



# Promoting gender equality in urban projects in Bologna



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## Acknowledgements

The European Investment Bank (EIB) conducted a comprehensive study to help the city of Bologna implement projects that address the gender gap and empower women economically. The sectors addressed by this assignment play a crucial role in the city’s goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2040. The aim is to help develop projects that are in line with the European gender equality goals, improve the quality of life of vulnerable populations and promote social inclusion through a gender perspective.

The report was written by the following experts from OCA Global’s Consulting and Technical Advisory division, Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini and Istituto per la Ricerca Sociale: Zaida Nuxí Martínez, Flavia Pesce, Pablo Martínez Díez, and Barbara Leda Kenny.

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# Introduction

Women and men experience life in the city differently because of different gender roles. Traditionally, urban planning did not consider gender perspectives and women's experiences in cities, leading to unequal access and opportunities for women. However, this has evolved in the last few decades, and cities are gradually moving to the forefront of efforts to make societies gender equal.

Urban development can reflect and reinforce gender inequalities, which can affect other sectors. This is why many cities are now introducing policies and measures to promote gender equality by addressing stereotypes and structural discrimination against women in the local labour market, ensuring equal opportunities for participation in public and political life, and improving conditions for reconciling work and family life.

Adopting a gender perspective in urban policies is critical to overcoming the challenges of the social-cultural transformation and urban inclusion. For example, women and LGBTIQ+ individuals face issues related to security and accessibility that do not necessarily affect men. Projects need to be examined from their outset to ensure that they correspond to the everyday needs of all of the city's residents.

Gender mainstreaming, essential for achieving egalitarian cities, begins with the collection of data and urban statistics, to allow for more accurate decision-making. The municipality of Bologna, Italy, considers gender a crucial element in its planning of more sustainable mobility to better fulfil the specific needs of its residents. Under its 2022-2024 tri-annual investment programme, Bologna intends to integrate the gender perspective into the green transition of its infrastructure and services and to support growth by making urban areas more sustainable and inclusive. Specifically, Bologna aims to build and upgrade public infrastructure to make schools, open spaces and urban mobility more sustainable. This is expected to help strengthen the city's resilience following the COVID-19 crisis, boost its businesses and economy and increase its competitiveness. Bologna aims to position itself as the city with the highest per capita added value in Italy and with the highest female employment rates.

The European Investment Bank (EIB) is co-financing multi-sector projects in the city through [new financing signed in December 2021](#). The project is expected to significantly improve the air quality and help the city combat climate change. The investments are consistent with preventive measures defined under recommendations following the COVID-19 crisis, which include improving public transport, urban spaces (pedestrian areas, green areas, public squares, etc.) and public buildings (schools and administrative buildings).

Bologna has devoted the resources necessary to addressing gender equality and integrating the gender perspective in its green transition. In October 2021, the city asked for EIB Advisory's support in including gender-related measures in its investment programme, to ensure they can be implemented and monitored to reduce the existing gender gap and contribute to women's economic empowerment.

The proposed technical assistance specifically targeted three sectors included in the investment project: public buildings (notably schools), sustainable urban mobility, and parks and open spaces. Investments in these sectors are directly connected to improving climate mitigation (public buildings and sustainable urban mobility) and adaptation (parks and open spaces). Bologna aims to become carbon neutral by 2040, and these sectors make a significant contribution to its green transition.

The technical assistance aimed to help make this green transition more inclusive by improving the understanding of gender needs and ensuring that the urban infrastructure and services provided by the city are accessible to both women and men. This approach is in line with the [EU gender equality goals](#), which include improving the quality of life of vulnerable populations and promoting social inclusion.

The technical assistance covered the following objectives:

- I. Improve existing monitoring and reporting systems.
- II. Use gender data to develop gender-sensitive solutions for specific projects that form part of the current framework loan with the city.
- III. Develop key messages to ensure that successful projects can be replicated in other EU cities.

The assistance resulted in the following tasks:

- 1) Conduct a benchmark analysis of similar initiatives in cities aiming to implement green transitions with gender inclusion.
- 2) Help the city develop a gender impact monitoring system to improve or complement existing monitoring and reporting systems to better formulate and follow up on gender-specific services provided by the city.
- 3) Structure a qualitative and quantitative survey to capture the gender impact of urban infrastructure projects in Bologna.
- 4) Develop design guidelines for gender-inclusive projects related to public buildings, sustainable urban mobility and parks and open spaces.
- 5) Apply gender-inclusive guidelines for green pilot projects.
- 6) Create a gender atlas for the city. The atlas will show gender risks in different districts and will help the EIB understand the gender context in each area where investments were made. The gender atlas is a tool that can support investment decisions and help prioritise decisions from a gender perspective, based on the sociodemographic context and the urban environment.
- 7) Disseminate the lessons learnt.

EIB Advisory implemented the technical assistance with the support of the Spanish consultancy [OCA Global](#) and the Italian consultancy [Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini](#).

This document highlights **key insights and best practices** gleaned from the application of a gender-inclusive urban planning methodology in Bologna. The methodology takes a **holistic approach**, first looking at the broader urban planning perspective and then focusing on specific investments, ensuring that projects are designed through a gender inclusion lens. This approach was developed with the objective of **reducing gender disparities and promoting gender inclusivity** in urban infrastructure and development.

This document follows four steps:

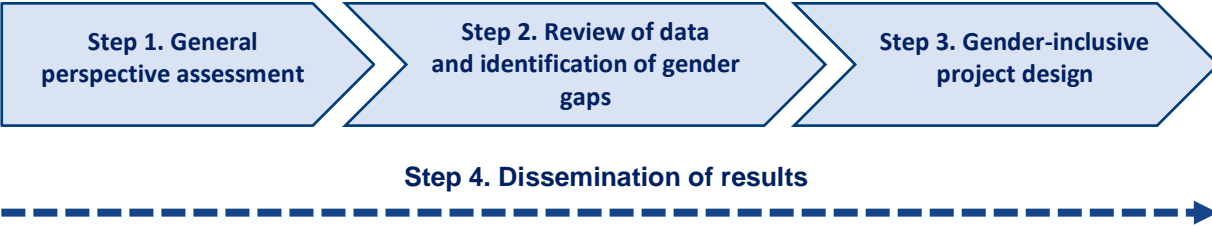


Figure 1: Four-step methodological process.

The following elements are detailed in each of the steps:

- The **deliverables** developed by the technical assistance team
- The gender-inclusive methodology
- The challenges and the mitigating measures
- The key takeaways and success factors

The report concludes with some **key cross-cutting components** that will help ensure the success of the technical assistance and of **future endeavours** based on this work.



# 1

## Step 1: General perspective assessment

The technical assistance began with a comparison of existing case studies from cities with experience applying a gender lens to urban planning, urban infrastructure design and services. This initial phase included a comprehensive assessment of Bologna's planning and existing urban strategies from a general perspective. It allowed decision-makers, urban planners, developers and architects, among others, to gain a better understanding of Bologna's existing issues and challenges and of where the city stood regarding gender inclusion and urban infrastructure.

Five case studies were selected for this document: **Barcelona, Spain; Bergamo, Italy; Berlin, Germany; Umeå, Sweden; and Vienna, Austria**. The sample was selected according to the following principles:



### Benchmark analysis

- Include cities with a leading position in gender mainstreaming in urban design at the EU level.
- Be **broad and diverse**, representing different urban and social contexts, allowing the consultant team to explore the possibilities of applying a gender perspective to urban planning.
- Represent a **variety of typologies and scales of projects** to provide a range of actions that could be implemented, and a measure of the recurrence of some themes (such as mobility, safety and well-being in urban space).
- Provide a consistent set of **information and data** about the actions and projects.

Thanks to the extensive and accessible documentation on **investment projects, and the efforts to disseminate** ideas and actions on gender urban planning, these cities (in particular Barcelona, Vienna and Umeå) have received international recognition, which has helped **consolidate gender projects and policies**. However, there continues to be a shortage of concrete cases showing how the gender perspective is implemented in urban planning.

Key takeaways from the general assessment phase:



- **How are other European cities addressing gender issues?** A benchmark analysis of gender inclusion through urban planning and design is an important term of reference on how to address challenges because it makes it possible to take advantage of the experience and expertise developed in other contexts.
- **Cities with more experience** incorporating gender mainstreaming in urban investment projects **offer valuable information**, which has been fundamental in strengthening their projects.



**The challenges:** Despite the usefulness of a benchmark report, urban projects cover a wide range of sectors and infrastructure types (green areas, cultural facilities, sports facilities, social housing, etc.). It is therefore difficult to find comparable examples of how a gender perspective is implemented in urban planning and urban design for all urban infrastructure typologies. The field is also rather new, meaning there are few real case scenarios to analyse.

# 2

## Step 2: Reviewing existing data and identifying gender gaps



### Gender-sensitive monitoring and reporting system

Step 2 reviews existing data and indicators describing the current situation in Bologna. This is an efficient way to gather insights into the city's urban landscape and to leverage readily available information. To achieve gender-inclusive urban planning, it is essential to complement existing urban-related data with specific gender indicators. These indicators help identify areas where gender disparities and issues exist within the city.

Based on existing information gathered during the benchmark phase, the **gender-sensitive data analysis already conducted by the Bologna municipality's statistics department before the consultants arrived was pioneering**, not only for Italy, but also for Europe. This allowed for fast and agile data gathering, analysis and gap identification.

The consultants used the data to help Bologna design its annual quality-of-life survey in 2022, to **identify and target additional gender-related issues**, such as the burden of care and economic dependence/independence, and to measure the psycho-emotional well-being of the city's residents.



### Recommendations for 2022 quality-of-life survey and analysis for the future

In organising the survey, **the consultants had to adapt their work to the city's prior commitments (calendar, budget, etc.)**. The original plan was to assist the municipality in the design and analysis of an ad hoc survey gathering first-hand information from Bologna residents on gender-related needs in prioritised sectors. However, as the municipality's schedule was tight, it was agreed to keep a structure consistent with previous surveys, and the consultants **helped the city draft** the 2022 quality-of-life survey.

The survey results showed that:

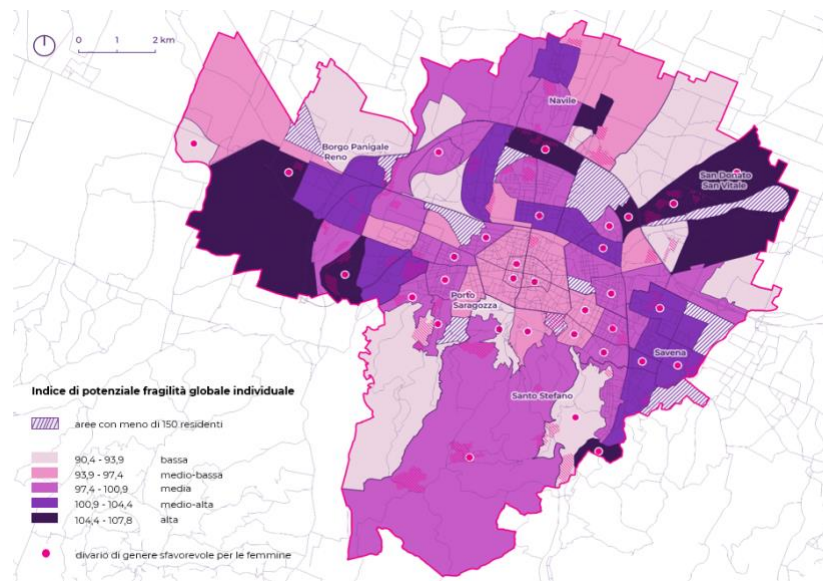
- there is a large amount of data explaining gender inequalities in Bologna;
- these data are **produced within different units and departments of Bologna's public administration**, and not collected in a single repository, making it difficult to consult, analyse and update the information.



### Gender maps: Tools to inform and guide city policies

To improve this situation, the consultants **drafted a series of gender maps**, providing the municipality with **a gender atlas**, an instrument unifying the data in a visual way, to assist in the drafting of public policies. The technical assistance in general, and the atlas in particular, enable the municipality to identify **the gender inequalities in the city and to locate them**. The atlas systematises and organises data from primary sources visually, offering a description of the residents of Bologna, their gender and how their gender relates to vulnerability, behaviour and needs. It shows the city's indoor and outdoor social infrastructure and mobility connecting public spaces and services.

The gender atlas also shows the investments the city is making in each domain and captures climate data addressing key climate risks for the city. This is an important element for the city as well as for the EIB, as gender vulnerabilities and climate vulnerabilities are connected.



**Figure 2: Index of potential individual frailty and gender disparity as it appears in the gender atlas produced by the technical assistance team.**

The data generated and insights gleaned the gender maps need to be integrated seamlessly into the city's geographic information systems (GIS), to ensure that gender-related information is readily available to city planners, to improve the overall quality of urban planning.

The atlas provides a powerful tool in the form of graphical representations of gender-related data, making it easier to identify and address gender disparities in the urban context and to visualise the geographic distribution and impact of investments and how they overlap with other needs.

The gender maps can reveal the locations of wider gaps and correlate gender gaps with infrastructure ones, aiding in the identification of potential beneficiaries and enabling more targeted actions.

**Key takeaways** from the data review phase:



- When assessing gender gaps in a city's databases, it is essential to consider **the municipality's available resources, skills and knowledge**.
- Modifications to make a more inclusive tool do not necessarily involve additional cost.
- **Geographic information systems (GIS) are invaluable tools** for urban planners. They 1) enable the visualisation of data through maps, providing a clear and graphic representation of indicators and highlighting areas that require attention; 2) help monitor and evaluate the gender impact of investments in a city's urban planning; and 3) foster more gender-sensitive decision-making.



**The challenges:**

- Even a city very committed to reducing gender gaps can be constrained by prior commitments and budget limitations.
- Updating city databases to ensure long-term consistency among multiple databases requires a concerted effort.
- Investment is needed in both social-gender and climate dimensions of projects.

# 3

## Step 3: Gender-inclusive project design



Manual with guidelines for gender-sensitive urban projects

Once a city's gender-related vulnerabilities have been identified through data gathering and analysis, the **gender-inclusive urban planning methodology** must be extended to project design to ensure real impact on a city's population.

The consultants began by creating **guidelines for gender-sensitive urban projects in three sectors (public space, urban mobility and school buildings)**. The manual was based on the consultants' extensive knowledge and expertise and on research performed through the benchmark analysis, which focused on other existing manuals and reports about gender-sensitive analysis and urban projects related to schools and bicycle paths. The EIB Advisory team proposed these kinds of projects as case studies in the guidelines, which were **intended for technical specialists** working in urban design, with a focus on public space, urban mobility and school buildings.

The manual is meant to **drive change** in Bologna and to **serve as a model for other European cities**. It is a gender mainstreaming tool in the three selected sectors and covers all the phases of urban projects: context analysis, design, monitoring and evaluation, and implementation. The manual brings together a series of detailed indications and design principles that integrate a gender perspective in the design of urban space. The principles are accompanied **by a series of precise drawings** that, much like the gender maps, **illustrate and clarify the technical content**.



**Figure 3: Drawings by the technical assistance consultants in the manual to illustrate gender-sensitive urban design.**

To test the efficiency and applicability of the manual as it was being developed, its checklist was applied to two green pilot projects financed by the EIB through municipal loans to the city: a new school, Scuola Dozza, and a bicycle path, Via della Conoscenza. This activity was key to:

- connecting the gender guidelines to projects without needing to develop a separate tool or manual;
- adapting the gender guidelines to the Bologna context and gathering feedback from relevant sectoral municipal departments;

assessing the need to update or modify the selected urban projects to meet the guidelines' gender criteria.



Application to two green pilot projects



Key **takeaways** from the gender inclusion design phase:

- Applying a gender lens to urban design means **considering the specific needs, challenges and preferences of all users from the planning phase to the execution of urban projects**.

- The **successful application** of gender-inclusive guidelines to urban projects, such as a school and a bicycle trail, **highlights their effectiveness** and helps **tailor them further to fit the context of the city.**



- **The challenges:** The guidelines must be applied to urban projects early enough in the design process, when the projects can still be modified but are also sufficiently detailed to provide enough information to analyse. Some barriers (technical barriers, cost, prejudice, etc.) may be encountered when applying the guidelines and for projects to be fully gender inclusive.

# 4

## Step 4: Disseminating results



A visual identity

Communication plays an important role in **fostering transparency, accountability and active participation** within any organisation, community or government. It is the bridge that connects individuals, institutions and stakeholders, ensuring that information is readily accessible and actions are open to scrutiny.

The objectives of communication for the technical assistance project were to:

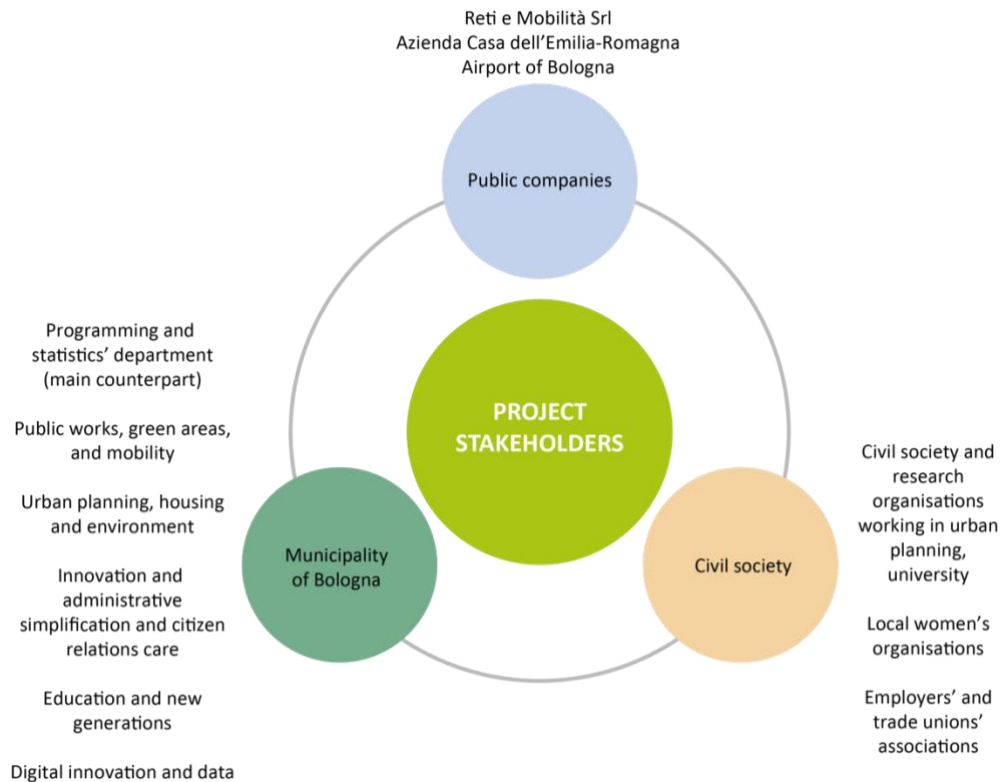
- **communicate** about the ongoing project to the public and **engage** local stakeholders;
- **raise awareness** about the importance of a gender perspective in urban planning;
- **facilitate the replicability** of the project in other Italian and European cities.



A press folder (including press communication and social media publications for Women's Day)



A small two-minute video summarising the main measures of the project in Bologna<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 4: The Bologna technical assistance project's stakeholders.**

Source: Technical assistance team.

The consultants provided **dissemination materials and tools** to help Bologna communicate about the gender gap reduction in urban projects and its results to the widest audience possible.

The **key messages** disseminated were:


- **Women perform multiple roles** (household work, caregiving, employment) that are not always recognised in urban planning. Gender roles create **different opportunities and access to services**, transportation and infrastructure, exposing them to different risks.
- An intersectional and gender approach to urban planning has an **impact on the well-being of the entire community**.
- **Collecting disaggregated gender data, organising it and analysing it** are fundamental steps for sound gender-inclusive planning, monitoring and evaluation.



An executive summary (brochure)

<sup>1</sup> <https://advisory.eib.org/videos/bologna-infrastructure-and-services-through-the-gender-lens>

- **Social and environmental sustainability are interconnected:** A more gender-inclusive city is positive for the environment and climate actions are positive for gender equality.

  
**Slides presenting the project's main outputs**

  
**A document about the lessons**



**Figure 5: The brochure prepared by the technical assistance team.**



Key **takeaways** from the communications phase:

- Effective communication boosts the engagement of all parties involved, contributes to the achievement of a cultural change that acknowledges the importance of gender mainstreaming and ensures the project's legacy and replicability.
- It is very important to use **gender-inclusive language** on a visual and written level.



**The challenges:** Communication is linked to the identity and mission of organisations. It is therefore important to **consider multiple factors** and ensure that **all those involved are at ease** with the communication tools, messages and actions, including visual branding (images and colours).



## Acknowledging key essential components

Gender mainstreaming is a critical approach that promotes gender equality by **ensuring that the specific needs, challenges and opportunities of all users are considered and addressed in urban planning** and development. Six essential components play a significant role in effectively integrating gender into urban planning:



### Engagement

Engagement is at the core of gender mainstreaming in urban planning. It actively **involves all stakeholders** in the planning process, including individuals, groups or organisations that have an interest in the outcome of the project, such as residents, businesses, investors, planners, regulators, activists and non-governmental organisations. Engaging these voices ensures that their perspectives and technical needs **are heard and integrated** into the definition of tools for gender mainstreaming in urban planning. It promotes **inclusivity** and also **a cultural change** in city offices, which leads to **long-term impact and more equitable and sustainable urban development**.



### Data

Quality data are fundamental for **evidence-based gender mainstreaming**. Data allow us to **understand existing gender disparities** in urban settings, **identify areas** where there are greater gender inequalities, and **track progress** over time. Gender-specific data **enable planners** to make informed decisions and allocate resources effectively, ultimately leading to **more equitable and resilient urban environments**.



### Time management

Time management is crucial in gender mainstreaming. **Allocating sufficient time** for a thorough analysis and implementation of gender-sensitive policies and projects is essential. Rushed processes may neglect important gender considerations, leading to ineffective outcomes. Properly managed time **ensures that gender issues are thoroughly addressed and integrated** into urban planning. **It also ensures that planning and design processes are not delayed by the inclusion of the gender dimension**.



### Scope and objective definition

Clearly defining the scope and objectives of gender mainstreaming initiatives is critical for success. It makes it possible to **set boundaries and goals**, ensuring that **gender issues are systematically addressed in** various aspects of urban planning, from policies and strategies to the design of urban infrastructure. Gender mainstreaming is **cross-cutting** in all activity sectors. It is therefore very important to have a **clear framework** that also **includes activities developed by different stakeholders, such as government officials, urban planners and gender experts**. Without a well-defined scope, gender mainstreaming efforts can become fragmented and lose their effectiveness.



### Dissemination with a focus on quality

Effective communication and dissemination of gender-inclusive urban planning strategies and outcomes are essential for **garnering support and creating a lasting impact**. It is not enough to simply integrate gender considerations; the results must be **communicated effectively** to all stakeholders and the broader community. Dissemination with a focus on quality ensures that gender-sensitive urban planning becomes **widely understood and supported**.



### Cost effectiveness

It is a misconception that gender mainstreaming drives up the cost of implementation. This belief can lead decision-makers to avoid implementing a gender perspective effectively. However, as this EIB technical assistance project (including the recommendations for the draft survey and the pilot projects) has shown, **proposals can be found and incorporated at no additional cost** when planned **and included in the available budget**. Cost effectiveness is key to **ensuring that the municipality** accepts the recommendations.



# Future prospects

The EIB technical assistance project in Bologna has equipped the city with a **valuable gender-based urban planning methodology**, but the journey towards gender-inclusive urban planning is not without challenges. The transition to a more gender-inclusive urban planning approach may require **changes in mindset, practices and policies**.



**Previous focus on climate vulnerabilities**

**Past projects supported by the EIB were primarily oriented towards addressing climate vulnerabilities.** This must now be combined with gender-inclusive planning, as both dimensions are an inseparable part of inclusive and integrated urban development.



**Gender-inclusive future**

With the gender methodology and lessons learnt, we anticipate that future urban planning and infrastructure projects in Bologna will take the gender dimension into account. This shift will result in **urban infrastructure that is more gender sensitive** and will contribute to **making the city's green transition more inclusive**.

The **gender-inclusive urban planning methodology** developed and applied in Bologna offers **valuable lessons for future urban development endeavours**. By using existing data, incorporating gender indicators, using geographic information systems (GIS) and applying a gender lens, we can work towards a more inclusive and equitable urban environment. This approach also serves as a **testament to the city's commitment to fostering gender inclusivity and sustainability** in its development efforts.





# Promoting gender equality in urban projects in Bologna



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