



ESPO AWARD 2025 ON SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF PORTS

Seventeenth Edition

Port innovative strategies and/or policies aimed at attracting more women to work in ports

Title of the project

“Breaking Waves for Gender Equality: Livorno’s Certified Innovation Strategy”

Summary description of the project

The North Tyrrhenian Port Network Authority (Port of Livorno) has taken a bold and visionary step toward advancing gender equality through the implementation of a comprehensive, multi-year project aimed at transforming the port into a more inclusive, diverse, and socially sustainable working environment. At the core of this initiative is the objective to attract more women to work in the port sector, particularly in roles that have been historically male-dominated, such as operations, logistics, and technical functions. This is not simply a program of formal compliance, but a structural change in how the port approaches governance, human resources, and its relationship with the surrounding community.

This transformation is guided by the principles outlined in the UNI/PdR125:2022 Certification for Gender Equality—an Italian benchmark standard. The Port of Livorno is notably the first and only port in the country to have achieved this certification, which underscores the strategic importance and pioneering nature of the project. The certification process required the port to undertake a rigorous internal assessment, implement measurable performance indicators, and establish an internal governance framework dedicated to monitoring gender-related progress. The Gender Equality Committee, composed of representatives from various departments and levels, was created to oversee the strategy and ensure the continuous alignment of policies with the objectives of equality, transparency, and inclusiveness.

The project, officially launched in 2024 through the establishment of the Gender Equality Committee, has been structured to be maintained and evolved over the next years. This phased approach allows the port to implement and refine its interventions over time, respond to new challenges as they arise, and systematically track its progress through annual evaluations. In 2025, the port’s successful attainment of the UNI/PdR125:2022 certification marked a key milestone, demonstrating its institutional readiness and full commitment to transformative change.

Among the key issues the project seeks to address is the persistent underrepresentation of women in the port workforce. The port sector, like many industrial and maritime environments, has long been perceived as a male preserve, which discourages women—especially younger generations—from viewing it as a viable and welcoming career path. Moreover, challenges such as work-life balance, limited advancement opportunities, and a lack of inclusive communication strategies have historically hindered gender parity. In response, the Port of Livorno has introduced a broad set of measures designed to dismantle these barriers.

These include revising recruitment and promotion procedures to ensure transparency and fairness, offering targeted professional development and leadership training for women, and introducing family-friendly work policies, such as flexible hours and the possibility of remote work where applicable. Awareness-raising campaigns, job orientation programs for female students, and structured engagement with schools and universities will be launched to encourage early exposure to the variety of careers available in the maritime and port sectors.

A central strength of the project lies in the strong network of collaboration between the port authority and a wide array of local, regional, national and international stakeholders. Institutions such as technical institutes, maritime academies, universities, municipalities, and trade unions must be actively involved in supporting and co-implementing various initiatives. These partnerships will carry in co-designed educational content, internships for young women, and joint public events that connect the port community with broader civic life. The Port of Livorno has positioned itself as not only an economic engine but also a community leader capable of driving social change.

The project envisions concrete and measurable results. These include a steady increase in female participation across all levels of the port workforce, with a particular focus on operational and technical roles; improved employee satisfaction, especially among women; and a cultural shift within the port toward more inclusive and respectful workplace dynamics. Performance is evaluated using gender-sensitive indicators, in accordance with the certification framework, which measure recruitment data, internal mobility, training uptake, and gender composition at various hierarchical levels.

The Port of Livorno has committed concretely, both financially and administratively, to support the implementation of the gender equality strategy. The dedicated resources are directed toward training activities, communication campaigns, stakeholder engagement, and improvements in infrastructure aimed at supporting female staff, such as improved transport access, rest areas, and potentially childcare support.

Beyond internal benefits, the project contributes meaningfully to the wider objective of social **integration between the port and its host community**. Initiatives like “Open Port” invite residents, particularly students, to experience the life of the port firsthand, demystifying its operations and presenting it as an open and accessible space for all. These

public-facing efforts not only improve the image of the port but also foster a shared sense of ownership, pride, and inclusion.

In this way, the Port of Livorno is making a significant contribution to the goals of the ESPO Award, demonstrating how inclusive employment strategies can serve as a driver for broader societal cohesion. By embedding equality into its strategic vision, the port is promoting long-term resilience, competitiveness, and social sustainability. It offers a clear example of how ports, traditionally viewed through the lens of logistics and infrastructure, can become leaders in inclusive innovation and community-centered development.

An essential and emblematic component of this broader strategy is the launch of the **“Blue Women” pillar within the Blue Line Initiative** —a dedicated program designed to foster visibility, empowerment, and community among women working in or aspiring to enter the maritime and port sectors. Born from the recognition that cultural change requires not only policy but also role models and collective identity, Blue Women serves as both a communication campaign and a support network. The initiative creates a space where women can connect, share experiences, and support one another while also inspiring new generations to consider careers in blue economy fields. Blue Women embodies the symbolic and practical shift taking place in Livorno: from isolated efforts to a coordinated and visible movement, reinforcing the port’s commitment to a future where diversity is not an exception, but the norm.