

GENDER BALANCE POWER MAP

EUROPEAN BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

Co-inspiration between social
and conventional enterprises
to promote equal access to
decision making positions



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Partners of the project



EDITORIAL



Marie Arena

MEP, member of the FEMM committee
at the European Parliament

The low representation of women in economic decision-making positions is a missed opportunity and a challenge for companies, countries and the European Union as a whole.

This absence of women leads to under-utilisation of qualified people, while many studies confirm that women have a positive impact on the decision-making process and business performance.

As the years go by, statistics continue to show that women are too often faced with a glass ceiling in their careers. They also tend to decide themselves not to embark on a challenging career, afraid that they will no longer have time to take care of their family and loved ones.

We should support the engagement of women in leading positions and in entrepreneurship in every way possible as they offer a new perspective and channel towards innovative growth.

As a member of the FEMM Committee at the European Parliament, I support every initiative that can contribute to a better understanding of inequalities between men and women in all sectors, and in this case, in economic decision-making.

We should always endeavour to share experiences, information and good practices, whether between States or companies, as it is a wonderful inspiration leading to potential improvements for each partner in the debate.

This “Gender Balance Power Map” provides new opportunities and a new instrument for companies to fight against the gender disparity in decision-making positions.

In addition, its focus on social and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), sectors for which women’s activity data is poor, opens a new perspective on gender equality.

Conventional and social enterprises can learn from each other and we, as political leaders, can learn from all the good practices highlighted in businesses. We should promote these and work together towards a women-friendly economic sector.





INTRODUCTION

According to the last Gender Equality Index of 2013 from the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), out of the six domains assessed by the Index, the gap between women's and men's representation in political, social and economic decision-making revealed the lowest gender equality score. However, regarding the economic sphere more specifically, the Index illustrates a gradual increase in the proportion of women on Boards of Directors from 9% to 20% between 2003 and 2014. The increase is all the more visible in Member States having adopted binding legislation, such as in France and in the Netherlands. Unfortunately, this figure only concerns the largest publicly listed companies.

Yet, even though small and medium enterprises (SMEs) represent the vast majority of employers on the continent (in 2014 they accounted for 99.8% of all enterprises in the EU28 and employed almost 90 million people - 67% of total employment)¹, policy measures and indicators mainly focus on the biggest corporate boards. If legislative measures introduced in the past 10 years have led to substantial progress, especially when accompanied by sanctions, the debate on the issue tends to be dominated by the controversies on the need to establish gender quotas in European boardrooms.

For two years, the Gender Balance Power Map project has aimed to advance the comparison of different types of legal incentives in order to better understand in which political, social, historical and cultural contexts these measures could genuinely contribute to achieving progress in terms of equal gender participation in economic decision-making. Moreover, it proposed an innovative approach to analysing and understanding the issue in SMEs by means of drawing comparisons between the situation in the social enterprises sector and the conventional enterprises sector.

In fact, social enterprises are guided by different values and principles to those of the conventional business sector. Our approach to social enterprises follows the EMES International Research Network² definition: "Social enterprises are non-profit private organisations providing goods or services directly related to their explicit aim to benefit the community. They rely on a collective dynamic involving various types of stakeholders in their governing bodies, they place a high value on their autonomy and they bear economic risks linked to their activity"³. In other words, social enterprises are private and autonomous businesses operating on the market but with the additional and explicit aim of benefit to the community. This social orientation is even reinforced by criteria defining the internal governance of social enterprises that are supposed to be a citizen-led initiative, organised on a principle of democratic decision-making (not based on capital) in a participatory process, involving those who are affected. As a result, six national qualitative studies take stock of the levels of women's participation and access to decision-making positions in conventional and social enterprises in Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Italy and Romania. From these national case studies, a European comparative study has been drafted to focus on opportunities and barriers as well as policy recommendations for the access of women to decision-making positions. In addition to the national research activities, representatives of the conventional enterprises sector met representatives of the social enterprises sector and exchanged views on the topic during three workshops in each partner country. Thousands of invitations were sent out and resulted in merely 250 participants.

¹ EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2015), "Annual report on European SMEs 2014/2015. SMEs start hiring again", p. 3

² For further information about EMES: <http://emes.net/>

³ DEFOURNY, J. and NYSSSENS, M. (2008), "Social Enterprise in Europe: Recent Trends and Developments", EMES Working Paper series, no. 08/01, Liège.

It should be noted that the gender balance was weak – more women than men participated – which might have affected the recommendations to some extent. With the help of national gender experts and facilitators specialised in participatory methodologies, each workshop came up with best practices and recommendations in a fruitful bottom-up dynamic. This European framework gathers a selection of these results.

One of the most important outcomes of these workshops is that the presumption that social enterprises are more gender sensitive and equal than conventional enterprises is actually an illusion. The business entity does not matter, but rather the size of the company and the awareness and attitude of the management. The communication of gender, how to avoid fostering and transferring stereotypes, was very much latent in the exchanges of the participants as a core factor of the current unbalanced situation.

The purpose of this unique European framework dedicated to gender equality in SMEs is therefore to highlight best practices and understand their key to success in order to replicate them in other countries or corporate contexts. It aims to produce transferable policy recommendations for corporate, national and European levels and to establish a European framework that could be disseminated across the European Union in due course.

We hope you find this interesting reading!





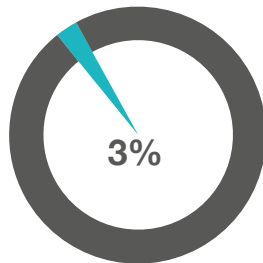
CHAPTER I

KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

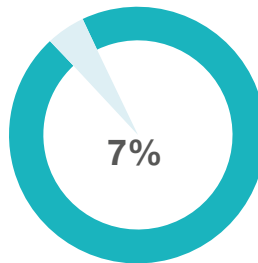
In EU largest publicly listed companies...

I A weak gender balance is to be found in EU highest decision-making bodies

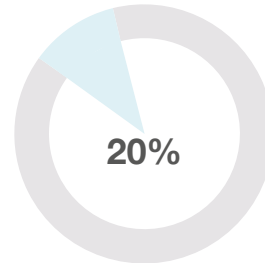
(Figures for 2015)



3% have a woman CEO



7% have a woman president of the Board of Directors



20% women among members of Boards of Directors

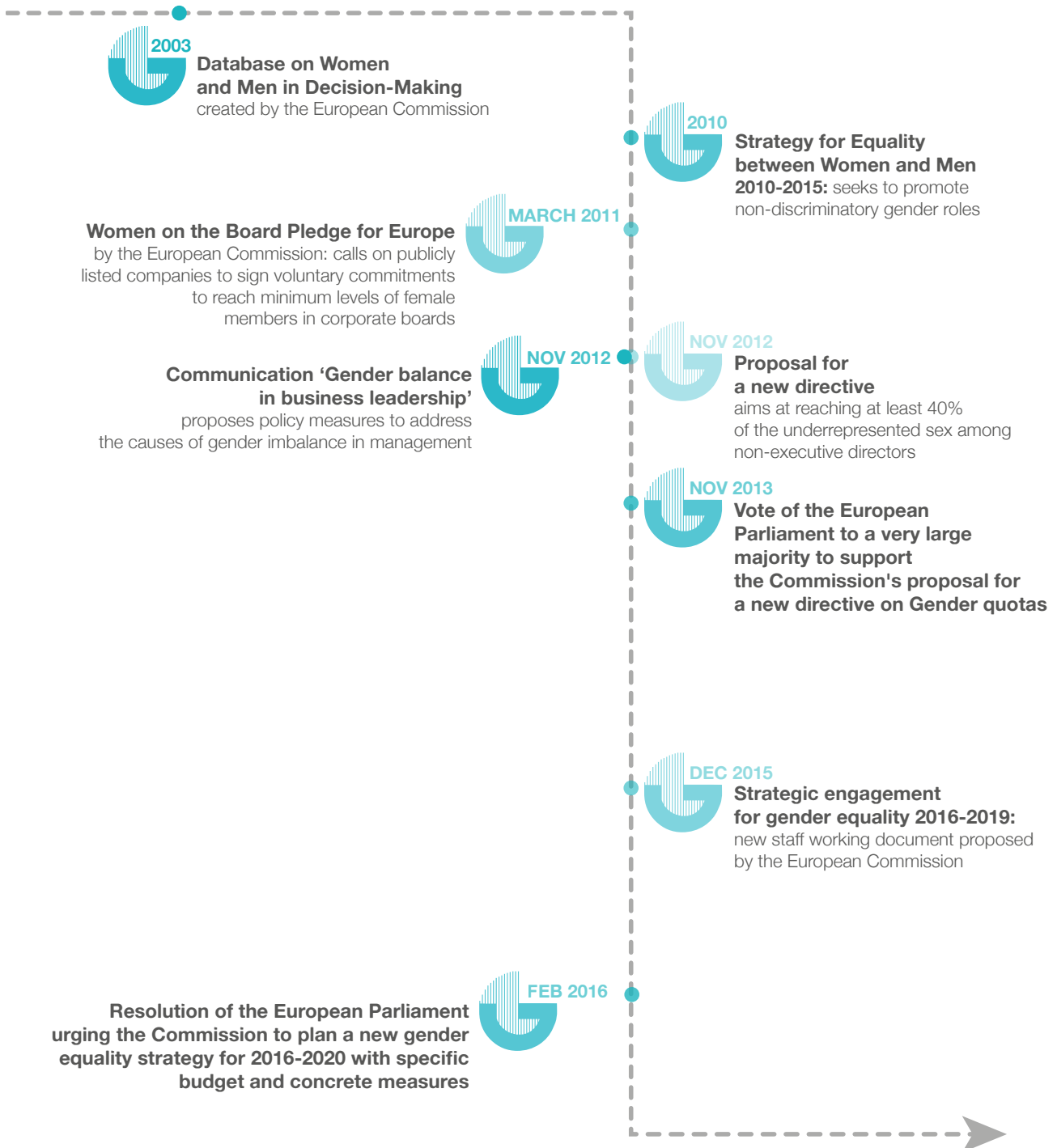
I The best gender balance results are to be found in countries having implemented binding legal or voluntary measures

Binding legislation: in Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain.

Voluntary targets (instead of quotas): in Austria, Denmark, Poland, Sweden and the UK.



I Several EU legislative measures in the past 10 years contributed to the current situation



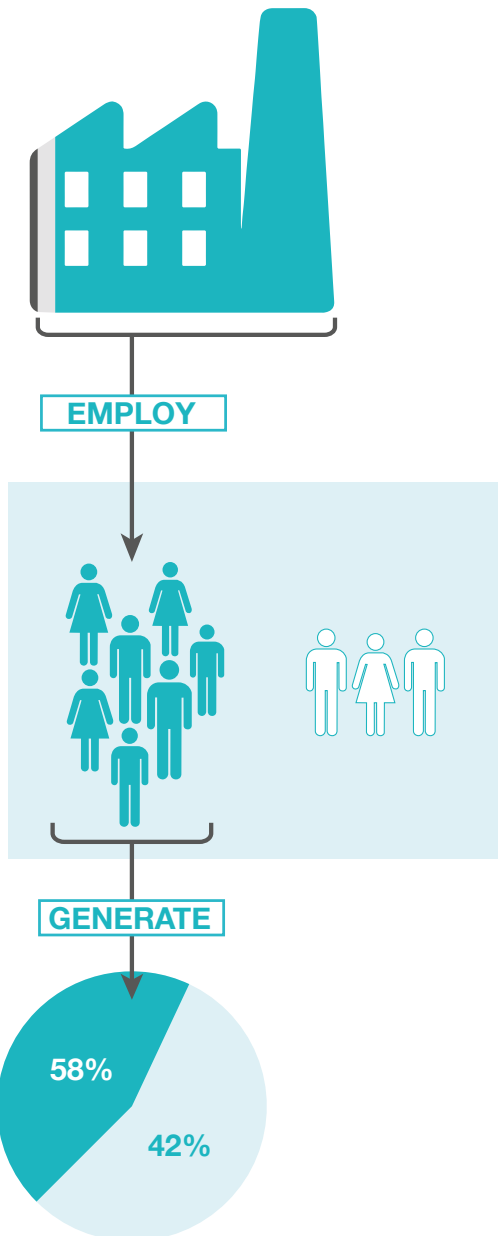
All figures and data come from the EIGE 2015 "Gender equality in Power and Decision-making" report except where another source is mentioned.



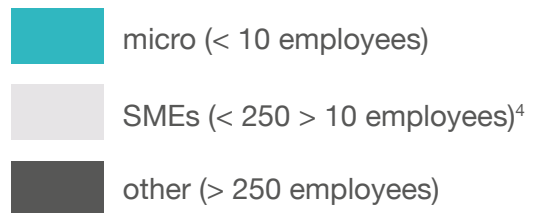


In EU small and medium enterprises...

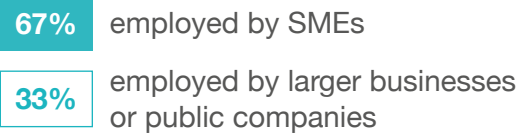
However, most European companies are SMEs and do not fall under national and European policies dedicated to gender balance in businesses



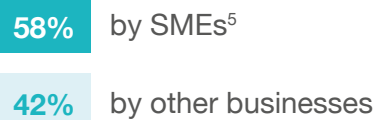
90% of EU businesses are SMEs



90 million people employed in the EU



Generated added value



⁴ European Commission, 2015, *SME Performance Review 2014/2015*.

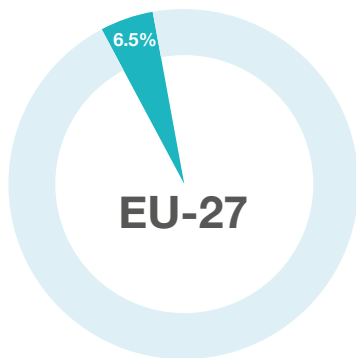
⁵ *Ibid.*

In EU social enterprises...

I Similarly, social economy entities are mostly micro, small and medium-sized enterprises

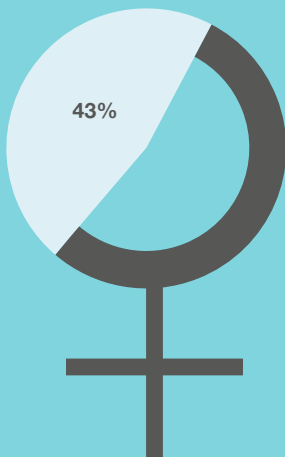
THEY EMPLOY **14.5M** PEOPLE

equivalent to 6.5% of the working population in the EU-27



In countries such as Sweden, Belgium, Italy, France and the Netherlands it accounts for between 9% and 11.5% of the working population⁶.

43% of social enterprises are run by women⁷



The "paradox of the contented female business owner"

On the one hand...

- Longest running social enterprises are run by men⁸
- Women CEOs earn 29% less

On the other hand...

- Female social entrepreneurs are more satisfied with their jobs
- Women social entrepreneurs are more likely to engage in participatory management practices⁹

⁶ Data from Eurostat, 2010 in CIRIEC, 2012, *The Social Economy in the European Union*.

⁷ SELUSI Report Summary: http://cordis.europa.eu/result/rcn/146138_fr.html (23-12-2015).

⁸ HUYSENTRUYT M., 2014, *Women's Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, OECD Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Working Papers, 2014/01, OECD Publishing.

⁹ *Ibid.*





CHAPTER II

TOOLS FOR GENDER EQUALITY

FAMILY AUDIT CERTIFICATION - Italy

I Tool description

The “Family Audit” certification results from a joint project between two Italian public bodies: the Italian Department of Family Policy and the Provincia Autonoma of Trento. In 2012 they initiated a reflection on a managerial tool to promote cultural and organisational change in businesses. Together they built Family Audit, a certification attesting that companies have adopted human resources management measures, oriented towards the wellbeing of employees and their households. Family Audit aims to continue improving the wellbeing of employees by introducing innovative, organisational and competitive solutions in terms of flexibility, time management and work-life balance.

I Implementation process

The tool was designed to answer discriminatory situations at work and the unequal career opportunities for men and women. Family Audit was a way to safeguard maternity rights, promote women’s work and offer equal career opportunities for both men and women. The Family Audit certification starts with a deep study of the business by consultants who assess the situation of the company and identify goals and initiatives, which would help satisfy the needs of work-life balance. Each business gets its own tailor-made programme with specific goals to reach before being certified.

“Family Audit has helped us to structure the work-life balance practices in the best way possible, thanks to an annual data collection which allows us to evaluate these practices and find out whether they are really coherent with workers’ needs.”

Elena Frascaroli, project manager at L’Ovile,
a Family Audit certified company.

I Impact on gender balance in management

Results related to women’s access to decision-making have not yet been evaluated. Nevertheless, as women’s access to top management positions is strongly linked to work-life balance measures, a tool like Family Audit is very likely to improve women’s access to both the market and decision-making.

I Transferability potential

The Family Audit tool can be used by any kind of business, conventional or social, of any legal form, size or activity. The business, which benefits from Family Audit, triggers a virtuous cycle for continuous improvement, introducing innovative and competitive organisational solutions regarding work flexibility and work-life balance. The Family Audit tool can be transferred to other countries: it has proven to help every kind of business thanks to its tailor-made solutions.

I Contact details for further information

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THE BELGIAN COLLECTIVE LABOUR AGREEMENT ON TELEWORKING - Belgium

I Tool description

The Belgian Collective Labour Agreement N°85 was signed by the National Labour Council (NLC) on 9 November 2005. It defines teleworking as “a form of organisation and/or realisation of work, using information technologies, in the framework of a labour contract in which a job that could have been carried out within the company premises is completed outside the company, on a regular basis”. Teleworking must be voluntary and reversible, either on the initiative of the worker or the employer, unless it is part of the original job description. It must be formalised by a written agreement specifying the frequency, the place(s) of work and the terms of return to work in the company premises.

I Implementation process

Before the Agreement, the practices were structured around the law of 6 December 1996 on homeworking. Teleworking was an informal habit with no contract, convention or agreement control. In July 2002 the European social partners signed a framework agreement giving this practice a legal character. Following the path to this European framework, the Belgian Agreement included important aspects of teleworking such as the voluntary nature of teleworking, its reversibility, equality of treatment with other employees, the guarantee of collective rights, data protection, training and career opportunities for teleworkers.

I Impact on gender balance in management

A study carried out by Ms. Naschberger about women’s career paths has found that one third of women executives questioned mentioned work-life balance as an obstacle to their career (compared to only 4% of men). This result emphasises the need to strengthen and generalise work-life balance practices, such as teleworking. Indeed, as shown by the Working Conditions and Technostress Observatory, teleworking has a positive impact in terms of quality of life, wellbeing and professional efficiency. Yet, the WCTO pointed out the necessity for constant vigilance (risk of increasing working hours) and good material conditions. Although teleworking should be developed and amplified, particular attention should be paid to its different consequences for women’s and men’s work. In fact, it could become a factor of exclusion considering that women mostly telework full-time, whereas men telework part-time.

I Transferability potential

Teleworking can be used by both social and conventional businesses given that the Convention applies to the private sector as a whole. The only set condition is for the employer to be responsible for the teleworking equipment installation and maintenance. Teleworking then implies financial means to guarantee its proper functioning. In terms of national cultures, no obstacle seems to arise: in France, where the 2005 inter-professional national agreement on teleworking contains similar terms to the Belgian Agreement, proving that this kind of legislation is transferable to other countries.





GENDER EQUALITY OBSERVATORY - France

I Tool description

COORACE is a national social enterprise network that brings together more than 500 organisations throughout the French territory. Most of them are structures of integration through economic activity. They all share the same vision of an inclusive and united society and consider employment as the main lever of action. In 2012 COORACE started developing a Gender Equality Observatory in order to collect data in this field and raise awareness on this matter. It analyses the representation of men and women in different sectors and at different levels of responsibility.

I Implementation process

The Observatory was the result of several combining factors. In 2012 an Equality Department was created. A campaign raising awareness about gender equality was also organised during a working seminar and proved successful. The participants showed a real interest in having an overview of the situation through the COORACE network. Furthermore, the Board of Directors showed goodwill about this idea and gave their support to the project. Although only one person launched the Observatory in 2012, the communication department added its contributions as the years went by.

I Impact on gender balance in management

A survey was launched in 2012 via an online questionnaire sent to all COORACE members. The participation rate was higher than expected, although the lack of detail in the answers was sometimes problematic. Quality improved over the years but certain topics remain taboo, such as salaries. Regarding the impact of the Observatory, the collection of data goes on every year but no significant change was observed in practice. Although the Observatory did not give rise to a change in practice, it remains a relevant monitoring tool to obtain information about the perception of equality as a core value within the social economy. Furthermore, its notoriety tends to get bigger and bigger: a federation of integration companies is willing to start common work with COORACE.

I Transferability potential

The Observatory is definitely transferable to other social enterprise networks. Conventional companies did not show any particular interest in this practice. One mandatory condition to carrying out a Gender Equality Observatory remains the support of the management in order to be fully efficient. At the time the first Observatory was devised, the Board of Directors was detached from the project, but as there was no hostility, the employees could proceed.

“99% of the questionnaire can be used by other kinds of organisations.”

Barbara Tiriou,
member of the team who designed the tool, COORACE.

I Contact details for further information

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EQUALITY-DIVERSITY GUIDE - Belgium

I Tool description

The Federation Wallonia-Brussels, the governing institution representing the Belgian French-speaking community, published an equality-diversity guide in March 2014 to trigger a gender equality dynamic in Belgian associations. The Guide aims to give associations guidelines to serve as a self-evaluation tool of gender equality and to set up measures for a better gender balance. It gives explanations about the under-representation of women in top management positions, describes the glass ceiling and glass cliff phenomena and defines the inequalities of treatment between men and women.

I Implementation process

A decree of January 2014 was created in Wallonia to ensure diversity among decision-making positions in non-profit organisations (NPOs): at least one third of members of Executive Boards of public interest organisations accredited by the Walloon Region must be of the opposite gender. Concurrently, the FWB launched the Equality-Diversity Guide in March 2014. The Minister of Equal Opportunities targeted NPOs as they mainly defend values connected to equality and diversity. The social economy sector is widespread and active in Belgium: 7 000 non-profit associations are operating in Wallonia alone.

I Impact on gender balance in management

A huge awareness campaign was launched within the voluntary sector to broaden the visibility of the guide. 22,000 folders, 6,000 guides and 9,000 posters were printed, reaching more than 3,300 NPOs. In order to trigger a real change, the FWB launched a call for proposals, after which 10 NPOs were selected to take part in a new guide-testing experiment including a supporting phase and a self-assessment phase. After a first step of diagnosis regarding gender equality in the associations, recommendations and concrete actions were suggested in order to build a global strategy for implementation. The auto-assessment phase will continue until June 2016.

“We are currently three female animators, and until we discovered the guide, we had never thought it could affect our cultural offer. Now, external male contributors participate in the development of our activities in order to avoid conveying gender stereotypes.”

Océane Derzelle,
Group Leader, Chimay's Cultural Centre NPO.

I Transferability potential

The guide could be used by social enterprises and even evolve in other legal or cultural contexts. It could also apply to conventional companies willing to self-assess gender equality in their organisation. Yet, such transfers would require adaptations, especially regarding the legal environment in which the firms are established, as well as companies' different governance systems.

I Contact details for further information

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CHAPTER III

BEST PRACTICES

SAMFUNDET FOLKHÄLSAN'S GENDER EQUALITY PLAN - Finland

I Best practice description

Best practice set up by: a social enterprise, Health care services, 200 employees.

Founded in 1921, Folkhälsan is a social welfare and health care NGO with the aim of promoting health and quality of life in Finnish society. Samfundet Folkhälsan makes up the core of the organisation by co-ordinating different sections: research, asset management, projects construction, human resources management, etc. The objective of the Samfundet Folkhälsan in implementing a gender equality plan was to turn a pre-existing plan into a user-friendly tool. To achieve this, Folkhälsan has focused on daily meetings in the organisation and the respect and appreciation of diversity. Folkhälsan's work was closely related to how knowledge in the different parts of the organisation could be better used to create tools for implementing the gender equality plan. In addition, further development tasks included the continuous monitoring of equal opportunities through risk assessment and staff surveys.

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I Implementation process

An equality plan had previously been set up but it was part of a general staff plan and its implementation turned out to be problematic as the policies were dealt with in separate plans and in different parts of the organisation. A development work group of voluntary members, who were interested in developing the work community, was set up to devise a new plan destined to be applied to all parts of the organisation. The changes were carried out with the help of surveys and workshops.

I Impact on gender balance in management

During the improvement of the gender equality plan, set objectives, key functions and responsibilities were added, thus making the plan more concrete, comprehensible and more easily implemented.

I Transferability potential

Samfundet Folkhälsan is a social company but with a large number of workers. The difficulty for smaller companies, whether in the conventional or the social sector, could be to find and finance the Human Resources dedicated to the conception and the implementation of the plan. Apart from the potential HR issue, this best practice is transferable to all companies in all countries.

I Contact details for further information

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THE “GLASSDOOR” WAGE TRACKING SOFTWARE

I Best practice description

Best practice set up by: a conventional enterprise, Information Technology industry, between 500 and 1,000 employees.

Founded in 2007, Glassdoor is a job offers and recruitment website (www.glassdoor.com) created for job seekers, employees and employers. Besides job offers, Glassdoor contains a complete database indexing more than 8 million company evaluations, wage references, interview questionnaires, CEO and directors' evaluations, etc. It also includes a wage comparator according to the company, the position and the social benefit. It allows employees to compare their own salary with other employees' salaries from 180,000 companies in the world.

“Women's access to decision-making positions is firstly a matter of self-confidence. Their organisational intelligence will make them go further in their career. [...] For the employee, Glassdoor is a reassuring tool. It allows him/her to show up to a wage negotiation with realistic demands based on real data.”

Christelle Hardy,
Consultant using the Glassdoor tool, Linéa Coaching

I Implementation process

Glassdoor provides help when it comes to improving the recruitment processes in favour of a better gender balance, developing Human Resources management, increasing the proportion of women on Executive Boards, adjusting salary grids, enhancing employees' status and skills, etc.

I Impact on gender balance in management

According to client feedback, Glassdoor can be considered as a useful tool that completes the company's repertoire. It offers an objective basis for comparison and analysis of potential internal actions for implementation. Glassdoor can potentially reveal inequalities between employees and companies and thus lead to a salary negotiation or a change in the working conditions based on reliable and objective data. The way Glassdoor is used can modify internal organisation through actions in favour of professional equality between men and women.

I Transferability potential

Glassdoor indexes, sorts and compares companies and organisations according to their salary characteristics, thus it is perfectly suitable for both social and conventional companies. It is also transferable to different national contexts as it already contains data from various countries.

I Contact details for further information

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SILTA LTD'S TALENT PROGRAMME - Finland

I Company presentation and best practice description

Best practice set up by: a conventional enterprise, HR services, 280 employees.

Founded in Finland in 2001, Silta Ltd offers outsourced payroll services, reporting and operational HR services. The talent programme launched by Silta Ltd. records various employee success stories for internal use, in order to improve self-esteem and self-knowledge in a sector dominated by women. The fundamental idea behind Silta Ltd's development efforts was to raise the profiles of the company experts both internally, by raising awareness and increasing women's appreciation of their knowledge, and externally, to better reflect the employees' levels of expertise.

The organisation also worked on its values in order to promote organisational culture change. The management team and other managers became an integral part of the change; communication, which was considered strategic, was developed to be more open, positive and supportive. Training in services, customer service, as well as human resource policy issues, was provided for employees. Finally, mentoring is currently being incorporated into the company's talent programme.

I Implementation process

It was recognised that the company, operating in a female-dominated field, needed to enhance the employees' appreciation of their own work. To that end, Silta Ltd took part in a gender equality project called NaisUrat: the management team and other managers wanted to better support their employees and increase the appreciation and development of knowledge in gender equality matters. The main themes were the promotion of women in management positions (challenges and opportunities); equal opportunities in the workplace, particularly taking into account the challenges arising from work-family reconciliation; making gendered structures more visible; and promoting change.

I Transferability potential

Implementing this practice at the scale of Silta Ltd required Human Resources dedicated to the talent programme. In smaller companies, the lack of employees assigned to this kind of gender equality plan could be a problem. Yet it remains transferable to all types of companies, in Finland as elsewhere.

I Contact details for further information

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ATTORNEYS AT LAW BORENIUS LTD WORK-LIFE BALANCE MEASURES - Finland

I Best practice description

Best practice set up by: a conventional business, Business law services, 200 employees.

Established in Finland in 1911, Attorneys At Law Borenius Ltd offers services in business law. The company set an objective to promote gender equality and diversity. Thus, it pursued a plan to promote women's careers and facilitate work-life balance as a permanent section of their strategic human resource management. The following actions were implemented:

- Employees on parental leave are regularly contacted during their absence, if they so wish;
- The time of the weekly meetings was changed so that parents can pick up their children;
- A children's room was designed in the facilities to accommodate temporary care needs.

The initiative came from the management of the company and the actions were decided with the help of gender equality project workers. The latter gathered information by answering questionnaires or interviews and attending workshops. This diagnosis revealed the need for top management support in order to achieve equality and women's career advancement.

I Implementation process

The company's high turnover rate of young employees and the disproportionately high number of men in management led the company to reflect on gender issues. In addition, a major influence was the intention of the company to improve its image as a responsible employer. Previously, the company had worked on a project known as The Crowded Years Initiative, which allowed the company to identify development areas in the field of gender equality. This pilot project aimed to help the organisation identify opportunities to retain young female employees. The company wanted to assess how new gender equality measures actually affect employees, especially senior female experts' career development inside and outside the company.

I Impact on gender balance in management

Apart from an increase in the proportion of women in management, a decrease in female employee turnover, and also an increase in the number of male workers on parental leave, the company was able to implement practices successfully to balance work and family in a better way. According to the company, the most challenging issue remains measuring unconscious stereotypes.

I Transferability potential

The company's global operating environment, as well as the customer-oriented nature of the sector, was a challenge in promoting women's careers and gender equality at work. Operations in different time zones put pressure on being flexible. Yet, this best practice is transferable to both social and conventional enterprises, as actions, such as maintaining contact with employees on parental leave or changing the schedules of weekly meetings, are rather a matter of will power.

I Contact details for further information

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COMMITMENT FOR YOUNG WOMEN - Czech Republic

I Best practice description

Best practice set up by: a conventional enterprise, Car industry, 24,000 employees.

Škoda Auto Mladá Boleslav, based in the Czech Republic, has belonged to the Volkswagen Group since 1991. While the sector is rather male dominated, two events for young women are organised by Škoda Auto to inform girls about opportunities in engineering:

The [Engineering days for younger schoolgirls](#) (10-12 years old) take place twice a year in Škoda Auto premises and consist of a playful development of technical thinking among girls;

The [Girls Day](#) (13-15 years old) is a special programme at the museum of Škoda Auto, a tour of the factory, which includes a presentation of career development opportunities for women.

Supporting women in the company in general includes measures like working time flexibility, teleworking and financial support for nurseries. The company also facilitates access to training within the company while on parental leave. Concerning gender equality and women's access to decision-making positions, the management decided not to use quotas but targets: 18% of women in lower management, 15% in middle management and 12% in top management by 2020.

“Škoda Auto decided to work systematically to increase the proportion and participation of women in the company as a whole in order to create the base for selection of talent. [...] The company has set up rather indicative targets. Meeting them must be the result of a long-term systematic campaign.”

Miroslava Nigrinová,
Human Resources Director, Škoda Auto

I Implementation process

Out of the 24,000 employees working for Škoda Auto in the Czech Republic, only 19% are women. Thus, the long-term strategy of aiming to increase the number of women in management must be preceded by a rise in the general proportion of female employees in order to create a pool for the selection of female managers.

I Impact on gender balance in management

These actions within Škoda Auto are at a very early stage and no assessment is available yet.

I Transferability potential

However, the transferability potential of these practices has already been tested, as the practices originally came from Volkswagen: since 2001, the “Girl's Day” sees girls of 7 to 10 visit Volkswagen plants and find out about professions that previously were typically favoured by boys. In 2014 Volkswagen presented the 5th Woman DrivING Award, a prize for young female engineers. However, SMEs willing to implement these wide practices are likely to face a lack of resources. These practices are more suitable for large companies with highly varied hierarchical structure of positions.

I Contact details for further information

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AXA'S ACTIONS FOR WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT - France

I Best practice description

Best practice set up by: a conventional enterprise, Bank and Insurance services, 15,000 employees (160,000 employees worldwide).

AXA is a world leading insurance company, present in 59 countries and employing around 160,000 people, who are committed to better protect 103 million customers around the world. The French branch is part of the Equality and Diversity Label and has signed a partnership with the French Women Rights Minister to reaffirm its commitment to equality and gender balance policies. Gender equality is one of AXA's Human Resources priorities. Access for women to decision-making positions is facilitated through three main action plans:

The [Sponsorship Tandem](#) project was launched in 2014 with the aim of identifying the most talented women within each business unit and preparing them for the highest management functions with the sponsorship of the Group or the local Executive Committee members.

The [AXA WoMen's Conference](#) was first organized in 2013 to create networking opportunities between women and men holding management positions within AXA. The objectives are to identify collectively how AXA can continue to improve gender diversity at all levels of the organization and in particular accelerate the professional development of women.

The [AXA Mix'In](#) is a company network initiated by AXA Group to promote diversity within the company. It was launched in France in 2012 and gathers more than 1,000 women and men throughout the country. It consists of various networking events, such as conferences and training sessions, to discuss diversity.

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I Implementation process

When the gender equality analysis started in 2009, only 9% of the members of the Group Senior Executive (GSE) were women. In 2014, more than half of the employees worldwide (52.6%) are women; however, their representation dropped down to 41.2% in management positions and to 27.3% in top executive positions. Faced with this situation, the Group Senior Executive decided to implement the aforementioned actions. They were initiated and carried out by the Diversity and Inclusion Governance which promotes the values of respect, equal opportunities and aims to fight against all kinds of discrimination.

I Impact on gender balance in management

In 2015, 21% of the members of the Group Senior Executive were women. The objective is set for reaching 33% of female GSE by 2020. However, from 2013 to 2014, the representation of women only increased by 0.3 points in management positions and 0.5 points in senior executive positions.

In 2015, 18 women involved in the second wave of the Group Sponsorship Tandem worldwide have been trained in collaboration with members of the Group Executive Committee and AXA Group is getting ready to kick-off a third wave of this programme.

“Mentoring is when you talk with somebody; sponsorship is to talk about somebody, to promote somebody. It is to give a woman the opportunity to shine, to be known.”

Christiane Bisanzio,
Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, AXA Group





I Transferability potential

These practices would be more suitable for medium sized and large companies as they require Human Resources to organize the Women Conference and to animate the Mix'In network. However, the Sponsorship Tandem project is worth considering in smaller companies.

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CHAPTER IV

RECOMMENDATIONS

The European Commission has proven that gender balance in organisations contributed to higher quality decision-making and improved overall company performance, both in terms of financial gains and risk management¹⁰. The various measures, implemented by corporate and political stakeholders, have helped to improve women's participation in economic decision-making. However, as shown in the European comparative study, there is still a long way to go if we want to bring about the actual underexploited potential of highly qualified and skilled women.

Based on the findings of national studies and the experience of representatives of conventional and social enterprises, as recorded at several national workshops in each partner country, this section aims at gathering concrete policy recommendations formulated by project partners. This section is intended for corporate, national and European stakeholders. Further to widely-shared recommendations from institutional lobbies (such as the European Women Lobby) or research institutes (such as the European Gender Equality Institute – EIGE) supported by the project partners, the present section expects to bring new suggestions into public debate that will tackle the imbalance in SMEs.

We hope that our recommendations will act as a powerful awareness raising and capacity building tool for corporate and policy decision-makers dealing with gender issues and that they will contribute to women's advancement in decision-making in all kinds of businesses, even the smallest and most socially oriented ones.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CORPORATE LEVEL

I Best practice sharing

In its last *Gender Equality in Power and Decision-Making* report from 2015, the EIGE calls for institutional change in the corporate sector. It urges companies to create opportunities for women's advancement in decision-making by challenging the corporate culture characterised by long hours, prevailing leadership styles and lack of transparency in recruitment and promotion practices. The Gender Balance Power Map project partners support the recommendation of the EIGE that is in line with the project results. Implementing transformative solutions will be essential to the advent of more effective corporate governance, higher quality jobs and better financial performance.

The results of the comparative study underline the need to set up this change in all businesses, no matter their class or size. When it comes to participation in economic decision-making, the presumption that social enterprises are more gender sensitive and equal than conventional enterprises is actually an illusion. The business entity does not matter, but rather the size of the company and the awareness and attitude of the management. Thus, the recommendations given in this section concern both social and conventional enterprises and underline the benefit of diversity in management.

¹⁰ EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2012, *Women in Economic Decision-Making in the EU: Progress Report - A Europe 2020 Initiative*, Publications Office of the European Union (EU), Luxembourg.





I Raising awareness on gender in management

In all partner countries (that is to say Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Italy and Romania), regardless of how advanced or how weak the companies' gender policies are, there is a demand for raising awareness about gender equality status in the enterprise. Figures and facts which reveal the actual situation should form the base for active measures. Diversity plans or gender equality plans should be introduced, put into practice and assessed on a regular basis. Integrating diversity and promotion of gender equality into the strategy of the company, as well as into the HR-policy, will ensure that gender equality is on the company's agenda and will send important signals to those in charge of implementing strategies and plans. Training should be provided for staff in charge of HR in order to increase gender sensitivity and understanding of the importance of diversity in the company. On the other hand, all employees should be aware of the diversity plan and actions.

I Adopting a gender-sensitive communication

One of the main factors hindering women's participation in decision-making is the abiding gender-based norms and social roles. The communication of gender in the corporate sphere, as in any other societal sphere (public institutions, education, etc.), is therefore key if we are to avoid fostering and transferring stereotypes. Bearing that in mind, it is all the more important that companies adopt a gender-neutral language in its internal and external communication. In a gender mainstreaming perspective, as has already been implemented at the European Commission, the company strategy, as well as communication and other strategies, should be assessed for gender status.

I Redefining the code of management

As underlined by the EIGE, leadership is often connected with power: assertiveness, dominance or rational thinking stem from what is "normatively understood as masculine characteristics and thus, commonly associated with men"¹¹. The picture of a manager is often stereotypical and portrays them as a person adopting dominant or assertive behaviour. Such representation of leadership makes it difficult for women – but also for men in conflict with these masculine expectations – to reach leadership positions. Therefore, the code should be changed and better adapted to diversity requirements in decision-making. A more diverse picture of management should be developed with portrayals of female and male managers working and taking care of their family responsibilities and/or adopting more participatory and collaborative styles of management¹².

I Setting up measures with well-defined indicators

Quotas have been discussed in many European countries and largely remain a hot and very divisive issue. Several studies carried out on the topic show that legally binding or voluntary measures, having been implemented by Member States or, more recently, by corporate boards, had led to an increase of women's participation in decision-making¹³. The Gender Balance Power Map project partners therefore invite corporate boards and companies to set up measures, especially when they are established in countries without either dedicated legislation or voluntary targets (this is the case of Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia). Companies set up in countries with quota legislation could also contribute by implementing more ambitious measures, which would allow for expansion of the array of targeted incentives by feeding the public debate. The regional and national associations of enterprises could also take a role in motivating companies to work for increased diversity in companies, in general, and in management, in particular.

¹¹ EUROPEAN INSTITUTE FOR GENDER EQUALITY, 2015, *Gender Equality in Power and Decision-Making. Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States*, Publications Office of the EU, Luxembourg, p. 13.

¹² The WEstart synthesis report demonstrates that female social entrepreneurs already display a set of characteristics to the opposite of the conventional codes of management: they developed their social enterprise thanks to resilience, a wide network of supports, a process orientation rather than a focus on the end goal, empathy, adaptability and flexibility. EUROPEAN WOMEN'S LOBBY, 2015, *Mapping Women's Social Entrepreneurship in Europe*, Belgium, p. 37.

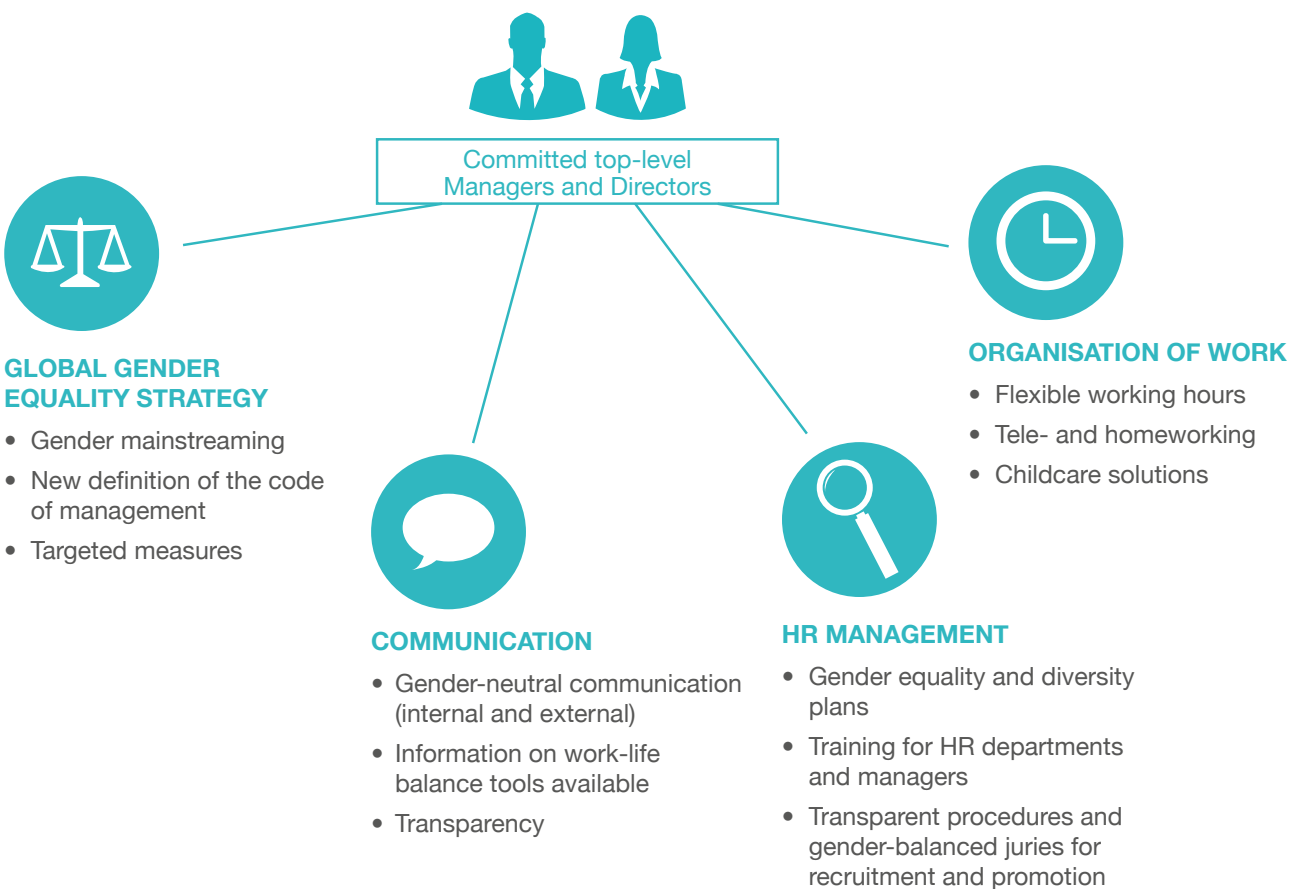
¹³ EUROPEAN INSTITUTE FOR GENDER EQUALITY, 2015, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

I Developing transparent and gender-sensitive recruitment and promotion systems

The importance of developing transparent structures and systems for recruitment, promotion and remuneration in companies was also mentioned as a soundtrack for improving the situation. Attention should be paid to the communication about job and promotion opportunities so that they are accessible and open to all employees. The criteria should not increase inequality but rather respond to both male and female aspirants. Companies should also ensure that there are juries in charge of recruitment and that they have a gender balance.

I Developing work-life conciliation tools and new work practices

The Gender Equality Index 2015 illustrates the huge abiding gap between women and men with regard to the amount of time spent outside the workplace: women still perform the majority of household tasks¹⁴. A great variety of work-life conciliation measures (such as flexible working hours) and new work practices (such as teleworking) have already been experimented in the corporate sphere. In addition to the work-life balance they facilitate, these tools of modern management also increase the competitiveness of the company. While most of these measures are common in big companies and international groups, they remain infrequent or informally implemented in smaller businesses. Even though SMEs tend to have fewer human and financial resources, they have a much more flexible organisational structure, which should enable them to use participatory approaches in order to involve employees more in formulating such actions in the companies.



¹⁴ EUROPEAN INSTITUTE FOR GENDER EQUALITY, 2015, *Gender Equality Index 2015 - Measuring gender equality in the European Union 2005-2012*, p. 142.





RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATIONAL LEVEL

The recommendations on national level underline the need to identify and address the factors that foster and promote gender inequalities and stereotypes that cause segregation of the labour market. Although gender equality has been on the agenda in most European countries for a long time, the gender pay disparity is significant. The lack of women in economic and political decision-making and the division of the labour market between male jobs and female jobs should remain an issue of public concern in all EU Member States.

I Raising awareness on diversity in decision-making

Raising awareness about gender equality should be implemented at all levels and in all political and economic spheres, although the main actions need to be performed at national level. Awareness raising campaigns on the benefit of diversity in economic decision-making and in companies in general are needed in all countries in order to support local actions. Awareness raising campaigns targeted at parents, maternity wards, day care centres, schools, workplaces, etc. are crucial to dismantle the segregation currently at stake in enterprises. The issue should also be integrated into teaching studies programmes and into the professional orientation of students at an early stage in order to get a neutral and equal appreciation of professions.

I Promoting the best practices of SMEs

The national observatories and researches carried out on the topic of gender equality often lead to the conclusion that there is still a long way to go. Other than supportive and motivational methods, in order to avoid attributing blame, companies promoting gender equality should be awarded or receive benefits and likewise, companies breaking the law should be sanctioned. This is all the more important for SMEs that comprise the vast majority of employers in Europe but often lack information or support to implement these tools.

I Encouraging quantitative measures in all companies

Although many targeted measures can be set up in companies themselves, national measures remain necessary to promote gender equality on a larger scale. The issue is addressed in very different ways depending on the EU Member State. However, whatever voluntary or legally binding measures were taken, an enhancement of the situation could be observed¹⁵. Therefore, the Gender Balance Power Map project partners invite all EU Member States to take legislative initiatives and set up targeted measures in this direction. As reminded in the EIGE report, progress could be taken even further by ensuring the implementation of these quantitative measures and offering clear, direct and effective information campaigns.

I Enacting new legislation and policies facilitating work-life balance

Flexible forms of work for people with care responsibilities should be implemented in family-friendly national policies in order to create basic political frameworks for employers and employees and ensure a better distribution of housework and caring duties. As caring work is mainly endorsed by women, national public institutions should also look after the provision of quality childcare and elderly care solutions, as suggested in the last EIGE report¹⁶.

¹⁵ "The most significant improvements took place in countries that have launched or considered legislative action (e.g. France, Italy and the Netherlands) or that have had an extensive public debate on gender balance in corporate boards (e.g. Germany and the United-Kingdom)", EUROPEAN INSTITUTE FOR GENDER EQUALITY, 2015, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

¹⁶ EUROPEAN INSTITUTE FOR GENDER EQUALITY, 2015, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EUROPEAN LEVEL

Inequalities between men and women violate one of the five values on which the European Union is founded. Beyond principles, these inequalities contribute to an underutilisation of talent and a waste of highly qualified and skilled women. Given the current economic situation and the objectives of Europe 2020, the EU economy would benefit greatly from enhancing gender equality. In 2015 the EIGE called for the promotion of legislative initiatives and targeted measures, a reinforcement of public debate, an acceleration of the progress in work-life balance and further measures to fight gender stereotypes¹⁷. The Gender Balance Power Map project partners believe that the EU has a role to play in the achievement of all these goals that will help achieve the EU 2020 objectives. It is essential that the European Union keeps women's participation in economic decision-making high on the agenda.

I Coordinating awareness raising campaigns on an EU scale

The EU should support campaigns that raise awareness about equal opportunities and encourage Member States to take action for equal access to economic decision-making. Effective communication about the European initiative to support women in decision-making positions in companies and organisations in the EU should be carried out. This effective communication should also apply more broadly to the benefits of diversity management, including all marginalised groups (marginalisation grounded in gender, disability, ethnicity or sexual orientation).

I Fostering the implementation of gender equality legislations at national and European levels

As underlined by the European Women's Lobby, all EU policies should be gender mainstreamed in order to ensure policies dealing with entrepreneurship, education or care, for instance, do not have a negative impact on the situation of women¹⁸. With regard to women's participation in economic decision-making, the EU should speed up the implementation of the directive on quotas on boards¹⁹ in all countries, especially in countries where the gender gap remains wide. Taking such action would help achieve the Europe 2020 strategy, as it aims to foster job creation and gender balance, and to create conditions for the development of sustainable policies at national level. Progress could be further aided by encouraging Member States to invest in accessible and affordable care services for children, elderly and people with disabilities, as well as sound job quality policies²⁰.

I Developing funding specifically for gender equality

Gender equality legislation will not be reinforced or properly implemented without the allocation of resources and funds. The Europe 2020 strategy, the structural funds 2014-2020 and the next multiannual financial framework should be an opportunity to include and promote gender equality in the Member States through the development of local projects by CSOs, local public authorities, etc.

¹⁷ EUROPEAN INSTITUTE FOR GENDER EQUALITY, 2015, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57.

¹⁸ EUROPEAN WOMEN'S LOBBY, 2015, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

¹⁹ COM (2012) 614 final.

²⁰ The need for improving the quality of women's jobs was underlined by the European Trade Union Institute in a Policy Brief that showed job quality is an important factor affecting female labour market attachment. The authors conclude: "Improving the quality of women's jobs may reduce incompatibilities between paid employment and family formation, thereby leading to both higher female employment and fertility rates". PIASNA A., PLAGNOL A., 2015, *Job quality and women's labour market participation*, ETUI aisbl, Brussels, p. 5.





I Promoting role models and best practices of SMEs

The promotion of female role models from and in all European countries should continue. Shedding light on the career path and profiles of female managers, directors, and entrepreneurs is fundamental in order to continue raising awareness. The EU should also actively participate in the dissemination of good practices set up by companies and organisations that support gender equality and women in management, especially when those practices are implemented by the smallest businesses that do not have the same chance to spread their innovations. In their communication, they should be careful to involve men in the reflection and the promotion of diversity.

I Gathering high quality data on gender equality in SMEs

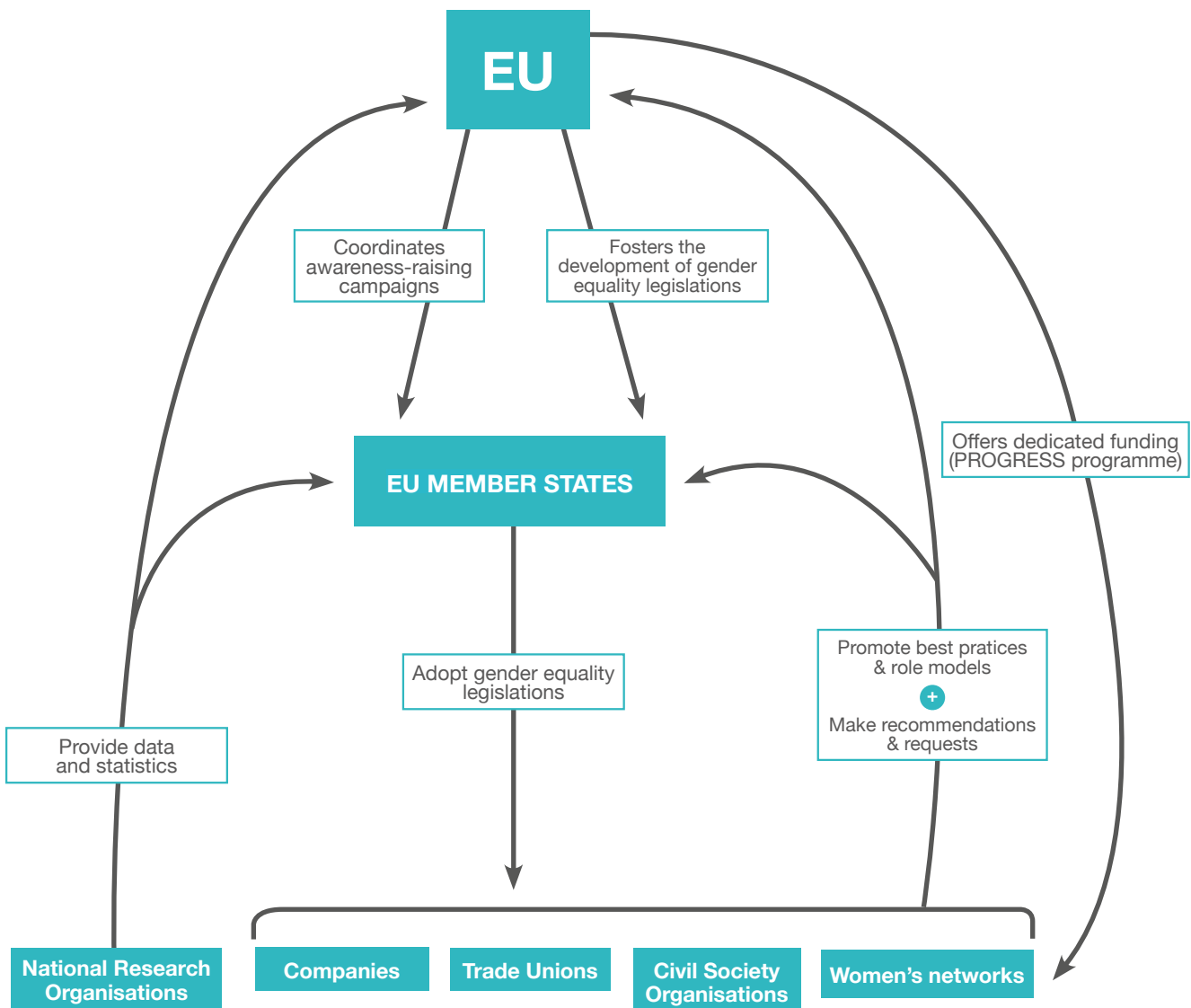
Even though gender issues have been on the scientific and political agenda for decades, further research and assessments are still needed in order to continue raising awareness and progressing towards equal opportunities. Transparent systems of career growth and remuneration should be encouraged from European level by the publication of gender-disaggregated wage and position statistics and continuing assessment of the progress. Eurostat, the EIGE and relevant European agencies (such as Eurofound), in partnership with national research institutes, should be invited and financially supported to collect gender-disaggregated data on social enterprises as suggested by the European Women's Lobby²¹ and undertake research on gender equality in social businesses. It would be even more interesting in the frame of the Europe 2020 strategy, since it has already been suggested that female management – characterised by more participatory practices – may be a key factor for more innovation and a better company performance²².

I Strengthening partnerships with field players

In order to tackle horizontal issues, such as the fight against rigid and stereotypical gender roles and discriminations, it is necessary that the EU continue to liaise and work closely with European social partners, civil society organisations, women's networks and researchers active in this field. It will help the EU to monitor the situation and continue the dissemination of good practices. The role of field players, especially women's organisations and networks, is crucial in the path to female empowerment.

²¹ EUROPEAN WOMEN'S LOBBY, 2015, op. cit., p. 42.

²² HUYSENTRUYT M., 2014, op. cit., p. 21.





CONCLUSIONS

The lack of women holding management positions and their weak participation in economic decision-making is still a reality affecting European countries. Despite the commitment of the European Union, Member States and local players, common efforts and initiatives are still needed to reach a global change. The Gender Balance Power Map project was meant to assess the situation of women's access to decision-making positions in six European countries (Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Italy and Romania). National studies and workshops were carried out by each partner to evaluate the practices in small and medium enterprises from both the conventional and the social economy sector.

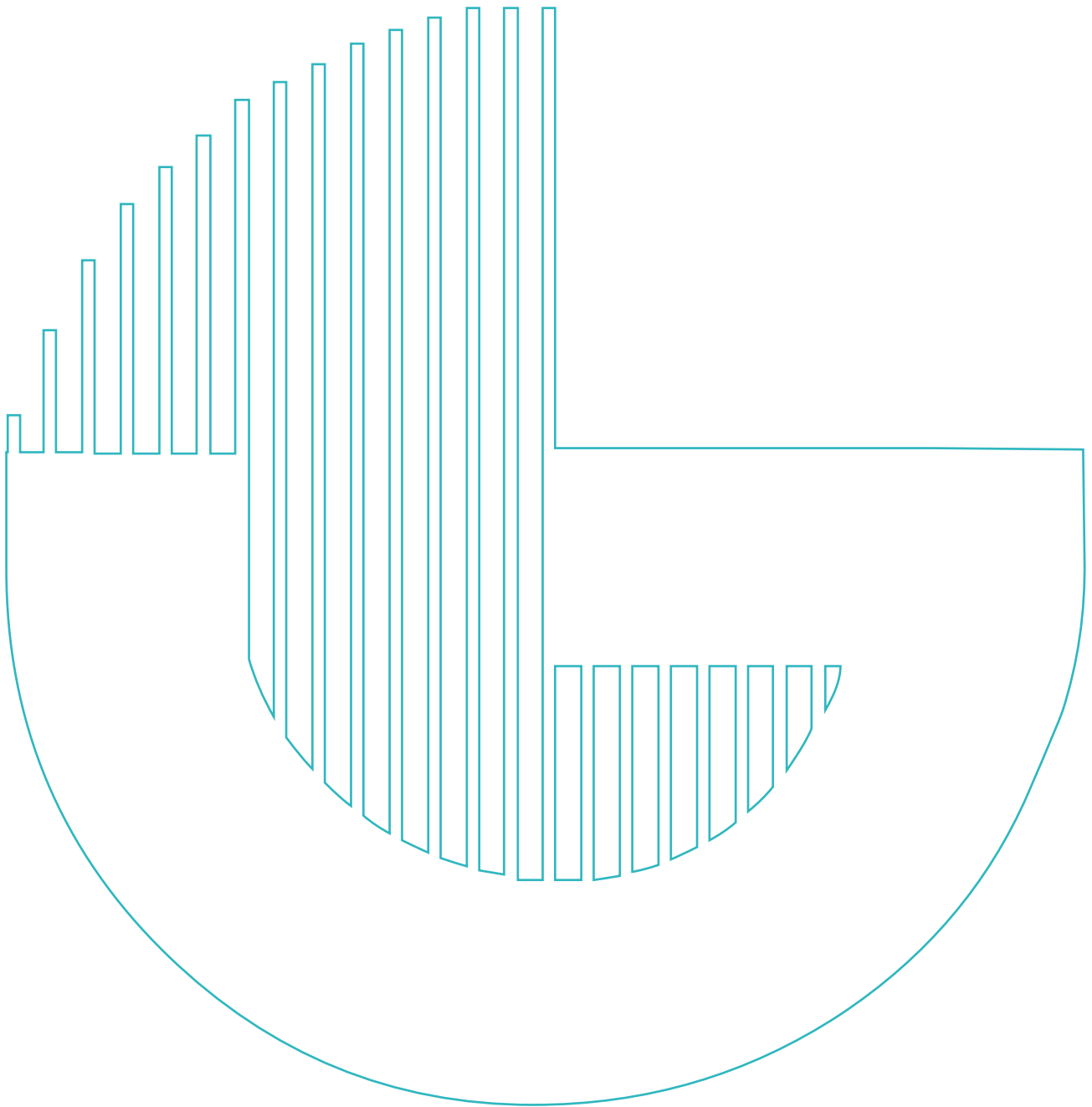
This European Framework was meant to gather best practices collected through these field activities and inspire SMEs as well as to issue recommendations intended for corporate and policy stakeholders. It aimed to provide them with information and tools in order to further their contribution towards higher women representation in the corporate sphere. From the national field activities, it emerged that small and medium enterprises, whether they belong to the conventional or the social economy, face similar factors hindering gender balance in decision-making: just as in bigger companies, gender stereotypes and masculine corporate cultures hamper the access of women to the highest corporate positions and the lack of childcare solutions, or the national culture promoting social roles for women as mothers, often place the responsibility of parenthood on women.

Thus, awareness raising activities and the promotion of role models remain essential whatever social or economic stakeholder is considered for the deconstruction of gender stereotypes and for encouraging women to consider positions usually held by men. Diversity and gender equality need to be promoted as factors of well-being and performance in companies of all sectors and in all countries through information campaigns, publications and events. Faced with these challenges, the project also highlighted once more the need for affordable and accessible childcare services, paternity support tools, return-to-work policies after long-term absences (such as maternity or parental leave), capacity-building, sponsorship and training for women as well as transparent procedures to access decision-making.

However, the different governance systems and resources available in SMEs justify that we also propose recommendations specific to smaller businesses. First, research projects and detailed figures dedicated to women's participation in decision-making in SMEs and in the social economy are still needed. On the field, work-life conciliation measures (flexible working hours, homeworking, etc.), taking into account the human resources shortage and limited financial means, are also an important axe to consider. These actions can even be enhanced by the provision by public bodies of self-assessment tools or certifications asserting measures in favour of gender equality.

From the start, gender equality has been considered as a core value of the European Union. We now need to set up the corporate and political tools to support gender equality and that will enable the continent to match up its gender sensitive values!





Partners of the project



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