D3.1 Memorandum covering the specified objectives, tasks and membership of the INFIMO Women in Tech Coordination Group

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Table of Contents

General information 2

Abbreviations 4

Introduction 5

1. Overview of Gender Bias in Technologies: Situation in Estonia, Georgia, and Portugal .. 7

2. Methodological Background of the Memorandum 9

3. INFIMO WTCG: Objectives, Tasks, Membership 11

3.1 Core objective and tasks 11

3.2 Expectations of women to be contributing to the work of the INFIMO WTCG 14

3.3 Other relevant insights from the analysis carried out 15

Conclusion 17

Abbreviations

BIA – Baltic Innovation Agency

CEO – Chief Executive Officer

D – Deliverable. A report that is a result of project activities, uploaded in SyGMa (EU Funding & Tenders portal) as part of effective monitoring of the project.
EISMEA - the European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

GIC – the Georgian ICT Cluster

HR – Human Resources

ICT – Information and Communication Technology

INEGI – Institute of Science and Innovation in Mechanical and Industrial Engineering

INFIMO – The Acronym of the project "Interconnected and Inclusive Innovative Ecosystems focused on ICT and Mobility"

IT – Information Technology

ITL – Estonian Association of Information Technology and Telecommunications

MOBINOV – MOBINOV automotive cluster, project partner; legal name of the organisation: MOBINOV –Associacao do Clusterautomovel

PMO – Project Management Office

WTCG –Women in Tech Coordination Group

Introduction

The widespread adoption of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) globally has garnered significant attention from major organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank.[1] ICTs, recognized as catalysts for development, have been shown to positively contribute to national GDP growth over the long term, emphasizing the crucial role of innovative activities mediated by ICT and digitalization[2].

The transformative impact of ICTs on global trade, coupled with the digitalization of trade and global value chains, has far-reaching implications for women engaged in or affected by trade, encompassing roles as traders, workers, or consumers. While trade has historically played a pivotal role in creating opportunities for women and bridging gender gaps by expanding markets and facilitating the entry of women into the labor force, it is imperative to acknowledge the potential gender disparities introduced by ICTs in this context.[3]

Despite the positive prospects presented by ICTs in reducing gender gaps, studies indicate that the percentage of women opting for entrepreneurial careers remains lower than that of men[4]. Additionally, research by Guzman and Kacperczyk[5] underscores a significant gender disparity in obtaining external financing, with females being 63% less likely than males to secure risk capital, primarily due to gender-related differences.

In parallel, the advancement of technology has triggered a transformative shift in the automotive, transport, and wider mobility market[6]. However, evidence suggests that women are

[1] Walsham, Geoff. "ICT4D research: reflections on history and future agenda." *Information Technology for Development* 23, no. 1 (2017): 18-41.
[2] Ishnazarov, Akram, Nargiza Kasimova, Shakhnoza Tosheva, and Arletta Isaeva. "ICT and Economic Growth: Evidence from Cross-Country Growth Modeling." In *The 5th International Conference on Future Networks & Distributed Systems*, pp. 668-671. 2021.
Hakim, Dani Rahman, and Desi Kurniawati. "The Effect of Competency and ICT Skills on Vocational Students' Work Readiness." *Jurnal Pendidikan Ekonomi Dan Bisnis (JPEB)* 10, no. 1 (2022): 15-34.
Niebel, Thomas. "ICT and economic growth–Comparing developing, emerging and developed countries." *World development* 104 (2018): 197-211.
[3] Sicat, Marie, Ankai Xu, Ermira Mehetaj, Michael Ferrantino, and Vicky Chemutai. "Leveraging ICT technologies in closing the gender gap." (2020).
[4] Cardella, Giuseppina Maria, Brizeida Raquel Hernández-Sánchez, and José Carlos Sánchez-García. "Women entrepreneurship: A systematic review to outline the boundaries of scientific literature." *Frontiers in psychology* 11 (2020): 1557.
[5] Guzman, Jorge, and Aleksandra Olenka Kacperczyk. "Gender gap in entrepreneurship." *Research Policy* 48, no. 7 (2019): 1666-1680.
[6] Simpson, Charlie, Edward Ataii, E. Kemp, and Yuan Zhang. "Mobility 2030: Transforming the mobility landscape." *KPMG Int* (2019).

underrepresented in this sector, with mobility systems predominantly tailored to male needs and less accessible for women, thus highlighting a gender gap in mobility[7].

Addressing these challenges, the project, "Interconnected and Inclusive Innovative Ecosystems Focused on ICT and Mobility" (INFIMO)", funded by the European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA), aims to contribute to overcoming gender inequality in the ICT and mobility sector in the involved countries and beyond. The project primarily seeks to foster interconnected and inclusive European innovation ecosystems through strategic collaboration between clusters and diverse innovation actors from Estonia, Portugal, and Georgia. The focus is on leveraging ICT for digital and twin transitions across various economic sectors, with a specific emphasis on enhancing the participation of women innovators.

To achieve these objectives, INFIMO proposes the establishment of the Women in Tech Coordination Group, involving female entrepreneurs from INFIMO clusters and related ecosystems. This group will collaborate within the framework outlined in this Memorandum, with a specific goal of enhancing the participation of women entrepreneurs and innovators in the activities of the INFIMO clusters and increasing the gender-responsiveness of their services.

This document endeavors to analyze the needs of women representing INFIMO's partner organizations and their expectations for the international women's cooperation platform. The insights gleaned from this analysis will serve as the informational and analytical foundation for the INFIMO Women in Tech Coordination Group (INFIMO WTCG), ensuring the efficiency of the cooperative framework to be created.

[7] https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/01/women-in-mobility-sector-gender-equality/

1. Overview of Gender Bias in Technologies: Situation in Estonia, Georgia, and Portugal

The intrinsic value of the "Interconnected and Inclusive Innovative Ecosystems in Georgia, Estonia, and Portugal" (INFIMO) project lies in its explicit objective to facilitate collaboration with additional innovation ecosystems in the EU and associated countries, with a specific focus on Modest and Moderate Innovator regions. Evidently, the ecosystems engaged in the project represent countries at varying levels of innovation development. For instance, as per the Global Innovation Index 2023, Estonia is assigned a score of 53.4, Portugal 44.9, and Georgia 29.9.[8] This diversity allows the participating parties to share experiences, enabling the relatively advanced countries to contribute to Georgia's positioning in the global innovation market.

Distinct innovation ecosystems entail varied experiences concerning women's participation in technologies and the mechanisms employed to address gender bias. Portugal, for instance, earned recognition in 2018 as a top country for Women in Tech according to the Women in Tech Index. Notably, Portugal exhibited the smallest gender pay gap disparity between the overall economy and the tech industry across 41 countries[9]. Furthermore, Portugal boasts one of the highest rates of gender diversity among female scientists and engineers in Europe, with 51% being women. Despite these achievements, Portugal faces challenges in gender diversity within its entrepreneurial ecosystem, with less than 10% of founders being women[10].

In Estonia, data from the Commercial Register and Startup Estonia indicates a positive trajectory in the share of female founders of startups, reaching 17% at the end of the previous year. Of the 1,448 startups in Estonia, one in five was founded by women or had at least one woman among the founders. Notably, the highest share of female founders, at 30%, is observed in health and education technology startups. This positive trend signifies progress in gender inclusion, particularly in technology-driven sectors[11].

Conversely, UN Women in Georgia emphasizes the imperative of women's involvement in the ICT sector to address the growing demand for professionals. Despite fewer barriers for women entering the ICT labor market due to increased demand, persistent gender stereotypes in society

[8] Soumitra Dutta, Bruno Lanvin, Lorena Rivera León, and Sacha Wunsch-Vincent. 2023. Global Innovation Index 2023 Innovation in the face of uncertainty. 16th Edition.
[9] https://southeusummit.com/europe/portugal/portugal-ranked-top-country-women-tech/
[10] https://sifted.eu/articles/portugals-top-women-investors
https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/EDN-20190211-1
[11] https://estonianworld.com/business/the-share-of-estonian-female-founders-in-the-startup-sector-has-grown/

continue to limit women's participation, especially in technical professions directly related to IT activities. The study conducted by UN Women in Georgia highlights that women employed in the ICT sector are often engaged in sub-sectors such as publishing activities and programming, with limited representation in technical roles. Furthermore, the sector's leadership positions remain predominantly male-dominated. The root causes identified in in-depth interviews include gender stereotypes, lack of awareness about the ICT profession, and limited access to funding for women, affecting their representation in leadership roles.

This examination of women's participation in technology across diverse ecosystems underscores the paramount importance of increasing gender-responsiveness in the context of INFIMO. Portugal's challenges in gender diversity within the entrepreneurial ecosystem, Estonia's positive trend in increasing female founders in startups, and Georgia's persistent gender stereotypes all contribute to the project's overarching goal of fostering cross-cultural knowledge sharing. By addressing these gender biases and promoting inclusive practices, the project not only contributes to technological development but also plays a pivotal role in empowering and advancing women within the evolving landscape of the ICT and Mobility sector. The identified barriers, encompassing gender stereotypes, awareness gaps, and limited access to funding, serve as focal points for further analytical work and targeted interventions, ensuring a more inclusive and diverse future in the interconnected innovative ecosystems[12].

[12] UN Women. 2023. Women in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) IN Georgia. Participation and Challenges.Tbilisi, Georgia.

2. Methodological Background of the Memorandum

The process employed in preparing the Memorandum aligns seamlessly with the goals and objectives of the INFIMO project, which brings together three ecosystems: the Estonian ICT Cluster, MOBINOV automotive cluster from Portugal, and the Georgian ICT Cluster. Additionally, the project consortium includes the Baltic Innovation Agency (Estonia), an experienced innovation management company with a solid track record in cluster development services. As per the project stipulations, the coordination group will encompass female entrepreneurs from within the INFIMO clusters and the broader involved ecosystems. Their role is to provide strategic input for planning and executing activities focused on enhancing the participation of women innovators in the activities of the INFIMO clusters and augmenting the gender-responsiveness of their services. Moreover, the coordination group will collaborate with existing national initiatives that aim to foster more gender-balanced entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystems.

To get input to developing the current Memorandum, a general analysis of the needs and expectations regarding the international collaboration platform among women entrepreneurs in the form of the INFIMO Women in Tech Coordination Group was conducted, involving women representatives from the member organizations of the INFIMO partner clusters. The analysis utilized qualitative research methods, specifically through semi-structured interviews. The questions were categorized into three parts: 1. Exploration of the experience of gender bias as female innovators. 2. Inquiry into the current development plans of their organizations with respect to gender responsiveness. 3. Open-ended questions about respondents' expectations of the proposed women's international cooperation platform. Interviews were conducted between July and October 2023.

Stakeholders representing the Georgian ICT Cluster involved in the analysis:

- Teona Zurabashvili, Director at Georgian ICT Cluster;
- Nana Khuskivadze, Director at Innovative Systems Management.

Stakeholders representing the Estonian ICT Cluster involved in the analysis::

- Doris Põld, CEO at Estonian ICT Cluster;
- Mari-Ly Klaats, Member of the Management Board - Operations & Product Portfolio, Auve Tech;
- Jana Krimpe, CEO at Best.Solutions;
- Anna Greta Tsahkna, CEO at Timbeter.

Stakeholders representing MOBINOV involved in the analysis::

- Isabel Oliveira, Project Manager at MOBINOV;
- Ana Rais, Head of Advanced Manufacturing Processes at INEGI;
- Catarina Antunes, CEO at PTC;
- Natalina Sanches, HR Director and Board Member at Capgemini Engineering;
- Rita Santiago, R&I & PMO at Ubiwhere.

3. INFIMO WTCG: Objectives, Tasks, Membership

3.1 Core objective and tasks

The INFIMO WTCG will include female entrepreneurs from among the members of INFIMO clusters as well as the involved ecosystems at large to give strategic input to planning and carrying out activities focused on enhancing the participation of women innovators in the clusters' activities and to increase the gender-responsiveness of the clusters' services.

In the context of the activities planned in INFIMO, the WTCG will provide a direct contribution to the development of the INFIMO Collaboration strategy and action plan, outlining strategic action lines and concrete activities in the mid-term perspective (5 years) to enhance interconnectedness and inclusiveness in the partnering innovation ecosystems, with a focus on using ICT for digital and green twin transition in various economic sectors.

In line with the strategy and action plan, the cluster managers and experts together with the INFIMO WTCG group will a) revise the services already provided by clusters and b) design new services/tools that promote higher gender equality and responsiveness to diversity in the activities of the partnering clusters.

3.2. Membership and contributing stakeholders

In adherence to the agreement among the project consortium partners, the main body of the INFIMO WTCG comprises the clusters participating in the project and the female representatives of their member companies. Given the limited number of member companies in the Georgian ICT cluster with female representatives, the members of the wider Women in Tech Coordination Group in Georgia (supported by the USAID economic security program and led by the Georgian ICT cluster) will also be involved in the activities of the INFIMO WTCG. This addition will provide valuable expertise and a distinct perspective to further the goals and objectives of the project.

The key stakeholders contributing to the INFIMO WTCG include:

a) INFIMO ecosystems as the founding members of the INFIMO WTCG

- **The Georgian ICT Cluster** - Georgian ICT Cluster is a collaborative platform for ICT industry stakeholders that supports the establishment of business linkages locally and

internationally in order to increase the competitiveness of the Georgian ICT industry and ultimately contribute to the economic development of the country.

- **Information Technology and Telecommunications Association of Estonia** - A collaboration platform for enterprises created to boost the development of new products and solutions and foster their export to the international market.

- **MOBINOV Automotive Cluster** - A knowledge aggregator platform between the entire national automotive industry that promotes research and innovation in the sector by increasing the level of competitiveness of the Portuguese automotive industry and creating an environment to promote and support the internationalization of the national automotive industry.

Each cluster appoints a representative to the Steering Group of the INFIMO WTCG that is responsible for planning the activities of the WTCG, calling together the meetings, explaining tasks to the women participants, gathering input from them regarding the INFIMO collaboration strategy, revising and further developing the clusters' services for higher gender-responsiveness, etc. The members of the Steering Group are:

- Teona Zurabashvili, Director at Georgian ICT Cluster (Chair of the Steering Group)
- Lili Tiri, Head of ITS Estonia network
- Isabel Oliveira, Project Manager at MOBINOV

b) Representatives of member organizations of the INFIMO Clusters

The following organizations have confirmed their willingness to contribute to the work of the INFIMO WTCG (the list is not conclusive, other representatives of the member organizations of the INFIMO clusters will also be involved in the activities of the WTCG):

- **Institute of Science and Innovation in Mechanical and Industrial Engineering (INEGI)** - an industry-oriented Research and Technology Organization in Portugal that has three core pillars of activity: research with applied focus, innovation and technology transfer and consulting and advanced engineering services.
- **PTC Group** - Engineering & IT multinational Company in Portugal.
- **Capgemini Engineering** - A global innovation and engineering consulting firm’s branch in Portugal.

- **Ubiwhere** - A high-tech company in Portugal, focused on the research and development of smart and sustainable technological solutions for Smart Cities, Telecom and Internet.
- **Auve Tech** - A company in Estonia focusing on the development and manufacturing of autonomous transportation systems.
- **Best.Solutions** - A fast-growing IT-services company and solutions provider active in the field of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in Estonia and Azerbaijan
- **Timbeter** - A forest tech company in Estonia, specializing in timber measurement and data management using artificial intelligence and machine learning.
- **Innovative Systems Management** - A company in Georgia works on computer and software services, consulting, and education and science.

c) Members of the broader Women in Tech Coordination Group in Georgia

The Women in Tech Coordination Group in Georgia was established in 2020 with the support of the USAID Economic Security Program, its members include:

- United Nations Development Programme in Georgia
- EU4Digital Initiative in Georgia
- UN Women in Georgia
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Georgia
- Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF) in Georgia
- Georgia's Innovation and Technology Agency
- Georgia’s Communications Commission
- Women Fund in Georgia
- Innovative Education Foundation in Georgia
- TBC Bank in Georgia
- The Bank of Georgia
- Business and Technology University in Georgia
- Kutaisi International University (Georgia)
- Ilia State University (Georgia)
- IT Academy Step (Georgia)
- GeoLAb - Laboratory for the Innovation Technologies and Training Center
- SmartAcademy, an educational center in Georgia, providing professional courses for business
- Alte University in Georgia
- Tbilisi School of Communications

The broad group of women representing organizations listed above, as well as other organizations linked with the INFIMO clusters and ecosystem, will contribute to the WTCG based on their areas of expertise and interests. Smaller working groups may be formed to make the WTCG more functional, efficient, and allow everyone to contribute in terms of topics that are most relevant to them and where they have specific competencies.

3.2 Expectations of women to be contributing to the work of the INFIMO WTCG

The outcomes of interviews with women representing all three ecosystems can be distilled into several key statements outlining expectations related to the work of the INFIMO WTCG that are aligned with INFIMO's overarching goals and objectives:

- **Promoting gender equality and advocating for women's interests:** Articulating a commitment to championing gender equality and advocating for the interests of women within their respective organizations, clusters, and broader ecosystems.
- **Providing strategic input for enhanced participation of women in the clusters' activities:** Offering strategic input to facilitate the planning and execution of activities aimed at augmenting the involvement of women innovators in the partnering clusters and amplifying the gender-responsiveness of the clusters' services.
- **Knowledge sharing and best practices:** Engaging in the exchange of knowledge and best practices through relevant training activities and workshops, thereby fostering a collaborative environment conducive to mutual learning.
- **Dissemination of technological information:** Actively participating in disseminating information on new technologies, utilizing avenues such as conference attendance, seminars, and webinars to ensure a comprehensive understanding and awareness within the group.
- **Discussion of new cooperation opportunities:** Facilitating discussions on emerging opportunities for cooperation within the realm of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Mobility, thereby contributing to the advancement and collaboration within the sector.

These articulated expectations underscore the multifaceted role envisioned for the INFIMO WTCG. The emphasis on gender equality, strategic input, knowledge exchange, technological awareness, and collaboration initiatives collectively align with INFIMO's mission to create an inclusive and dynamic environment for women innovators in the ICT and Mobility sectors.

3.3 Other relevant insights from the analysis carried out

The women involved in the interviews as part of the preparatory process for establishing the INFIMO WTCG also shared a number of additional insights relevant to the future work of the WTCG, outlined below. More specifically, experiences related to gender bias and the development plans of the involved organizations in terms of gender-responsiveness were discussed.

Experiences related to gender bias

Concerning experiences related to gender bias, representatives from the **Portuguese ecosystem** articulated several challenges:

- Male Dominance: The automotive industry's male-dominated nature results in a notable absence of women in leadership and project management roles.
- Gender Stereotypes: Deep-seated beliefs regarding gender-specific roles impact the perception of women, presenting hurdles to their acceptance as project leaders.
- Initial Challenges: Initial interactions are marred by politeness but lack trust, particularly pronounced in industries traditionally dominated by men.
- Hostile Environments: Women entering industrial settings, notably foundries, encounter skepticism and mistrust from both peers and the organization.
- Ingrained Attitudes: Women in fields dominated by men often contend with unconscious bias, evident in casual comments.
- Acceptance: Women at times dismiss or downplay such comments, attributing them to societal issues rather than deliberate prejudice.
- Prejudgment: Early judgments based on age and gender impact interactions and perceptions during project application or coordination stages.

Nevertheless, some interviewees shared positive experiences, highlighting:

- Overcoming stereotypes: Being selected for a position during pregnancy, challenging prevailing stereotypes.
- Organizational commitment: Recognition of the importance of diversity and inclusion, with organizational targets set for gender balance and overall diversity.

Portuguese interviews underscored that despite relationships becoming more manageable over time, the industry's conventional mindset and a dearth of women in management roles perpetuate challenges. They highlighted the **significance of women leaders as role models** and **initiatives challenging biases** and emphasizing the equal capabilities of women in the industry.

In the **Estonian context,** interviewees acknowledged gender stereotypes but did not perceive them as hindrances to women's success in the technological field in the country. Key points from the interviews include:

- Estonian landscape: No notable underrepresentation of women in the economy and the sector.
- Inclusive environment: Many IT companies in Estonia are welcoming to women.
- Leadership representation: Numerous IT companies in Estonia are led by women.
- Underrepresentation at executive levels: Despite the positive aspects, women's underrepresentation persists at the executive level.
- Educational gap in tech fields: A predominant issue is the lower participation of women and girls in IT and Mechanics studies compared to men and boys.

Representatives from the Estonian ecosystem highlighted the importance of women leaders as exemplars and emphasized supportive internal initiatives within companies. Similar sentiments were echoed **in the case of Georgia**, where gender stereotypes were emphasized, and the significance of women leaders as role models was underlined.

Development plans of involved organizations in terms of gender-responsiveness

Furthermore, the interviewed women from **Portugal** provided insights into the organizational development plans concerning gender-responsiveness. Within the Portuguese ecosystem, company representatives highlighted a prevailing gender disparity in managerial positions. Worthy of mentioning that out of all interviewed, only PTC maintains a balanced gender distribution, with equal representation at both board and managerial levels (50/50). Suggested solutions include an emphasis on diversity and responsiveness in the development plan, the commitment to maintaining gender parity with a specific focus on women in engineering roles, and concerted efforts to foster knowledge growth, independence in project management teams, and the holistic development of women within the organization.

In the **Estonian** context, initiatives to discuss the topic internally, addressing issues related to women's participation in the company, and devising strategies to attract more women and promote them to managerial positions were pointed out. Also, Jana Krimpe, CEO at Best.Solutions shared her experience on implementing various initiatives to counter gender bias in companies in Azerbaijan, which might be a useful collaboration model for the INFIMO international Women in Tech Coordination Group.

Furthermore, the case of the **Georgian ICT Cluster** highlights gender disparities despite having a female director. Among the board management, 100% are men. Addressing these imbalances necessitates strategic efforts to promote gender diversity in leadership positions and enhance opportunities for women across the member companies.

These organizational insights underscore the multifaceted challenges faced by women in various ecosystems and the need for concerted efforts to ensure gender-responsive development plans that foster inclusivity and equality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the INFIMO Women in Tech Coordination Group emerges as a pivotal initiative in the pursuit of gender equality and inclusivity within the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Mobility sectors. Designed to bridge gender disparities and cultivate an environment conducive to the participation of women innovators, INFIMO reflects a conscientious response to the evolving dynamics of technology and trade.

The inherent challenges illuminated through the analysis of women's needs, organizational development plans, and expectations underscore the imperative of strategic collaboration. The diverse experiences across partner ecosystems—Portugal, Estonia, and Georgia—reveal both common challenges and unique contexts that demand nuanced interventions.

The examination of gender biases in technology across these ecosystems brings to the forefront the multifaceted nature of the issues faced by women in the ICT and mobility domains. From male dominance and ingrained stereotypes to disparities in organizational leadership, the identified challenges necessitate targeted and comprehensive solutions. The positive experiences shared by some interviewees, such as overcoming stereotypes and organizational commitments to diversity, serve as beacons of progress but also highlight the need for widespread adoption of inclusive practices.

The organizational insights further emphasize the role of companies in shaping gender-responsive development plans. From addressing gender imbalances in managerial positions to promoting diversity and fostering a supportive internal environment, companies play a pivotal role in shaping the professional landscape for women. The articulated expectations of women towards the INFIMO WTCG elucidate a shared vision for a collaborative platform that not only

advocates for gender equality but actively contributes to knowledge exchange, technological awareness, and the exploration of new cooperation opportunities.

In essence, the INFIMO project represents a significant step towards empowering women in the ICT and Mobility sectors. By addressing gender biases, fostering collaboration, and providing a platform for shared experiences and best practices, INFIMO lays the foundation for a more inclusive and diverse future in the interconnected innovative ecosystems of Estonia, Portugal, and Georgia. As the INFIMO WTCG takes shape, it stands as a testament to the collective commitment to gender equality, innovation, and progress in the ever-evolving landscape of technology and mobility. In the future, the results of the work of the INFIMO WTCG will hopefully be helpful for other innovation ecosystems beyond the INFIMO partnership.