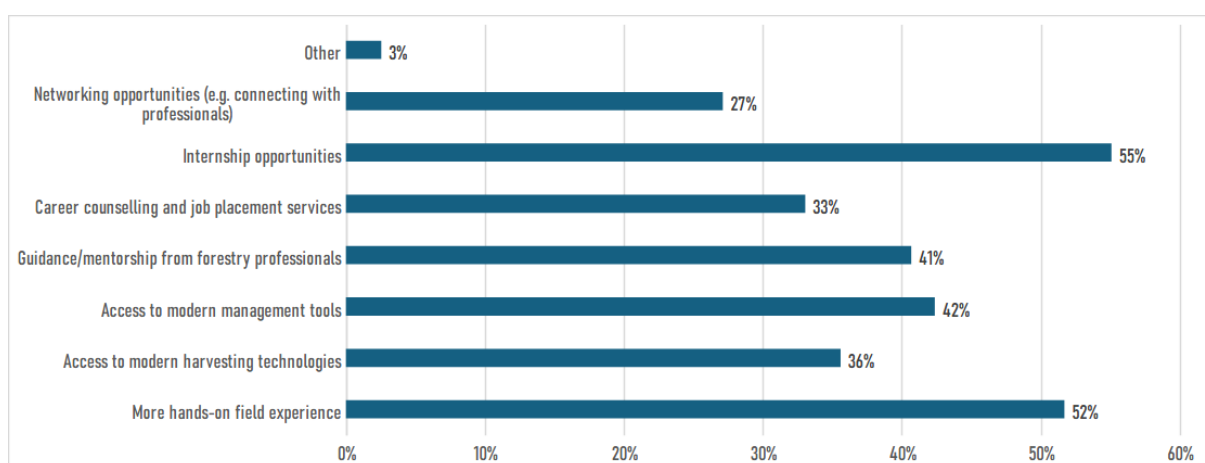
- **Low popularity** and relatively negative image of the profession, related to corruption, unclear procedures, lack of communication etc.

Some of the results of the needs assessment among female forestry students show the following:

Most of the female students of forestry find **practical activities as the most interesting**, with 66% of selection share. The other aspects are shown in the table below.



Female students of forestry have defined the following supportive activities for their education and career enhancement: **internship opportunities** (55%), more **hands-on field experience** (52%), **access to modern forest management tools** (42%) and **guidance or mentorship** from forestry professional (41%).



For very large share of non-forestry students, forestry as a career option would become more attractive in case of **appropriate payment** (73% of respondents) as well as the situation, where forestry would be a career path, that that involves understanding, conserving, and managing some of the world's most valuable natural resources (60%). Over half of respondents (53% for both cases) also would appreciate the situation, where there would be understanding that **forestry can impact climate change positively** as well as possibility to participate in an **international and national conservation activities**.

Better image of foresters and opportunities to work closely with local communities and contribute positively to rural development would also do the favour for 35% and 30% of respondents accordingly (forestry and non-forestry students).

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Share</i>
Understanding that forestry can impact climate change positively	21	53%
Better image of foresters	14	35%
Appropriate payment	29	73%
Opportunities to work closely with local communities, and contribute positively to rural development	12	30%
Possibility to participate in international and national conservation activities (programs focused on biodiversity conservation, forest protection, etc.)	21	53%
Career path that involves understanding, conserving, and managing some of the world's most valuable natural resources (i.e. protected area management)	24	60%
Other	1	3%

Although two different groups of respondents have reported different misconceptions, namely forestry students selected the most (i) it's not for women (61%) and (ii) all foresters are lumberjacks (52%) and non-forestry students have mentioned the most: (i) hard physical work (55%), (ii) it is not for women (50%) and (iii) limited opportunities (cutting trees), (50%), generalized answers are displayed below with the highest selection of misconception that forestry work is not for women (58% for both groups of respondents consolidated).

3 Future Actions and Recommendations

Across the Danube region, every national report reaches a similar conclusion: gender equality can no longer be treated as a peripheral project; it must become a core element of how the forestry sector educates, hires and manages its people. Partners therefore propose a shift from one-off pilot events to an integrated cycle of early outreach, practical immersion and institutional reform. Pupils—especially girls—should meet forestry long before they choose a study track, ideally through timetabled “green skills” modules, periodic field days and encounters with female professionals who break the stereotype of forestry as heavy, male labour. Once young women enter formal programmes, structured pathways—compulsory internships, job-shadowing and national mentorship networks—are required to turn theoretical knowledge into workplace confidence and professional contacts.

Yet recruitment is only half the battle. Long-term retention hinges on workplaces that combine transparent career ladders, flexible schedules and zero-tolerance harassment policies, backed by gender-awareness training for educators, supervisors and HR staff. Countries also agree on the need for robust, gender-disaggregated data so that progress can be tracked and policies can be steered on evidence rather than anecdotes. Finally, modern communication—story-telling, social media, peer platforms—should recast forestry as an interdisciplinary arena spanning climate services, digital innovation and green entrepreneurship, thereby appealing to the values and skill sets of a new generation.

If implemented in concert, these measures promise a virtuous circle: greater visibility attracts more girls, stronger support systems boost their success rates, and diverse leadership in turn accelerates the sector’s capacity to innovate and respond to climate and market change.