

DIKTAS II

Implementation of the strategic action program (SAP) of the Dinaric karst aquifer system:
improving groundwater governance and sustainability of related ecosystems.



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GENDER ANALYSIS OF WATER GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT IN CROATIA

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Introduction

- Croatia has a strong constitutional and legal basis for gender equality (Croatian Constitution 2000, article 3 - gender equality as a fundamental principle; Gender Equality Act OG 82/08, 69/17)
- However, implementation remains weak — laws lack enforcement and gender budgeting mandates
- Gender equality in the water sector reflects broader socio-economic disparities

Objectives and Methodology

- Objective: Assess gender equality in water sector governance under DIKTAS II (Output 6.2)
- Methodology: Desk review of legal, institutional, and statistical data (EIGE, Eurostat, UN, World Bank)
- Framework: Water as Asset, Service, and Space (Integrated Water Resources Management – cross-sectoral policy approach)
- Limitation: Scarce gender-disaggregated data in water management

Key Findings: The Gender Paradox

- 2021 Census – declining and aging population - 3,878,981 inhabitants - 2,011,026 (51,8%) women, 1,867,955 (48.2%) men
- Life expectancy - women 81.8 years, men 75.4 years
- Population 65 and over – 22,9 % (0.64 males per 1 female)
- Female literacy – 99.8%
- Women: 59.9% of university graduates, 55.4% of PhDs
- Yet female employment rate only 65% (5th lowest in EU)
- Gender wage gap: 11.1%; pension gap: 24.8%
- Legal protections are continually strengthening → 2024 amendments - femicide introduced as a specific criminal offense
- 2024 amendments Companies Act – improving gender balance in boards (33%, June 2026)

Water Sector Management Structure

- Ministry of Environmental Protection and Green Transition, Water Management and Sea Protection Directorate - water policy - 2025 - led by women
- Hrvatske vode – expert agency and legal entity for water management in Croatia, male-dominated (2025 – Management Board – 7 members, 2 women / 5 men -28,57%)
- Its formal mandate makes no mention of gender mainstreaming in operations or budgets

Water as an Asset

- Despite women's strong educational performance, they face structural barriers to achieve parity in economic power
- Widening gender wage gap (11.1% in average wages in 2021)
- Wage gap for part-time jobs: 21.6% (2022 -highest in EU)
- Underrepresentation in technical and managerial roles
- Economic vulnerability – 24,8% gender pension gap (2022)

Water as a Service

- Croatia: largest EU gender gap in time spend on care & domestic work
- Country's low EIGE “Time” domain score: 48.6/100
- Participation rates outside the household – 69% women, 86% men - social and individual activities three times a week or more (2022)
- Invisible managerial labour of handling household water activities, including paying bills, monitoring consumption, reporting infrastructure issues – falls disproportionately on women- unpaid care work

Water as a Space

- Examines women's ability to influence water policy and management decisions
- Political representation - women: 33.1% of Parliament 2024; first women president (2015-2020)
- Low EIGE 'Power' score: 49.5/100
- Office for Gender Equality "rarely consulted on issues other than those strictly related to gender equality"

Key Structural Gaps

- Structural deficiency in the implementation framework
- Strong legislation for gender mainstreaming – ineffective by the failure to tie it to enforcement and sanctions
- Failure to mandate gender budgeting ensures that gender mainstreaming remains an unfunded luxury
- Lack of gender-disaggregated data → weak evidence base
- Isolation of gender expertise

Strategic Opportunities

- Empirical research - women in Croatia show higher environmental awareness and pro-ecological behavior, they show more support for policies aimed at recycling and more positive outlook toward health problems caused by ecological problems
- Opportunity: this can be leveraged by the water sector – framing water policies and awareness campaigns around sustainability, household water conservation and climate change adaptation

Conclusion and Recommendations

- Croatia possesses progressive legislation but lacks structural and financial mechanisms necessary for substantive implementation

Recommendations

1. Gender Equality Act – amend - add sanctions & enforcement
2. Mandate gender budgeting across all sectors
3. Integrate gender expertise
4. Collect gender - disaggregated data in water sector
5. Targeted recruitment and professional development programs in Hrvatske vode – to increase women representation in technical, engineering and leadership roles
5. Leverage Women's Environmental Engagement

Thank you

