

Collective Action for Parity in the Social Economy

WHITE PAPER



Table of content

Introduction	3
Presentation of the CAPSE project	5
Presentation of the partners	6
Methods, challenges and outcomes of the project	8
Operational recommendations	15
Policy recommendations	22


Introduction

Gender inequalities are a major obstacle to the full participation of women in economic, social, and democratic life. In Europe, despite notable progress in some areas, the social economy (SE)¹ is still affected by these disparities, particularly in terms of women's access to decision-making positions. Persistent structural mechanisms such as the **glass ceiling** and **occupational segregation** continue to hinder the establishment of truly gender-equal governance.

It is in response to these challenges that the European project **CAPSE – Collective Action for Parity in the Social Economy** – was launched. Focused on **social economy federations and networks across European countries**, this project aims to support a concrete and lasting transformation of practices and mindsets. Its objectives include analysing current realities, raising awareness among key stakeholders, sharing good practices, and providing practical tools to achieve genuinely gender-equal governance. By promoting balanced representation within decision-making bodies, CAPSE highlights the many benefits of diversity, particularly in terms of **innovation, resilience and social justice**.

European texts relating to gender parity rarely mention social economy organisations, even though several of their specific features warrant particular attention. First, women make up the majority of both volunteers and employees in the sector, especially in care-related professions, which are expected to grow with demographic ageing.

Moreover, the democratic principle of “**one person, one vote**,” which characterises many social economy organisations, does not guarantee balanced representation of women in decision-making bodies. Although this principle is fundamental, it can sometimes be used as an argument to avoid taking specific action in favour of gender parity. Democracy does not automatically imply gender equality: it is essential to acknowledge this issue in order to avoid assuming that democratic governance alone is sufficient to achieve parity.



Furthermore, the social economy is largely made up of small organisations, even though, for example in France, social and solidarity economy (SSE) organisations are on average larger than conventional businesses and cannot all be classified as micro-enterprises. However, the predominance of small-sized entities within the social economy may help explain their invisibility in European legislation, which is most often focused on large companies, particularly in relation to **gender-balanced governance**.

Finally, given the social economy's contribution to social innovation, it is important to highlight that the practices developed within it can serve as inspiration for other types of organisations, including those outside the social economy. To promote these good practices in gender-balanced governance, it is relevant to share them more broadly across other economic sectors that share similarities with the social economy, particularly with craft enterprises and micro-enterprises, for example.

This **white paper** serves as a key advocacy tool, offering both **operational and policy recommendations**. By presenting the results and proposals of the CAPSE project, it provides European social economy federations and networks with concrete resources and proven methodologies to sustainably establish gender-balanced and inclusive governance.

Presentation of the CAPSE project

Philosophy of the CAPSE project

CAPSE – Collective Action for Parity in the Social Economy – is a European project led by five partners in France, Belgium and Spain, as part of the Erasmus+ programme for adult education. Its main objective is to strengthen and improve gender parity in the governing bodies of the social economy, a field that is largely feminised but still marked by significant gender inequalities.

The project is based on a strong conviction: establishing gender-balanced governance within social economy federations and networks is a key condition for sustainably transforming the sector and inspiring inclusive practices among member organisations. To achieve this goal, CAPSE offers an innovative training and support programme for leaders, aimed at raising their awareness, engaging them, and equipping them with concrete tools to initiate effective and lasting progress toward gender parity within their structures.

The various activities

To achieve its objectives, CAPSE is structured around four main areas of action:

- **Analyse:** conduct a detailed assessment of the barriers and needs faced by organisations regarding gender parity in their governing bodies.
- **Inspire:** showcase exemplary initiatives and share good practices from the social economy.
- **Raise awareness:** help social economy networks and federations recognise gender inequalities within their governing bodies.
- **Support and equip:** develop educational resources, deliver training sessions, and assist organisations in designing and implementing roadmaps for more inclusive governance.

Presentation of the CAPSE project

ESS France

Established as the representative body of the SSE in France under the 2014 law, ESS France is the leading voice of the SSE. It advocates for and promotes the interests of SSE enterprises and organisations at both national and European levels, bringing together associations, cooperatives, mutual societies, foundations, SSE commercial companies, as well as the 17 Regional Chambers of the SSE (CRESS).

With around thirty members and a team of about fifteen staff, ESS France organises its work around five operational areas: public affairs and communication, European and international affairs, economic development, ecological transition, and the National Observatory of the SSE. Its commitment is part of a collective effort toward a more inclusive and sustainable economy.

COCETA

For over 38 years, COCETA has represented worker cooperatives in Spain, playing a key role in their coordination, promotion and training. It brings together a network of 16 regional federations and nearly 19,000 cooperatives, which employ 320,000 people. In total, the cooperative movement in Spain involves around 490,000 people. COCETA defends a cooperative business model based on values of solidarity and economic democracy.

With a team of seven employees and a broad network of experts, COCETA works to create a supportive environment for worker cooperatives, highlighting their specific characteristics and social impact. It is a member of CEPES, the confederation of social economy organisations in Spain, and belongs to the European and international cooperative network (CECOP-CICOPA-ICA).

ConcertES

Created nearly 17 years ago, ConcertES is the consultation platform for representative social economy organisations in the Brussels-Capital Region and Wallonia. In response to

the lack of a space for dialogue and co-construction among social economy actors, it has established itself as a key interlocutor with regional and federal institutions in Belgium. With its 24 member organisations, ConcertES offers an innovative and dynamic framework for reflection, enabling the social economy to make its voice heard in the political sphere, to promote this model among citizens, and to analyse developments in the sector through the Social Economy Observatory.

Pour La Solidarité

Founded in 2002, Pour La Solidarité-PLS is an independent European think & do tank committed to a more united and sustainable Europe. POUR LA SOLIDARITÉ-PLS works to defend and strengthen the European social model, a delicate balance between economic development and social justice.

The multicultural and multidisciplinary team at POUR LA SOLIDARITÉ-PLS brings strong expertise in research, consultancy, coordination of European projects and event organisation. It works in the public sphere alongside businesses, public authorities and civil society organisations, guided by a core approach: Understand, Connect, Support to Act!

Sciences Po Bordeaux – The SEE Territories Chair

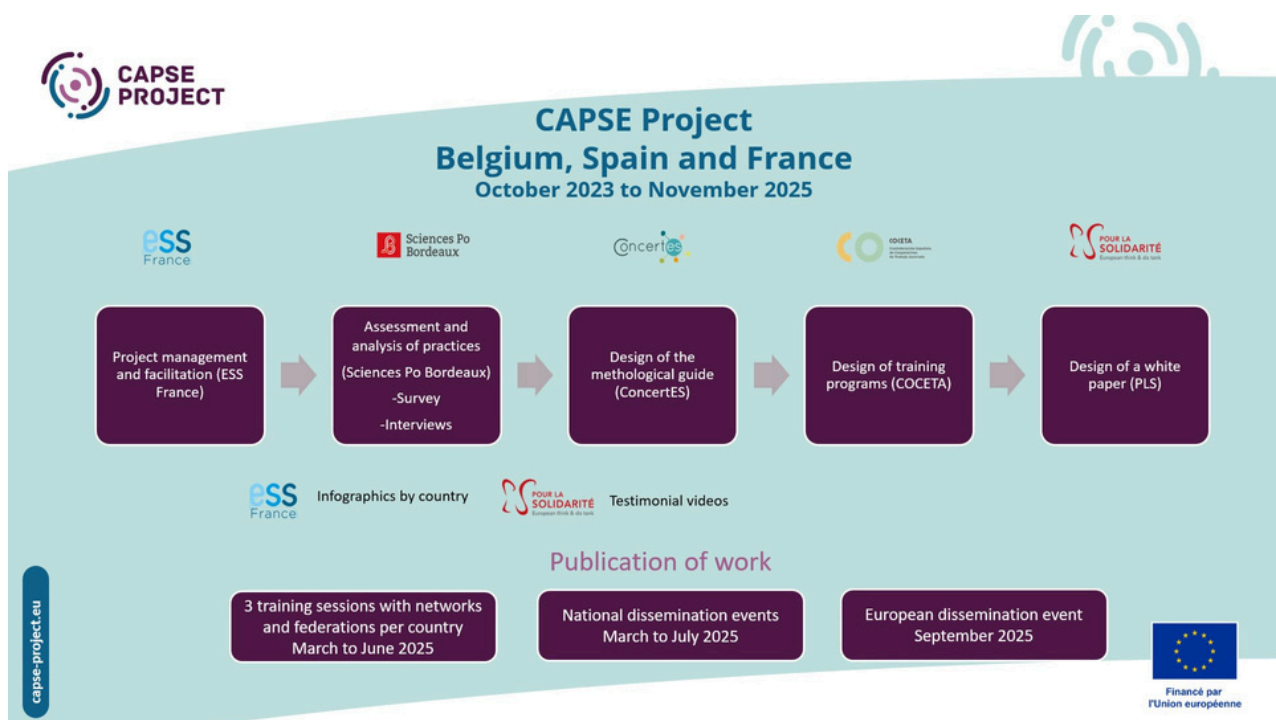
As a highly selective graduate school within the University of Bordeaux, Sciences Po Bordeaux is an institution for education and research in the humanities and social sciences, recognised for its academic excellence. Since 2020, the SEE Territories Chair (TerrESS) has been developing a training and action-research centre focused on territorial project engineering in the field of social and solidarity economy.

Combining initial and continuing education, the TerrESS Chair fosters interaction between academic research and field actors in order to better understand and support the dynamics of the social and solidarity economy. Through its research partnerships, it draws on the expertise of renowned researchers from LEST, the Laboratory for Economics and Sociology of Work at the Faculty of Economics and Management of Aix-Marseille University, as part of the CAPSE project.

Methods, challenges and outcomes of the project

Method

The methodological approach adopted was structured in several stages. First, a review of existing knowledge and practices regarding gender parity was carried out, both in the three countries involved and at the level of the European Union (EU). This initial phase was complemented by exploratory interviews with social economy networks and federations, as well as with key stakeholders in each of the three countries. The aim of these interviews was to identify existing good practices, the levers that support effective parity within governing bodies, and the persistent obstacles. In addition, relevant quotes and video materials were collected for potential use in training activities. Finally, experts from each country were invited to react to the initial findings, deepen the analysis and highlight key issues to consider in the next phase of the project, which focuses on training.



The second phase of the project focused on training. It combined awareness-raising, assessment, and support activities aimed at developing action plans to improve and monitor parity practices within the governing bodies of social economy networks and federations.

The awareness-raising and assessment stages relied on **visual and self-assessment tools** designed to evaluate, objectify and spark dialogue. A **radar chart** served as the main tool in this approach: it helps establish a snapshot of existing parity practices in decision-making bodies, identify levers for improvement, and foster constructive discussions among board members around gender equality issues.

Challenges

Two main issues emerged from the project: the need to raise awareness of gender inequalities, and the challenge for members of an organisation to take ownership of this issue.

Awareness of the realities of equality and parity within an organisation is inseparable from the deconstruction of stereotypes. Legislation alone, or commitment to the values of the social economy, is not sufficient to ensure gender parity. For instance, introducing statutory measures to achieve **quantitative parity** within a governing body does not necessarily lead to **qualitative parity**. The latter depends on individual awareness of **gender biases**, which influence everyone's participation.

Moreover, even when individuals become aware of these biases and organisations implement corrective measures, they may still come up against the systemic nature of inequalities. These inequalities often extend beyond the organisational level and require long-term commitment.

A lasting engagement with gender inequality issues therefore requires ongoing vigilance. It cannot be reduced to a one-off awareness initiative but must be part of a **continuous and evolving process**.

Expert insight – Marie-Pierre Le Breton

Vice-President of UDES and President of ANEM, with a long-standing commitment to gender equality in the social and solidarity economy.

“From what I observe, recent years have seen significant – though still incomplete – progress in gender parity within decision-making bodies in the social and solidarity economy (SSE).

The latest triennial report by the Parity Commission of the CSESS confirms this trend: in France, women account for 68% of SSE employees, and their presence is increasing in governance structures, with 45% of board members and 37% of presidents being women. This shows that things are evolving, even in sectors where leadership positions have historically been very male-dominated.

That said, there is still a long way to go. In larger organisations or umbrella networks, I find that women still struggle to access the most strategic leadership roles. The report, for instance, indicates that only 18% of presidencies in organisations with more than 50 employees are held by women. Moreover, nearly 4 in 10 organisations rarely or never address the issue of parity within their governance bodies – which is a red flag.

In my view, the momentum is underway, and several SSE networks are now seriously engaging with these issues. But to ensure lasting progress, structural barriers must be removed, women’s access to leadership roles must be actively supported, and a collective culture of equality must be promoted in our governance models.”

Results

Actions points

We present here the two action points identified in the project.

1. Strengthen gender-balanced governance

The first action point relates directly to governance. It involves mobilising leaders in high-responsibility roles (presidents, executive boards, directors) to drive a shift towards parity within decision-making bodies. To achieve this, it is essential to train leadership teams on gender equality issues and provide them with the necessary tools to introduce a gender perspective into organisational practices. Parity in governance bodies may involve, for example, amending the organisation’s statutes or explicitly integrating equality into its mission statement. It also requires the introduction of rules that encourage everyone to speak and be heard, ensure a fair distribution of invisible tasks, and schedule meetings during official working hours to support work-life balance. Addressing symbolic forms of violence is also essential to promoting a more equal working environment.

2. Rethink leadership and women's empowerment

The second action point involves rethinking leadership models by freeing them from characteristics traditionally associated with masculinity, such as authority, dominance or competition. To combat self-censorship, which can hold some women back, it is important to develop support networks that allow them to share experiences, exchange advice, and collectively recognise their own skills. These networks are essential tools for encouraging women to take on leadership roles and preparing them for future engagement.

Training: a driver for change

The **CAPSE Methodological Guide**, developed by the project partners, was designed as a training resource for sessions delivered to 15 pilot federations across three countries. Thanks to its modular structure, it can be easily adapted to national specificities and the unique realities of each organisation.

The pilot phase demonstrated the guide's high level of flexibility: it can be implemented independently, without requiring the systematic involvement of expert trainers. However, to ensure its effectiveness, proper preparation is essential. This includes familiarising oneself with the content, mobilising internal resources (such as organisational charts, statutes or charters), and embedding the approach into the organisation's day-to-day operations.

Although parity in governance was the main entry point for the training sessions, they quickly opened the way to a broader reflection on gender equality. Decision-making biases, role distribution within teams, and meeting organisation were all critically examined. In this context, the **flash diagnostic** tool proved valuable in raising collective awareness and sparking meaningful discussion.

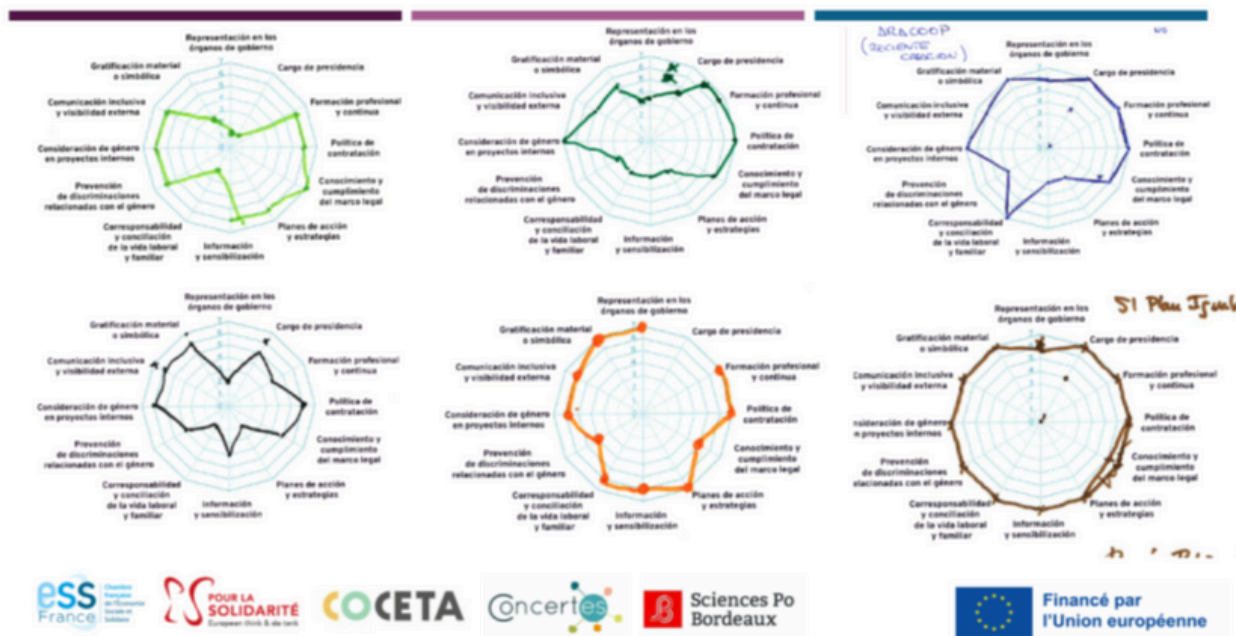
Participants also reported a better understanding of gender biases within their teams. Some organisations initiated internal processes to identify and address these biases, often through collaborative workshops. The variety of tools provided and the short format of the sessions were appreciated, although several facilitators expressed the need for longer discussion periods and follow-up support after the training.

One of the key findings was the urgent need to create safe and structured environments that allow participants to engage freely and in depth with the issues related to parity in decision-making bodies. This need emerged consistently across all training contexts, both in-person and online. More than 90% of participants rated the experience very positively, with an overall score above 4.6 out of 5 across the three workshops held.



Beyond the issue of parity, the training sessions provided space for participants to **share broader experiences and concerns** related to gender inequalities, such as gender-based and sexual violence, the under-representation of women in cooperative leadership roles, and structural barriers to equitable access to positions of power. These spaces encouraged the **emergence of concrete action proposals**, including within organisations that previously lacked tools or experience on these topics.

Among the most valued methodological resources, the **CAPSE flash self-assessment tool** stood out. It helped raise collective awareness and fuel in-depth discussions on perceptions, barriers and possible levers for progress toward parity. During the first workshop, for instance, this tool was described as “effective and empowering” by the majority of participants and facilitators. In addition, the **gender-balanced governance indicators** presented in the methodological guide were recognised for their usefulness in strengthening existing equality plans - as is the case in Spain - and as tools applicable to the revision of statutes and internal regulations in France and Belgium.



The flexibility of the CAPSE methodological guide was also a key success factor in the process. Its modular format made it possible to adapt the content to diverse organisational profiles and contexts, thereby facilitating ownership by the participating structures. This allowed for the implementation of numerous sessions without necessarily involving expert trainers, although facilitators did highlight the importance of providing post-training support to help implement the roadmaps and consolidate learning.

In practical terms, **several federations and networks that took part in the workshops initiated concrete transformations**, such as revising their statutes to include a gender dimension, adopting new rules to promote equitable participation in meetings, or developing tailored action plans. These changes demonstrate that the training sessions went beyond simple awareness-raising and served as a genuine catalyst for organisational transformation.

Ultimately, the CAPSE training workshops confirmed that training is a **strategic lever for advancing parity and equality in the social economy**. This experience shows that, when well-designed, context-sensitive and supported over time, training can break through inertia, foster collective learning, and activate continuous improvement processes. In a sector built on principles of cooperation, equity and social justice, training

on gender parity strengthens the alignment between values and practices, and lays the foundation for more just, diverse and democratic governance.

Expert insight – Marie-Pierre Le Breton

“I see the European Union’s commitment as necessary, but it must be just one lever among others. EU action should complement the policies implemented by each Member State, as national contexts, social cultures, and legal frameworks differ from one country to another. That said, this engagement cannot replace the responsibilities that actors must take on at all levels. In my view, meaningful progress will stem from the convergence between European initiatives, national decisions, and the concrete commitments made by enterprises themselves. Everyone has a role to play: institutions, States, professional networks, SSE organisations... no action is negligible.

I am convinced that it is this interplay between levels – European, national, and organisational – that will lead to lasting results. Every link in the chain matters.”

Operational recommendations

These recommendations stem from the project and aim to achieve gender parity within the governing bodies (boards of directors, executive committees, management teams...) of social economy networks. They take into account the identified needs, existing good practices and observed challenges.

1. Raise awareness among all social economy confederations, federations, and umbrella organisations

Observation: gender parity in the governance bodies of the social economy is still largely absent from the priorities of many networks and federations. It is often seen as a non-issue, an **unspoken concern**, or a secondary topic. There is a clear disconnect between the stated values of equality and actual practices: **governance remains largely male-dominated**, communication is not inclusive, while the majority of employees are women.

Yet the social economy carries with it an emancipatory vision of society, based on a different way of producing, deciding, and distributing wealth. It promotes a model that respects both the women and men who work within it, as well as living beings and the environment. The fundamental principle of "one person, one vote" seeks to make workplace democracy a reality. To remain **consistent with these values**, it is essential to promote truly inclusive governance practices.

Recommendations:

- **Support ownership of gender parity issues:**
 - Provide training on gender-balanced governance to leaders and members of governing bodies
 - Mobilise networks around a coordinated dynamic by encouraging the sharing of experiences and good practices
 - Support the involvement of already committed European and national confederations (such as Social Economy Europe at the European level, CEPES in Spain, ESS France, or ConcertES in Belgium), by assigning them a leading role in coordinating networks, disseminating tools (self-assessment, indicators, training), and driving ambitious collective commitments.

Expert insight – Marie-Pierre Le Breton

“Gender equality is a value embedded in the very DNA of the social and solidarity economy. As such, its actors must lead by example. The fact that the conventional economy performs worse does not mean we are doing enough.

All SSE networks and federations should take even greater ownership of this issue, notably by raising awareness about gender stereotypes and by developing and publicising strategic plans for gender equality.”

2. Integrate gender parity into the statutes and internal regulations of social economy organisations

Observation: in many social economy organisations, women represent the majority of both employees and volunteers.

While some organisations have begun to include parity objectives in their statutes or practices, such initiatives remain the exception. Gender parity quotas, although recognised for their effectiveness in correcting historical imbalances, are still not widely adopted. In the absence of formalised rules or corrective measures, inequalities persist. For **parity** to be truly embedded and positively perceived, it must become a **statutory principle**, supported by concrete practices and aligned with the founding values of the organisations.

Recommendations:

- **Include gender parity in statutes and internal regulations:**
 - Explicitly state gender parity as a fundamental principle in the official documents of associations, cooperatives, mutual societies, and foundations.
 - Include provisions that ensure balanced representation within boards of directors, executive committees, and strategic committees.
- **Establish balanced quotas and plan ahead for the renewal of mandates:**
 - Ensure that governance bodies are composed in a gender-balanced way.
 - Plan ahead for mandate renewals to maintain parity over time.
 - Develop monitoring mechanisms to measure the progress of gender parity over time

- **Strengthen implementation through procedural safeguards:**

- Introduce alternating female-male co-presidencies or co-leadership structures to ensure gender-balanced governance.
- Establish corrective targets in cases of persistent imbalance, with regular tracking of progress made.
- Create internal control mechanisms to monitor the application of parity principles and continuously raise awareness among members about gender equality issues.

3. Train leaders in truly inclusive governance

Observation: in social economy organisations, when gender parity is addressed, it is still too often approached solely from a quantitative perspective, through formal or statutory obligations. While these measures represent progress, they remain insufficient to guarantee qualitative parity, meaning free, active and equitable participation. Such participation continues to be hindered by structural biases, such as unequal speaking time, feelings of illegitimacy, or non-inclusive meeting formats and schedules. Yet without acknowledging these invisible mechanisms that limit women's participation, governance bodies cannot be truly inclusive.

Achieving this kind of quality-based equality depends on both individual and collective awareness of the persistent inequalities, inside and outside organizations. **Training leaders on these issues** is essential to make equality a part of daily governance practices and to drive real **cultural change**. In addition, the lack of structured support to help women access leadership and chair positions in the social economy contributes to the continuation of inequalities. Women still struggle to reach leadership roles, and the existing programs are often not enough or not clearly defined.

Recommendations:

- **Include mandatory training modules on gender parity:**

- Systematically include gender parity in leadership training programs by making these modules mandatory for anyone in a position of responsibility.
- Deconstruct the stereotypes and exclusion mechanisms that still exist in decision-making spaces.

- **Adopt an immersive approach that is sensitive to the issues of quality-based gender parity:**
 - Offer interactive training based on role-playing, personal stories, and real case studies.
 - Work specifically on governance practices: balance in speaking time, inclusive facilitation, meeting logistics, and decision-making methods.
- **Support the transformation of organizational practices:**
 - Provide practical tools such as guides, method sheets, and meeting observation grids.
 - Set up indicators to assess the evolution of practices and adjust training based on feedback from the field.
- **Make it easier for women to access leadership and executive roles:**
 - Develop mentoring programs and organized power handovers, with follow-up over time.
 - Identify in advance potential female candidates to prepare for leadership transitions.
 - Encourage co-presidency or co-leadership models with both women and men.
 - Adapt the organization of board meetings (schedules, facilitation, logistics) to remove barriers linked to gender-related constraints.

4. Structure the commitment to gender parity through action plans in all SE organisations

Observation: With the notable exception of SE enterprises in Spain, the vast majority of organisations in the sector do not have plans to guide their actions on gender parity. This lack of a framework limits the impact of commitments, slows down the implementation of concrete measures, and undermines the continuity of efforts. Without a structured vision or clear objectives, initiatives to promote gender parity remain occasional, isolated, or dependent on the goodwill of a few individuals.

Yet, achieving gender parity requires a long-term commitment, through a clear strategy, shared goals, and suitable management tools. Formalising this strategy in the form of action plans is a key lever to place gender parity at the heart of how SE organisations operate.

Recommendations:

- **Engage in a proactive approach to gender parity:**
 - Set collective and ambitious goals that are realistic, taking into account sector-specific and organisational contexts.
 - Develop concrete action plans with a realistic timeline and clear monitoring indicators.
 - Promote and highlight SE organisations already committed to gender-balanced governance practices, to make them inspiring examples for the rest of the sector.
- **Produce and share transparent data:**
 - Regularly publish information on the gender composition of governing bodies, to support accountability.
 - Use evaluation tools to monitor progress made on gender parity.
 - Use the CAPSE flash self-assessment tool to evaluate current practices, identify areas for improvement, and guide the development of actions.
- **Include specific and measurable actions:**
 - Plan targeted measures such as rotation mechanisms or schedule adjustments that support equity, using existing tools (e.g. CAPSE methodological guide).
 - Appoint a gender parity focal point to coordinate, monitor, and document the actions taken (e.g. co-presidency, mentoring, balanced representation).
- **Share and adapt existing models:**
 - Build on proven action plan models from the most advanced SE organisations.
 - Encourage peer-to-peer exchange of practices to support ownership of the tools and adapt approaches to each context.

Learn more

Institutional resources and methodological guides

- CAPSE Project (2025) : [CAPSE Methodological Guide](#)
- Gouvernement Français (2021) : ESSentiELLES : Livret de conseils pour favoriser l'égalité femmes-hommes au sein des structures de l'économie sociale et solidaire - [Download the booklet](#)
- UDES (2022) : L'Égalité professionnelle entre les femmes et les hommes dans l'ESS : 12 fiches pratiques pour passer de la conviction à l'action - [View the guide](#)
- UDES (2023) : Égalité professionnelle entre les femmes et les hommes : des outils pour accompagner les entreprises engagées (Mini-série de vidéos) - [Watch the videos](#)

Studies and reports

- Observatoire de l'économie sociale (2023) : L'état des lieux de l'économie sociale 2021 (Focus thématique : Le genre dans le conseil d'administration) - [Read the report](#)
- Conseil Supérieur de l'ESS (2022) : L'égalité femmes-hommes dans l'ESS (Rapport triennal 2021-2024)
- Institut belge pour l'égalité entre les hommes et les femmes (2013) : Rapport sur la parité dans l'ESS

Articles and case studies

- La Libre Eco (2023) : Les femmes sont bien plus présentes dans les conseils d'administration de l'économie sociale qu'ailleurs - [Read the article](#)
- ESS France : Égalité femmes-hommes dans l'économie sociale et solidaire - [Read the article](#)
- CEPES (Espagne) : Compromiso con la igualdad de género en la economía social - [Read the article](#)
- Entreprises Coopératives : Parité femmes-hommes dans l'ESS : Osons ! - [See the initiative](#)

Legislative and regulatory framework

- Espagne : Real Decreto 901/2020 - [View the text](#)
- Espagne : Ley Orgánica 2/2024 - [View the law](#)
- COCETA (2021) : Guía para la implantación de Planes de Igualdad en empresas cooperativas - [Download the guide](#)
- France : Rapport CSESS 2021-2024 - Loi sur les quotas en Espagne (2023) - Décret wallon (2014)

Reflections on quotas

- Les inégalités.fr : Les quotas sont-ils une solution pour l'égalité femmes-hommes ? - [Learn more](#)
- Haut Conseil à l'égalité (France) : Des quotas dans les instances de gouvernance et de direction - [View the report](#)

Policy recommendations

Public policies promoting gender parity are progressing at the European level. However, their impact remains limited within the specific field of the social economy (SE). Existing legislation – such as the European Directive 2022/2381 or the French Copé-Zimmermann and Rixain laws – mainly targets large listed companies or those with more than 250 employees, effectively excluding the majority of SE organisations. These are mostly small or medium-sized, governed by specific democratic statutes, based on voluntary participation in governance bodies and the principle of “one person, one vote”.

Given this situation, SE organisations must benefit from an adapted, supportive, and incentive-based framework to strengthen their role as models of gender-equal governance. The aim of these recommendations is to influence national and European public policies in order to better support internal transformation dynamics. Some of these recommendations are specifically addressed to SE organisations and their ability to take direct action. However, incentive-based measures could help implement some of them, accelerate their rollout, and strengthen their adoption across the SE ecosystem.

1. Adapt legal and strategic frameworks to the reality of the social economy

Observation : The European Directive 2022/2381 requires listed companies to have 40% women among non-executive directors, or 33% across the entire board, by 2026. However, this directive excludes micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, which make up the majority of the SE. National laws (such as Copé-Zimmermann and Rixain) follow a similar logic, which is poorly suited to the democratic models and varying sizes of SE organisations.

Recommendations:

- Adapt legal quotas by lowering employee thresholds to include SE organisations.
- Take into account the specific features of democratic governance in the implementation methods (e.g. elections, volunteer roles, rotation).
- Include quantified gender parity targets in all national and European strategies related to the SE.

- Introduce gradual implementation clauses and targeted support for small organisations.
- Make part of public funding conditional on verified commitment to gender parity (gender-based conditionality).

Expert insight – Marie-Pierre Le Breton

Vice-President of UDES and President of ANEM

“Perhaps it is because sanctions are too weak or rarely enforced? If so, this lack of dissuasion could be holding back real equality within the decision-making bodies of the social and solidarity economy.

What is more certain is that most SSE organisations have fewer than 250 employees. As a result, a large proportion – if not the vast majority – of SSE structures fall outside the scope of the ‘Women on Boards’ directive, as well as the Copé-Zimmermann law of 2011 and the Rixain law of 2021.

Should the European Union legislate further by extending, for instance, the ‘WOB’ directive to enterprises with fewer than 250 employees? I’m not sure a positive answer to that question is so straightforward. As mentioned earlier, producing EU-level legislation is a long and complex process. Other pathways may be worth exploring.

Indeed, France may be ahead when it comes to legal frameworks, but it still lags behind in terms of outcomes, especially when compared to neighbours like Spain. There, women make up nearly half of governance bodies, while in France we still hit a glass ceiling at, at best, 45% – even though 68% of people working in the SSE are women.

The main barrier for women lies at the very entry point to leadership bodies.”

2. Build a common European framework for gender-balanced governance in the SE

Observation: The lack of harmonisation between Member States and the absence of precise data on gender parity in the SE limit comparisons and cross-border progress. There is no common and visible reference framework.

Recommendations:

- Develop a **European voluntary Charter** based on gender-balanced governance principles adapted to the SE, allowing organisations to commit to a gradual and recognised process.

- Use existing EU tools, such as Gender Equality Action Plans (GEAP) and Gender Impact Assessments (GIA), to structure commitments, assess the impact of governance rules, and integrate gender parity into calls for projects and training programmes.
- Include gender parity in European calls for projects, selection criteria, and governance training modules.
- Assign a leading role to European networks (Social Economy Europe, CEPES, REVES, etc.) in promoting gender-balanced governance at the transnational level:
 - Facilitate transnational dialogue spaces on gender-balanced governance.
 - Share tools, feedback, and training resources within the Charter.
- Support national observatories in producing gender-disaggregated, comparable, and accessible data on SE governance.
- Include the SE in EU leadership indicators (Eurostat, EIGE) and publish comparative studies.

Expert insight – Marie-Pierre Le Breton

“It took ten years for the ‘Women on Boards’ directive to be adopted, and two more years for its transposition into French law. That is far too slow a response to a problem that is anything but new. Therefore, if political proposals are to be made, priority should be given to those that can be implemented concretely and in the short term.”

In this perspective, the proposed measures should aim first and foremost at rapid and tangible implementation, to complement longer-term legislative dynamics. The goal is not to become trapped in institutional processes, but to identify the most effective means of advancing gender parity in a pragmatic and action-oriented way.

3. Strengthen financial incentives for gender-balanced governance

Observation : Transforming governance towards greater equality requires time, resources, and skills. Yet, economic incentive measures are almost entirely absent to date.

Recommendations:

- Create dedicated **funding** lines for training, assessment, and the transformation of governance in SE enterprises.
- Grant **subsidy bonuses** to organisations that meet gender parity targets.
- Offer **mentoring and handover schemes** for women in leadership positions

Learn more:

European Publications and Directives

- [Directive 2022/2381](#)
- [European Strategy for Gender Equality](#)
- [Roadmap 2025 – Women's Rights](#)

Reports and tools from EIGE

- [Women and Men in Decision-Making – Methodological Report](#)
- [Gender Equality Action Plans](#)
- [Gender Responsive Evaluation Toolkit – GREENA](#)
- [Gender Budgeting Toolkit](#)
- [Gender Statistics Database](#)

National Sources

- Loi Copé-Zimmermann (France, 2011)
- Loi Rixain (France, 2021)
- Décret wallon (Belgique, 2014)

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Project code