

# segie



## **Toward a Gender-Inclusive Europe: Policy and Business Recommendations for Systemic Change**

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# Introduction

The social economy (SE) plays an increasingly pivotal role in shaping a more sustainable and inclusive future in Europe. As a sector committed to social innovation and collective well-being, the SE is uniquely positioned to respond to pressing societal and environmental challenges. However, despite its progressive values, persistent gender inequalities remain – particularly in access to leadership, entrepreneurship, and innovation opportunities for women and gender minorities.

Recent studies<sup>1</sup> have emphasised the urgent need to integrate gender perspectives into SE policy and practice. As the sector grows, it must also take responsibility for ensuring its expansion fosters equality and diversity. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated action from policymakers, supported by interdisciplinary research and inclusive dialogue involving civil society, institutions, and social enterprises.

This policy brief presents insights and recommendations from the **SEGIE Project – For a Social Economy that reduces Gender Inequalities in Europe** – funded by the European Commission. Launched in 2023 for a two-year duration, the project brings together a transnational consortium of committed organisations: Empow’Her Global, ActionAid International Italia, Acube Società Benefit SRL, and Universidade Nova de Lisboa. Implemented in France, Italy, and Portugal, SEGIE integrates applied research, participatory engagement with social enterprises, and policy analysis.

At its core, the project explores how gender dynamics intersect with three strategic EU frameworks which are central to the EU’s current and future strategic direction: the **European Pillar of Social Rights**, the **European Green Deal**, and the **Digital Agenda**. These pillars define the EU’s vision for an inclusive and sustainable development but their implementation often lacks gender sensitivity, leading to systemic exclusion and underrepresentation of women in shaping the future of work, welfare, and digital transformation.

This report consolidates insights from national-level case studies, stakeholder consultations, and an incubation programme involving social enterprises. The findings form the basis for the analysis and policy recommendations that follow. It proposes **clear and actionable recommendations** to promote more inclusive and gender-responsive policy frameworks at both EU and national levels. Therefore, the objectives of this report are threefold:

- a. to analyse the gender-related challenges and gaps in the implementation of the EU’s Social, Green, and Digital policy pillars, grounded in real-world contexts;
- b. to document country-specific progress and best practices; and
- c. to provide strategic policy recommendations aimed at closing gender gaps, advancing inclusive labour markets, and aligning policy implementation with equality objectives.

Ultimately, this report advocates for a systemic shift in how gender equality is approached – moving beyond isolated initiatives toward its integration as a cross-cutting imperative. The SEGIE Project demonstrates that empowering women and underrepresented groups is not only a matter of social justice but a catalyst for innovation, resilience, and the success of Europe’s most ambitious policy agendas.

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<sup>1</sup> COM(2021) 778 final, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, *Building an economy that works for people: an action plan for the social economy*; European Economic and Social Committee, *Gender Lens Investing as a Way to Improve Gender Equality in the European Union*, Own-initiative opinion SOC/723, Dec. 2022.

# 1- Study Overview: Gendered Realities in the EU Policy Landscape

Conducted in 2024 by Universidade Nova de Lisboa, the SEGIE Study explored how women and gender minorities experience work and innovation ecosystems across five EU countries: France, Italy, Poland, Portugal and Sweden. This in-depth qualitative and comparative analysis formed the backbone of the SEGIE project and aimed to understand the structural and cultural barriers to gender inclusion, particularly in the context of social enterprises (SEs).

While social enterprises often present themselves as champions of social justice and equality, the study reveals a more complex reality. Women and gender minorities continue to encounter significant obstacles to full participation and leadership within these spaces. The research places a particular emphasis on how gender dynamics intersect with the three EU policy pillars – Social Rights, the Green Deal, and the Digital Agenda – and how systemic gaps in these areas affect inclusion efforts.

The main common challenges identified are:

## 1. **Persistent Gender Pay Gaps and Occupational Segregation**

Across the countries studied, women remain overrepresented in lower-paid and less secure sectors, including care, education, and administrative roles. Even within SEs, where missions often emphasise social value, wage disparities persist. Leadership roles in innovation and high-impact decision-making continue to be dominated by men, reflecting entrenched occupational segregation.

## 2. **Inadequate Support for Unpaid Care Work**

Many women – particularly mothers, caregivers, or those in multigenerational households – face a “double burden” of paid and unpaid labour. The absence of formal support mechanisms such as flexible work arrangements, subsidised childcare, adequate parental and paternity leave policies within SEs often leads to burnout or forced exits from the workforce. This undermines both gender equality and workforce sustainability.

## 3. **Limited Access to Green and Digital Job Opportunities**

Although green and digital sectors are growing under EU agendas, they remain largely male-dominated. Women, especially from marginalised backgrounds, are underrepresented in roles related to technology, clean energy, and digital transformation. SEs in these areas rarely incorporate inclusive hiring or training practices, making it difficult for women and gender minorities to benefit equally from emerging economic opportunities.

## 4. **Gender-Blind Implementation of National Policy Reforms**

While some EU countries examined have made progress in gender mainstreaming policies, these efforts are often fragmented or inconsistently applied. National reforms aimed at supporting SEs or digital and green transitions frequently overlook gendered impacts. In several cases, policies were found to be “gender-neutral” in language and “gender-blind” in practice, failing to acknowledge or address existing inequalities.

## 5. **Fragmentation and Underfunding of Gender Equality Measures**

Support structures such as mentorship programmes, inclusive capacity-building, and safe peer networks are either lacking or disconnected. Many SEs operate without clear gender inclusion strategies, and public funding mechanisms often lack criteria or incentives to support women-led or gender-diverse organisations. Additionally, bureaucratic hurdles and a mismatch between funding schemes and the lived realities of gender-diverse entrepreneurs further inhibit access to financial resources.

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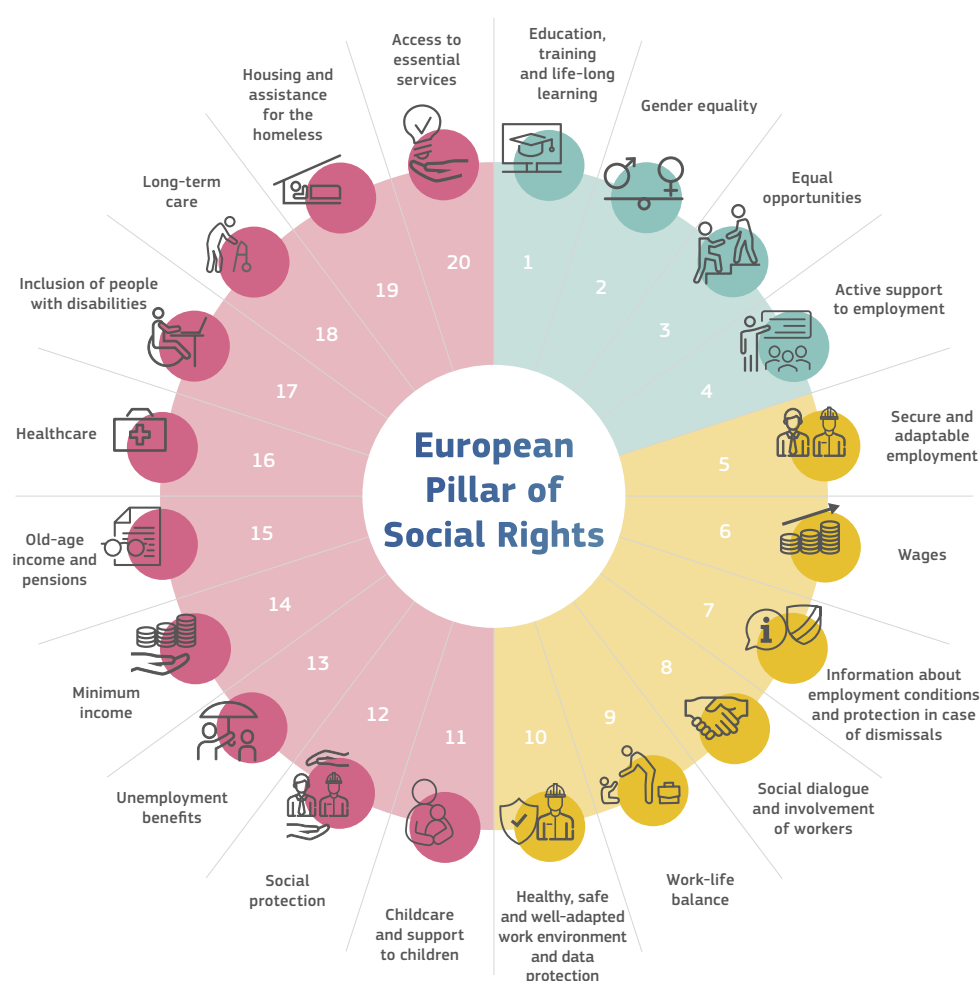
Beyond institutional gaps, the SEGIE study highlighted how deeply rooted cultural norms continue to shape the SE landscape. Gender stereotypes, the devaluation of informal labour mainly carried out by women (such as caregiving or community work), and the lack of visible role models create environments where women and gender minorities feel undervalued or invisible. Even within ostensibly progressive organisations, informal hierarchies and implicit biases often persist, limiting access to leadership roles and reinforcing existing power imbalances. Additionally, the absence of culturally responsive and inclusive design disproportionately affects individuals facing intersectional discrimination, such as migrant women, LGBTQIA+ persons, and racial or ethnic minorities. Their exclusion is further intensified by language barriers, lack of recognition for foreign qualifications, or xenophobic and transphobic attitudes.

## 2 - EU Policy Pillars: Gender Equality Gaps and Opportunities

### 2.1 The European Pillar of Social Rights

The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) (Figure 1), adopted by the EU Commission in March 2021<sup>2</sup>, constitutes the EU's flagship initiative to reinforce the Union's social dimension. It outlines 20 principles<sup>3</sup> structured around three domains: equal opportunities and access to the labour market; fair working conditions; and social protection and inclusion.

Figure 1 - The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles



Source: European Commission, *The European pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles*

<sup>2</sup> The Action Plan draws on a large-scale consultation launched in January 2020 (COM(2020)14) where more than 1000 contributions were received from citizens, EU institutions and bodies, Member States, regional and local authorities, social partners and civil society organisations.

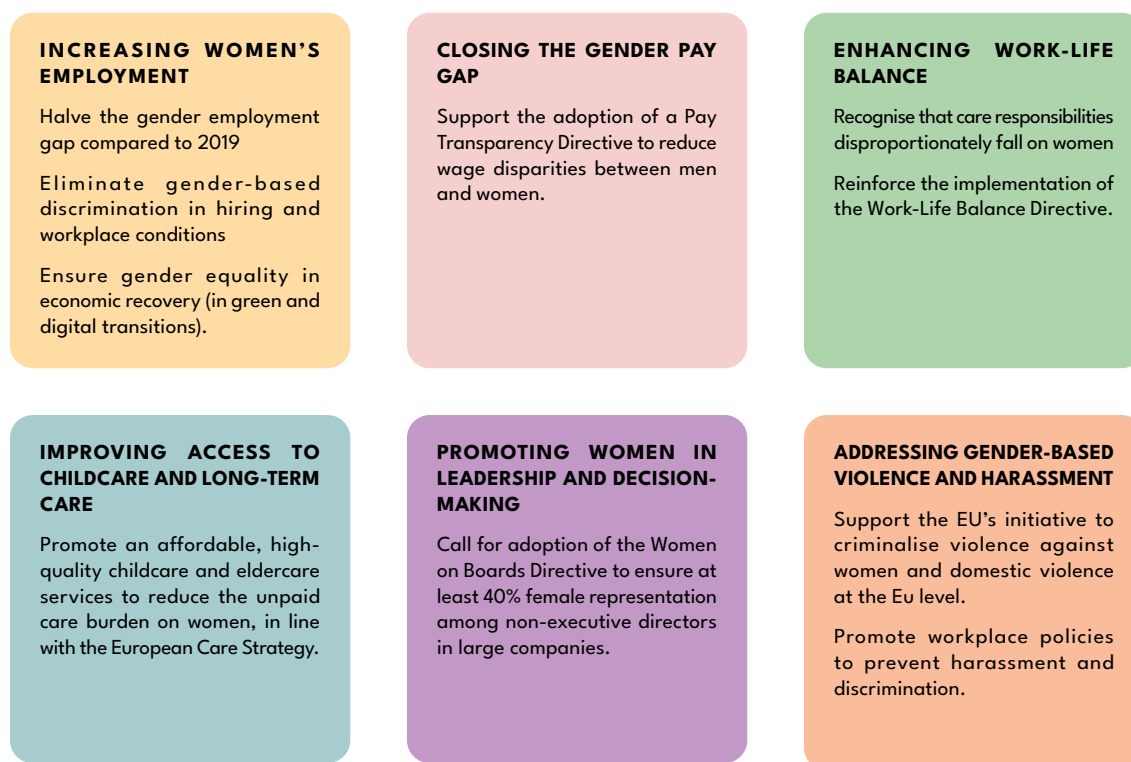
<sup>3</sup> Interinstitutional Proclamation on the European Pillar of Social Rights (2017/C 428/09) The European Parliament, the Council and the Commission solemnly proclaim the following text as the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The EPSR Action Plan was launched in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic to strengthen social resilience and ensure that no one is left behind in Europe's twin green and digital transitions. It establishes three overarching targets to be achieved by 2030: an employment rate of at least 78% for people aged 20–64, a minimum of 60% of adults participating in training annually, and a reduction of at least 15 million people at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

The implementation of the EPSR has seen mixed progress. While there are signs of improvement in employment and social inclusion, key targets – such as adult training participation and poverty reduction – remain out of reach, with persistent disparities across countries and social groups<sup>4</sup>. While these figures show that some ground has been covered, structural challenges remain, particularly in relation to gender equality, care provision, and equitable access to leadership roles.

A cornerstone of the EPSR is its commitment to gender equality, notably through Principle 2, which guarantees equal treatment and opportunities regardless of gender (see Figure 2). Yet, women's full and equal participation in the labour market remains hindered by systemic barriers. In fact, key EU initiatives under the EPSR Action Plan – including directives on pay transparency, adequate minimum wages, work-life balance, and women in leadership – have advanced the policy framework, but implementation gaps, enforcement weaknesses, and persistent structural inequalities hinder transformative change.

**Figure 2** - Action Plan Goals for Gender Equality



Source: ActionAid reworking of European Pillar of Social Rights data

<sup>4</sup> European Commission, *Joint Employment Report 2024*. As adopted by the EPSCO Council on 11 March 2024.



## Gender Pay Gap and Wage Transparency

The EU has made legislative strides toward closing the gender pay gap under the EPSR umbrella. The Directive (EU) 2022/2041 on adequate minimum wages<sup>5</sup> promotes fair wages and includes mechanisms to improve pay equity, recognising that addressing low wages also contributes to gender equality, given the overrepresentation of women in low-paid sectors. However, the directive lacks gender-specific obligations and does not mandate alignment between wage-setting and gender equality strategies.

More significantly, Directive (EU) 2023/970 on pay transparency<sup>6</sup> introduces binding rules for employers to disclose pay levels, ensure transparency in recruitment, and conduct pay audits. Companies with over 100 employees must report gender-disaggregated pay data, and workers have the right to request pay information. While this marks progress, the directive fails to tackle deeper structural drivers of pay inequality. For example, it promotes the principle of “equal pay for work of equal value” (Article 4), but it does not directly address how the “value” of work must be assessed, leaving unchallenged the structural biases that lead to the undervaluation of female-dominated work, a problem explicitly acknowledged in Recital 15 of the directive.

In addition, the exclusion of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) from mandatory reporting obligations overlooks a large portion of the labour force, potentially obscuring disparities where they are most acute. The directive also depends heavily on individual action for enforcement, which may deter vulnerable workers from challenging discriminatory practices. Finally, without a standardised EU methodology for gender-neutral job evaluation, many national systems risk perpetuating pay gaps through biased classification frameworks. Effective implementation will hinge on national political will, administrative capacity, and the development of robust monitoring mechanisms.

## Care Economy and Paid Leave

Unpaid care responsibilities remain one of the most significant barriers to women’s equal participation in the workforce. The EPSR Action Plan aims to address this through support for the Work-Life Balance Directive (EU) 2019/1158 and the broader European Care Strategy<sup>7</sup>. Yet, implementation remains inconsistent. In particular, regarding the Work-Life Balance Directive, despite an August 2022 transposition deadline, as of early 2024, 11 Member States<sup>8</sup> had not fully incorporated the Directive, with three<sup>9</sup> referred to the Court of Justice. Only one Member State was assessed as having fully transposed its provisions<sup>10</sup>. The directive’s minimum standards – such as 10 days of paternity leave and four months of parental leave (two non-transferable) – are variably applied. Inadequate compensation for parental leave continues to discourage men from taking it, reinforcing gendered care roles. This effect is further exacerbated by the limited availability of flexible working arrangements (FWAs) and the lack of protection against discrimination for those who choose to take leave or use FWAs where available<sup>11</sup>.

The European Care Strategy, launched in 2022, aims to improve access to affordable, quality care services and enhance conditions for care workers. Accompanied by non-binding recommendations<sup>12</sup>, it supports national reforms in early childhood and long-term care. However, its effectiveness is undermined by the

<sup>5</sup> Directive (EU) 2022/2041 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on adequate minimum wages in the European Union, Recitals 10 and 14.

<sup>6</sup> Directive (EU) 2023/970 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 May 2023 to strengthen the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women through pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms.

<sup>7</sup> COM(2022) 440 final, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the European care strategy.

<sup>8</sup> Belgium, Czechia, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Austria, Slovenia.

<sup>9</sup> Belgium, Ireland, and Spain. See: <https://ec.europa.eu/atwork/applying-eu-law/infringements-proceedings/infringement-decisions/?langCode=EN>.

<sup>10</sup> Sweden, See SWD(2025) 67 final Commission Staff Working Document 2025 Report on gender equality in the EU.

<sup>11</sup> European Commission: Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, Burri, S., De la Corte-Rodríguez, M., Böök, B. and van Hoof, F., The transposition of the Work-Life Balance Directive in EU Member States (II) – Considerable work still to be done, Burri, S.(ed.), Böök, B.(editor) and van Hoof, F.(ed.), Publications Office of the European Union, 2024.

<sup>12</sup> COM(2022) 442 final Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the Revision of the Barcelona Targets on early childhood education and care. And COM(2022) 441 final, Proposal for a Council Recommendation on access to affordable high-quality long-term care.

absence of binding commitments, funding mandates, and structural integration with labour and fiscal policies. Public investment in the care economy remains insufficient<sup>13</sup>, and care workers – many of whom are migrant or racialised women – face low wages and poor working conditions. Informal carers, often women, remain largely excluded from social protections. The strategy does not adequately incorporate intersectional or rights-based approaches, nor does it tackle the unequal distribution of unpaid care or create incentives for its redistribution. These gaps perpetuate economic vulnerability among women and limit their capacity to fully engage in paid employment. Addressing these challenges requires a legally binding framework with earmarked funding, social protection guarantees, and a stronger focus on integrating care into formal labour markets and welfare systems.

## Women in Leadership and Decision-Making Roles

Directive (EU) 2022/2381 on improving gender balance on corporate boards<sup>14</sup> is a notable legislative achievement of the EPSR Action Plan. It requires that by mid-2026, listed companies ensure at least 40% of non-executive director roles or 33% of all board positions are held by the underrepresented gender. To support these targets, it introduces binding procedural rules to ensure transparent and merit-based selection processes, including a requirement to give priority to equally qualified candidates of the underrepresented gender when targets are not met. The directive breaks a decade-long impasse in EU-level action on corporate gender balance, potentially triggering a shift in boardroom culture and succession planning. Nonetheless, the directive's scope is narrow. It excludes SMEs, which represent the majority of EU businesses, and applies only to board roles, not executive positions where gender imbalance is typically more severe. It does not extend to leadership in other sectors such as politics, academia, or public administration. Enforcement is also left to national authorities, risking inconsistent application and weak accountability mechanisms. Moreover, the EPSR Action Plan offers no additional binding instruments to address vertical segregation across the broader labour market. Cultural and structural barriers – such as stereotypes, informal networks, and lack of mentorship – are not sufficiently addressed. The Plan also lacks an intersectional perspective: racialised women, women with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ women continue to be underrepresented in decision-making roles, with limited data collection to monitor their inclusion.

## Way Forward: Reshaping EU social policy through binding and transformative gender structural change

Despite its advances, the EPSR Action Plan requires reinforcement to deliver on its transformative potential for gender equality. To achieve a more inclusive and gender-equal European labour market, the EU must move beyond superficial and no binding reforms and address the deep-rooted, structural inequalities that disproportionately impact women. Although recent legislative advances, the EU still fails to fully challenge the systems that uphold gendered power dynamics, as their impact remains constrained by limited scope, uneven implementation, and lack of enforcement. Future actions must focus on **eliminating the gender pay gap** by mandating gender impact assessments in wage-setting processes and expanding transparency requirements to all companies. Without stronger enforcement mechanisms and broader coverage, pay disparities will persist, particularly in sectors dominated by women, where wages are often undervalued and workers are left without adequate protection. It is crucial to ensure that women's work, especially in feminised, low-paid, and informal sectors, is not just recognised but also compensated fairly.

<sup>13</sup> In 2021, the EU average public expenditure on long-term care represented only 1.7% of GDP, with wide disparities among Member States, ranging from over 3% in Sweden and the Netherlands to less than 0.5% in some Eastern and Southern EU countries. See: European Commission Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion Social Protection Committee, 2021 [Long-Term Care Report Trends, challenges and opportunities in an ageing society](#).

<sup>14</sup> Directive (EU) 2022/2381 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 November 2022 on improving the gender balance among directors of listed companies and related measures.

Simultaneously, the EU should **rethink its approach to care work**, one of the most enduring and unjust forms of gender inequality. The European Care Strategy still fails to address the unequal distribution of unpaid care work that falls primarily on women, limiting their access to paid work and reinforcing cycles of economic dependence. To break this pattern, the EU must adopt binding measures to ensure a fair redistribution of care responsibilities between women and men and extend social protection and paid care leave to all workers, including those in non-standard forms of employment. While Member States must increase investments in care infrastructure, ensuring quality, accessible, and affordable services for all.

Moreover, the **current approach to women's leadership is too narrow** and fails to challenge the systemic barriers that limit women's access to decision-making roles. Directive 2022/2381 is too limited. A truly feminist framework for gender equality would go beyond mere quotas, addressing the intersectional barriers that racialised women, migrant women, women with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ women face in accessing leadership positions. EU and national policies should promote diverse leadership pipelines, backed by disaggregated data and intersectional monitoring tools. Binding measures should be coupled with incentives to ensure structural transformation rather than symbolic compliance. Only a coordinated, binding, and intersectional approach will allow the EU to fulfil the promises of the EPSR and its gender equality agenda. This requires not just holding Member States accountable but dismantling the structural systems that reproduce gender-based discrimination and exploitation. It is only through such transformative action that a truly feminist and equitable Europe can emerge where gender equality is no longer a distant aspiration, but a concrete reality in the everyday lives of all women.

## 2.2 The European Green Deal

Launched in December 2019, the European Green Deal (EGD)<sup>15</sup> is the European Union's flagship strategy to combat climate change, safeguard biodiversity, and drive the EU towards a climate-neutral, resource-efficient, and inclusive economy by 2050. With three core targets – achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050; reducing net emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels; and planting three billion trees – the EGD aims to fundamentally reshape Europe's economic and social model. It encompasses eight key policy areas, including climate, energy, industry, transport, agriculture, research and innovation, environment and oceans, and finance and regional development (Figure 3).

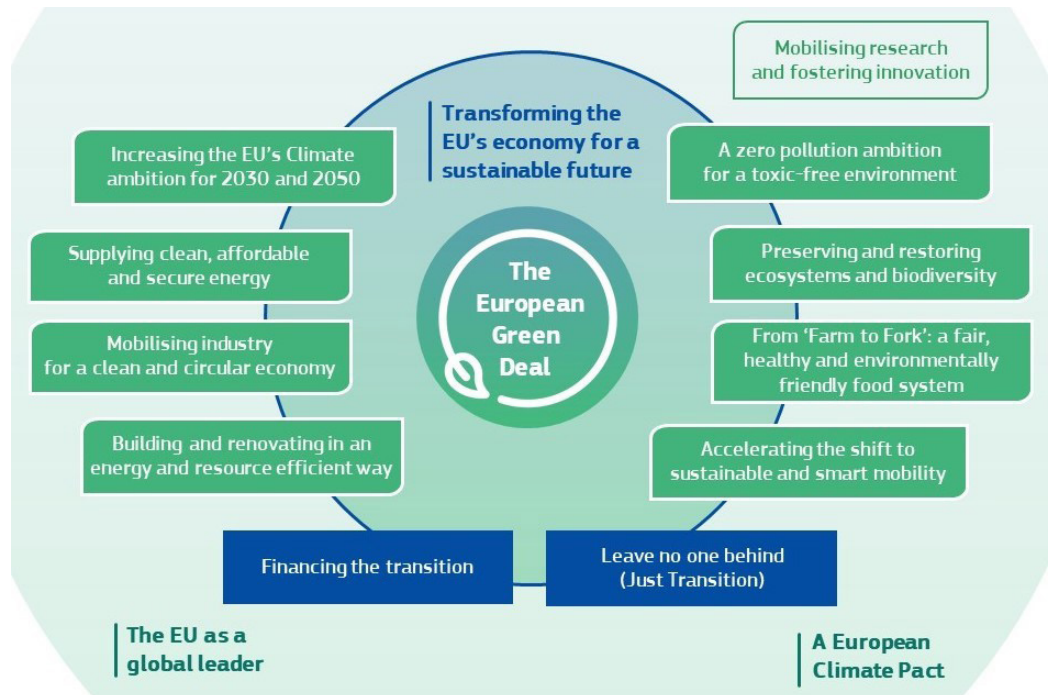
A central, though often understated, dimension of the EGD is its potential to promote social justice through inclusive policy design. Tackling disparities is both an ethical and practical step toward sustainable outcomes. Though research on gendered consumption is limited, studies<sup>16</sup> show that women cause less emissions compared to men, mainly due to more sustainable spending habits such as mobility and diet.

Moreover, women and gender minorities, while historically marginalised in decision-making processes, bear disproportionate burdens from climate change impacts. Their underrepresentation in sectors pivotal to the green transition – such as energy, transport, and agriculture – not only perpetuates inequality but also weakens the effectiveness of climate action. Yet, the EGD largely overlooks the gendered nature of environmental challenges and opportunities, raising concerns about the inclusivity and justice of its implementation.

<sup>15</sup> COM(2019) 640 final, Communication from the Commission, The European Green Deal.

<sup>16</sup> Research published by Ecoloop in 2021 in the Journal for Industrial Ecology <https://doi.org/10.1111/jiec.13176> Sweden, 2021. - Riitta Rätty and Annika Carlsson-Kanyama, "Energy Consumption by Gender in Some European Countries", Energy Policy, Vol. 38, no. 1 (2010): 646–49 (<https://doi.org/doi:10.1016/j.enpol.2009.08.010>).

**Figure 3 - The European Green Deal and its 8 areas of intervention**



Source: COM (2019) 640 final, 11 December 2019, p. 3

## Current State of Implementation: Progresses and Blind Spots

Despite its ambitious rhetoric, the implementation of the European Green Deal reveals a mixed picture, especially when examined through the lens of gender equality. Several studies, including recent data from Eurostat, EIGE, and the Joint Research Centre<sup>17</sup>, underscore persistent gaps in female representation across green and technical sectors.

In the renewable energy sector, for example, women comprise nearly 40% of the solar energy workforce but are significantly underrepresented in technical and leadership roles (IRENA 2022). In the wind and oil & gas sectors, the share of women drops further, to just 21–22%, with the majority engaged in administrative and legal functions rather than STEM fields. More broadly, women make up only 30% of the global R&D workforce<sup>18</sup>, and within the EU, only 19% of ICT specialists are female<sup>19</sup>. These disparities are especially critical given the pivotal role that digital and technological innovation plays in the green transition. According to the European Commission's She Figures 2024<sup>20</sup>, women represent 41% of scientists and engineers in the EU, yet the representation of women as researchers drops to 34% and their participation is uneven across sectors, with 22.4% in manufacturing sectors and in the business enterprise sector.

In the transport sector – responsible for nearly 30% of EU greenhouse gas emissions – gender dynamics are both visible and consequential. While women are more likely to use sustainable transport modes (walking, cycling, public transport)<sup>21</sup>, they represent only 22% of the transport workforce<sup>22</sup> and a mere 9.3% of drivers.

<sup>17</sup> Eurostat: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20240524-2#> - EIGE (2024), *Good practices on gender mainstreaming in the European Green Deal: Towards a more gender equal and greener Europe*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. - Murauskaite-Bull, I., Feenstra, M., Creusen, A., Koukoulakis, G., Della Valle, N., Shortall, R. and Stojilovska, A., *Gender and Energy: The effects of the energy transition on women*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2023, doi:10.2760/860118, JRC132744.

<sup>18</sup> UNESCO (2023), *Global education monitoring report 2024, gender report: technology on her terms*.

<sup>19</sup> Eurostat 2023 [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20240524-2#:~:text=The%20share%20of%20women%20working,compared%20with%202022%20\(18.9%25\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20240524-2#:~:text=The%20share%20of%20women%20working,compared%20with%202022%20(18.9%25).).

<sup>20</sup> European Commission, *She Figures 2024 Index*.

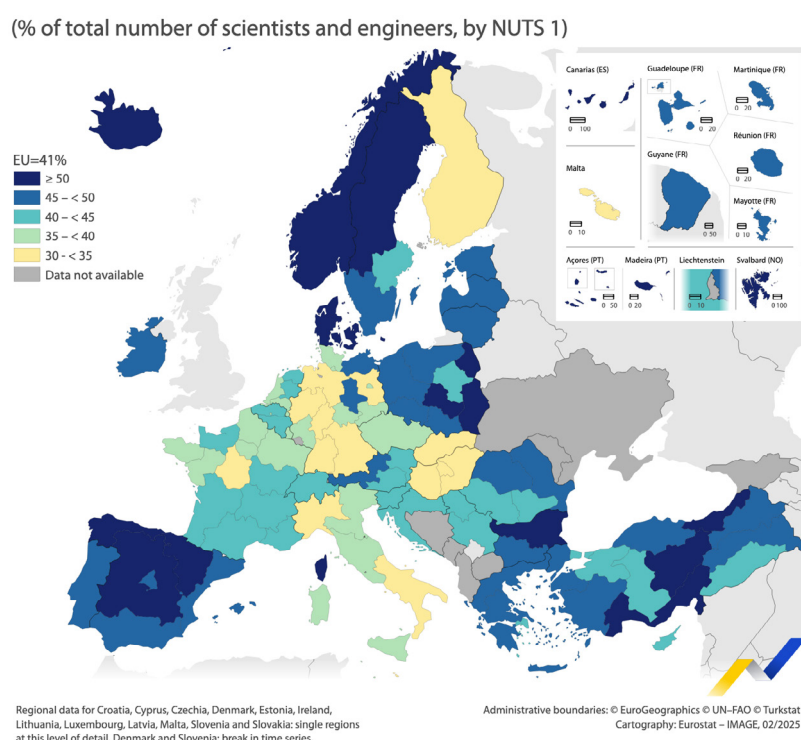
<sup>21</sup> The International Transport Forum of the OECD is a policy think tank with the goal of strengthening transport policies to improve people's lives. <https://www.itf-oecd.org/>.

<sup>22</sup> EIGE, <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/policy-areas/transport>.

Decision-making roles remain similarly skewed: less than 20% of board positions in urban public transport are held by women. Safety concerns, caregiving responsibilities, and inflexible transport infrastructure compound mobility inequalities. Although the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy<sup>23</sup> pledges to integrate equality into future transport policies, practical implementation remains limited and slow.

Agriculture is vital to the European Green Deal, yet gender dynamics are often overlooked in strategies like Farm to Fork<sup>24</sup> and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030<sup>25</sup>. In this sector, women make up 31% of the workforce<sup>26</sup> and 29% of farm managers across the EU<sup>27</sup>. However, they face structural barriers to land ownership, credit, and leadership roles in cooperatives and professional bodies. At the same time, profit-driven agricultural systems lead to land exploitation and labour abuses, with women disproportionately affected due to their concentration in precarious jobs. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)<sup>28</sup>, the primary funding and regulatory framework for EU agriculture, still lacks explicit gender targets or affirmative action measures. As a result, women continue to be sidelined in decision-making and access to resources. Despite their critical role as consumers of sustainable food, income disparities and rising costs limit women's ability, especially in low-income groups, to make eco-conscious choices.

**Figure 4 - Share of women scientists and engineers, 2023**



Source dataset: hrst st rsex

leadership, and policymaking persist. While women broadly demonstrate higher engagement in eco-friendly behaviours, such as avoiding plastic or choosing sustainable food options, their ability to translate personal commitment into professional impact remains constrained by structural barriers and unequal access to green jobs as shown in Figure 4. Efforts such as the Women in Transport – EU Platform for Change<sup>29</sup> and various

<sup>23</sup> COM/2020/789 final, [Communication from the Commission, Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy – putting European transport on track for the future](#).

<sup>24</sup> European Commission, [Farm to Fork Strategy](#).

<sup>25</sup> European Commission, [Biodiversity strategy for 2030](#).

<sup>26</sup> Eurostat, 2022, [Farmers and Agricultural labour force - statistics](#).

<sup>27</sup> [EU CAP Network](#).

<sup>28</sup> European Commission, [Common Agricultural Policy](#).

<sup>29</sup> European Commission, [Women in Transport – EU Platform for change](#).



national initiatives to promote STEM education and green employment for women are promising, but they are fragmented, underfunded, and rarely mainstreamed into broader climate strategies.

Despite its foundational role in sustaining societies and its low environmental impact, care work remains unrecognised in the European Green Deal. This omission is particularly stark given that the health and social care sectors employ more than 76% women across the EU (ETUC, 2021<sup>30</sup>), with personal care work comprising 86% female workers. These sectors are among the fastest-growing in employment but continue to be undervalued in both economic metrics and climate frameworks. Care work is not only labour-intensive but also disproportionately informal and poorly compensated. Yet, it represents a critical dimension of climate resilience: robust care systems are essential during climate-induced health emergencies, heatwaves, displacement crises, and pandemics. Additionally, these sectors significantly contribute to reduce carbon emission, underlining that public investment in care work contributes to a greener, more equitable economy. The lack of recognition for care within EGD policy instruments, such as the Just Transition Mechanism<sup>31</sup>, represents a missed opportunity. Without redistributing resources towards social infrastructure and properly valuing care, the Green Deal risks reinforcing the very inequalities it seeks to dismantle.

## Way Forward: Towards a Care-based Green and Feminist Economy

Bridging the gap between the ambition of the EGD and the lived realities of women and gender minorities requires a fundamental shift in economic thinking. The current implementation remains heavily rooted in a technocratic and growth-oriented model that undervalues social reproduction and care work – sectors predominantly staffed by women and vital for societal resilience.

A feminist approach to the green transition emphasises the **central role of care work and well-being in shaping economic policy**. Women comprise over 76% of the health and care sector and 86% of personal care work<sup>32</sup>, much of which remains underpaid or informal. Despite their essential role, care workers often face poor conditions and lack visibility in policy frameworks. These sectors also have a significantly lower carbon footprint compared to high-emission industries, making them both socially and ecologically vital.

Incorporating care into the fabric of the green economy would yield dual benefits of **improving social equity and accelerating climate resilience**. It would also involve reassessing traditional metrics of progress. GDP, while central to policy evaluation, fails to account for unpaid care and ecological degradation. Embracing alternative indicators – such as well-being indices and environmental health metrics – would allow for more inclusive and sustainable planning.

Policy tools such as gender budgeting, impact assessments, and quotas for women in leadership within green sectors could provide immediate leverage. But structural change also requires cultural and political will to reframe the narrative of **sustainability beyond technology and markets**. Gender mainstreaming must move from peripheral policy guidance to central strategy within the EGD, CAP, and mobility frameworks. Finally, intersectionality must inform the entire process. Women are not a homogenous group, and policies must reflect the specific needs and contributions of racialised women, rural women, LGBTQIA+ people, migrants, and others at the margins. Without this lens, the promise of a just transition will remain only partially fulfilled.

<sup>30</sup> ETUC Response to the EU Commission Proposal, 2021.

<sup>31</sup> European Commission, *Just Transition Mechanisms*.

<sup>32</sup> Heidegger P., Lharaig N., Wiese K., Stock A., Heffernan R. (2021), *Why the European Green Deal needs Ecofeminism*, European Environmental Bureau, Women Engage for a Common Future.

## 2.3 The European Digital Agenda

The Digital Agenda for Europe is a landmark policy framework designed to propel digital transformation across the European Union. Its core aim is to foster a digitally inclusive society, ensuring that the benefits of digital advancements are shared equitably across all EU citizens, industries, and governments.

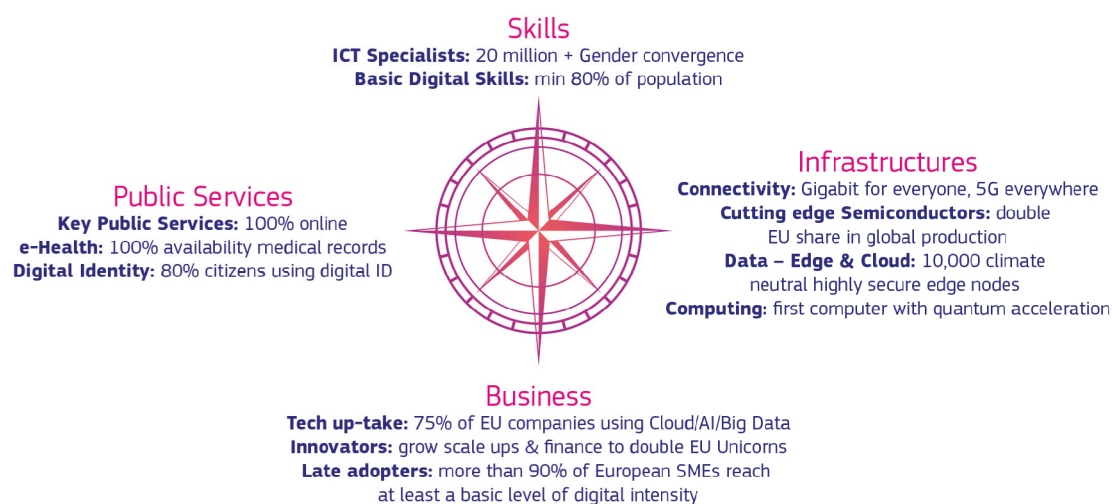
The policy is grounded in three key principles: inclusivity, sustainability, and innovation. Its broader objectives are aligned with the EU's overarching goals of creating a competitive and resilient digital single market, while addressing the challenges of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), data privacy, cybersecurity, and digital sovereignty.

Initially introduced in 2010, the first Digital Agenda<sup>33</sup> laid down the groundwork for progress in key areas, such as enhancing internet connectivity, improving consumer protections in telecommunications<sup>34</sup>, and eliminating roaming charges across the EU<sup>35</sup>. The current phase of the Digital Agenda, known as the Digital Decade (2020-2030)<sup>36</sup>, builds on these early achievements, focusing on four cardinal goals (Figure 5):

1. A digitally skilled population and highly skilled digital professionals.
2. Secure and sustainable digital infrastructures.
3. Digital transformation of businesses.
4. Digitalisation of public services.

These strategic pillars aim to empower EU citizens and businesses to maximise the potential of digital technologies while ensuring that these advancements occur in secure, sustainable, and ethical spaces. The 2030 Digital Compass<sup>37</sup>, introduced as part of the Digital Decade Programme, sets clear targets and offers a comprehensive framework for monitoring progress.

Figure 5 - 2030 Digital Compass' Targets



Source: <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/introducing-path-digital-decade>

<sup>33</sup> COM(2010) 245 final, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions *A Digital Agenda for Europe*.

<sup>34</sup> Directive 2009/136/EC amending Directive 2002/22/EC on universal service and users' rights relating to electronic communications networks and services, Directive 2002/58/EC concerning the processing of personal data and the protection of privacy in the electronic communications sector and Regulation (EC) No 2006/2004 on cooperation between national authorities responsible for the enforcement of consumer protection laws.

<sup>35</sup> For a comprehensive overview, see: Your Europe, *Roaming: Using a mobile phone in the EU* [last access: 7 April 2025].

<sup>36</sup> Decision (EU) 2022/2481 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 establishing the Digital Decade Policy Programme.

<sup>37</sup> COM(2021) 118 final, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, *2030 Digital Compass: The European way for the Digital Decade*.

This policy framework is designed to be adaptive, with mechanisms in place to assess progress at both the EU and national levels through annual reports<sup>38</sup> and national roadmaps<sup>39</sup>. Finally, in 2022, the EU adopted the European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles<sup>40</sup> (Figure 6) to align digital transformation with EU values and rights. It promotes equal access to technology and digital skills, ensuring no one is left behind, while guiding policymakers and businesses to protect citizens' rights online and offline.

## Current State of Digital Transformation

Since the adoption of the second Digital Agenda in 2020, the EU has made significant strides in fostering a digitally empowered society. The European Commission has been instrumental in spearheading legislation that seeks to regulate and guide the digital transformation<sup>41</sup>. Key legislative acts include the Network and Information Systems Security Directive (NIS2)<sup>42</sup>, the Digital Services Act (DSA)<sup>43</sup>, the Digital Market Act (DMA)<sup>44</sup>, the European Data Act<sup>45</sup>, and the Artificial Intelligence Act<sup>46</sup>, the Cyber Resilience Act<sup>47</sup>, the European Digital Identity (EUDI) Regulation<sup>48</sup>, among others. These regulations are designed to ensure that Europe remains at the forefront of digital governance and innovation, offering citizens and businesses a secure and fair digital environment.

Figure 6 - European Digital Rights and Principles Programme



Source: European Commission, *Digital Rights and Principles Principles* (last access: 1 April 2025)

<sup>38</sup> European Commission, [2024 State of the Digital Decade package](#) [last access: 7 April 2025].

<sup>39</sup> European Commission, [National Digital Decade strategic roadmaps](#) [last access: 7 April 2025].

<sup>40</sup> European Union, [European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade](#), 2022.

<sup>41</sup> See European Commission, SWD 'Digital Decade in 2024: Implementation and perspective' with annexes, SWD(2024)260, Annex 1 List of relevant policy initiatives.

<sup>42</sup> Directive (EU) 2022/2555 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 on measures for a high common level of cybersecurity across the Union, amending Regulation (EU) No 910/2014 and Directive (EU) 2018/1972, and repealing Directive (EU) 2016/1148 (NIS 2 Directive).

<sup>43</sup> Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market for Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act).

<sup>44</sup> Regulation (EU) 2022/1925 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 September 2022 on contestable and fair markets in the digital sector and amending Directives (EU) 2019/1937 and (EU) 2020/1828 (Digital Markets Act).

<sup>45</sup> Regulation (EU) 2023/2854 Regulation (EU) 2023/2854 of 13 December 2023 on harmonised rules on fair access to and use of data and amending Regulation (EU) 2017/2394 and Directive (EU) 2020/1828 (Data Act).

<sup>46</sup> European Parliament, [Legislative Resolution of 13 March 2024 on the Artificial Intelligence Act, COM\(2021\)0206 – 2021/0106\(COD\)](#).

<sup>47</sup> Regulation (EU) 2024/2847 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2024 on horizontal cybersecurity requirements for products with digital elements and amending Regulations (EU) No 168/2013 and (EU) 2019/1020 and Directive (EU) 2020/182.

<sup>48</sup> Regulation (EU) 2024/1183 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 amending Regulation (EU) No 910/2014 as regards establishing the European Digital Identity Framework.



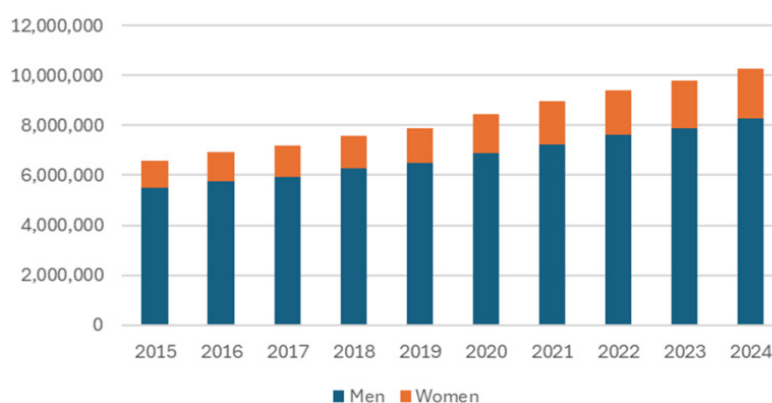
Substantial investments have been made to support these digital initiatives. Over the past few years, the EU has mobilised more than €205 billion for digital transformation<sup>49</sup>. Moreover, the Recovery and Resilience Plans have channelled an additional €651.7 billion into national-level reforms and investments, with a significant portion earmarked for digital projects. These funds are directed towards initiatives such as Digital Europe, Horizon Europe, and the Connecting Europe Facility.

However, despite these efforts, the State of the Digital Decade 2024 report<sup>50</sup> highlights several areas where progress remains slow. While internet connectivity has vastly improved, notable shortcomings persist in digital skills, digital business transformation, and the digitalisation of public services. The EU currently falls short on 8 out of 12 key performance indicators used to measure advancement in these areas<sup>51</sup>. A major hurdle is the fragmentation among Member States. Digital progress varies widely, with some countries advancing rapidly in areas such as cloud adoption, AI integration, and cybersecurity, while others continue to lag. These disparities are particularly evident among SMEs, which in many countries still struggle to adopt critical digital technologies like cloud computing, big data, and artificial intelligence – tools vital for innovation and competitiveness. Similarly, the quality of public digital services remains inconsistent: while some areas offer streamlined e-government and e-health platforms, others rely on outdated systems and limited user engagement. Infrastructure gaps further compound these challenges. Although some Member States lead in broadband coverage and next-generation networks, others lag behind in deploying 5G, especially in rural or economically disadvantaged regions. This limits equitable access to fast, reliable digital tools that are critical for remote work, online education, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement.

## Gender and the Digital Divide

Despite the ambitious goals of the EU's Digital Agenda, persistent structural and gender-related gaps continue to hinder truly inclusive digital progress. According to the 2024 Eurobarometer report<sup>52</sup>, only 57% of Europeans have basic digital skills, with substantial variations across countries. Women remain disproportionately underrepresented in the digital sector: despite accounting for over half of the EU population, they make up only one in three STEM graduates and just 17% of ICT specialists across Member States (Figure 7)<sup>53</sup>.

**Figure 7** - Employed ICT specialists by gender (2013-2022)



Source: Eurostat, 2024, in European Commission, *Women Digital*, 2025

<sup>49</sup> European Commission, *2030 Digital Decade. Report on the State of the Digital Decade 2024*, p. 9.

<sup>50</sup> European Commission, *Report on the state of the Digital Decade 2024*.

<sup>51</sup> European Commission, *Europe's Digital Decade: digital targets for 2030* [last access: 9 April 2025].

<sup>52</sup> European Union, *Special Eurobarometer 551 'The Digital Decade' 2024*.

<sup>53</sup> European Commission, *Women in Digital* [last access: 7 April 2025].

The gender gap also extends to pay and leadership. Women in ICT roles earn nearly 20% less than their male counterparts, and female entrepreneurs receive a disproportionately small share of funding, less than 10% of capital investment goes to women-led startups<sup>54</sup>. These statistics highlight the persistent challenges women face in entering and thriving in the digital economy and reflect longstanding barriers, including gender stereotypes, lack of tailored training and mentorship, and bias in hiring and promotion processes.

To track progress in closing the digital gender gap, the EU developed the Women in Digital Scoreboard<sup>55</sup>, which monitors women's participation in digital jobs, careers, and entrepreneurship across Member States. Its findings contribute to the Women in Digital Index, which in 2024 recorded a score of 54.8 out of 100 at the EU level<sup>56</sup>, highlighting the continued need for action to achieve a more inclusive digital landscape. These gender disparities are also reflected in Eurostat data from 2013 to 2022<sup>57</sup>, which show little change over time.

In this context, cybersecurity is an additional area of concern. Despite strong data protection regulations like the GDPR, increasing digital reliance has exposed vulnerabilities, with women and girls particularly targeted by cyber harassment and online abuse<sup>58</sup>. The EU Directive 2024/1385<sup>59</sup> marks a significant step forward by establishing a harmonised legal framework to combat online and gender-based violence and enhance victim protection across Member States.

## Way Forward: Strengthening Coordination, Investment, and Inclusivity for Digital Goals

Achieving the EU's Digital Decade objectives requires a renewed focus on coordination, investment, and inclusivity. Member States must work in closer alignment with the European Commission, ensuring national strategies are coherent with EU priorities and accompanied by transparent, measurable plans.

### BOX1

#### EU Initiatives to Support Women in the Digital Sector

**Digital Skills & Jobs Platform:** It offers information about digital skills in Europe. It provides resources, articles, training, professional opportunities, and insights from inspirational leaders.

**European Network of Women in Digital (EWiD):** It encourages more girls and women to explore digital studies and careers.

**“CEO Declaration on closing the digital gender gap in high-tech companies”:** It promotes gender equality and strives to create an inclusive business ecosystem accessible to everyone.

**Women in IT Day:** It is a free online event for women to help shape their careers in the IT industry.

**European Digital Skills Awards (EDSA):** It celebrates projects aimed at bringing girls into tech and STEM.

**ESTEAM Fests:** They empower girls and women through digital and entrepreneurial skills.

**Women in Cyber:** It is an event that provides a platform for female cyber managers and graduates from the **EC Cybersecurity Training Programme** to share their experiences and achievements in the ever-evolving field of cybersecurity.

**European Network For Gender Balance in Informatics (EUGAIN):** It is a **COST Action** focused on improving gender balance in informatics through the creation of a European network of colleagues working to promote gender equality within their countries and research communities.

**“Women in Digital Declaration”:** Signed in 2019 by 26 EU countries, along with Norway and the United Kingdom, to increase the number of girls and women in the ICT work sector.

Excerpts from: European Commission, *Women in Digital* [last access: 7 April 2025]

<sup>54</sup> European Commission, *Women in Digital* [last access: 10 April 2025].

<sup>55</sup> European Commission, *Women in Digital Scoreboard 2024* [last access: 7 April 2025].

<sup>56</sup> <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/women-digital-scoreboard-2024>.

<sup>57</sup> Eurostat, 2024, cited in European Commission, *Women Digital*, 2025.

<sup>58</sup> Eige, *Tackling Cyber Violence against Women and Girls: The Role of Digital Platforms*, 2024; --, *Combating Cyber Violence against Women and Girls*, 2022; Unesco, *“Your opinion doesn't matter, anyway”: Exposing Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence in an Era of Generative AI*, 2023.

<sup>59</sup> *Directive (EU) 2024/1385* of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on combating violence against women and domestic violence.

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Strengthening governance, improving cross-sector collaboration, and reducing fragmentation will be key to avoiding duplication and accelerating progress. **Investment in digital infrastructure and skills** remains a cornerstone of this transformation. Expanding secure, high-speed connectivity – including 5G networks – is essential **to bridging territorial divides and supporting innovation in both urban and rural areas**. At the same time, reforms in education and training systems are critical to equip citizens with the advanced digital competencies needed in a rapidly evolving labour market.

Acknowledging the importance of gender equality in the digital sector for driving economic growth and societal progress, the EU is actively encouraging women to pursue digital careers. As part of its commitment to employ at least 20 million ICT specialists by 2030 – up from 9 million in 2022 – the EU is fostering greater gender diversity through the Digital Decade Policy Programme, dedicated funding including the Digital Europe Programme, Horizon Europe, Women TechEU, and a wide range of different initiatives (see Box 1).

**Digitalisation must also be inclusive and human-centric.** While SMEs and public administrations are progressing in adopting new technologies, further support is needed to accelerate their transformation, particularly in underserved regions and sectors. Lastly, ethical and environmental considerations must guide all efforts, ensuring Europe's digital transition is not only innovative but also fair, rights-based, and sustainable.

### 3 - Catalysing Change through the Incubation Programme

From July 2024 to May 2025, 30 selected startups across Italy, France, and Portugal took part in an incubation programme, as part of the SEGIE project, implemented by Acube, Empow'Her, and Universidade Nova de Lisboa. The initiative targeted small and medium social enterprises and associations whose objectives are promoting social inclusion, gender equality, and empowerment through innovation, sustainability and circular economy efforts. Through a structured, collaborative process, the programme equipped participants with the tools, methodologies, and strategies to design sustainable, inclusive business models that place care, equality, and social impact at their core.

Built around three key phases – co-design, selection, and implementation – the programme drew on prior research and beneficiaries' input to develop a context-sensitive curriculum. Thirty entrepreneurial teams (ten per country) were selected based on the potential impact, sustainability, and inclusiveness of their initiatives. Throughout the programme, participants received capacity-building support via expert consultancy, workshops, mentoring, boot camps and peer learning.

Survey results collected towards the end of the programme highlighted that several teams adopted more inclusive practices: respondents reported integrating gender-sensitive values into their mission and strategy (scoring between 5.5 and 5.9 on a 7-point scale) and applying inclusive design methods and user testing in their products (5.0–6.1). The programme also strengthened participants' ability to define social impact and address inclusion. Portuguese teams scored this area between 6.4 and 6.9, while French and Italian teams scored 6.0 and 5.8, respectively.

When asked about their top success metrics, participants placed **social impact first** – with scores of 6.3 in Portugal and 6.8 in Italy – followed by revenue and customer retention. This shows their commitment to mission-driven growth that balances purpose with financial sustainability. Regular peer-to-peer engagement was also a feature: 50% of French teams reported frequent exchanges, with scores between 5.0 and 6.0.

Beyond the numbers, teams described meaningful changes to how they worked. Many **reshaped their operations to focus on inclusion** – revising recruitment, communication, and supplier policies – and moved from research to real prototypes. Several launched newsletters and LinkedIn campaigns to build their communities and promote their values. By the end of the programme, several ventures were already serving over 200 active beneficiaries. Team sizes grew to an average of four members, often with **women and gender minorities making up the majority**. Public advocacy also increased: 83% of Italian teams, 75% of Portuguese teams, and 50% of French teams had actively promoted gender inclusion, showing a shift from internal development to external leadership.

A key lesson from the incubation programme is that fostering truly inclusive and impactful enterprises requires more than support for business development, it indeed calls for a **systemic shift in how we define and measure success**. Social impact, including a gender perspective, must be recognised and valued alongside economic outcomes. This means equipping businesses with the tools to track inclusion through disaggregated data; providing staff with training for acquisition of specific skills in inclusion and gender equality; and creating flexible, care-oriented environments that enable equal participation. Investing in gender-focused financial instruments and capacity-building can further ensure that women-led and mission-driven enterprises are not just supported but empowered to lead lasting change.

At the heart of this initiative is the recognition that inclusive and care-oriented workplaces can drive structural change by addressing the specific barriers faced by women and gender minorities, such as limited access to finance, unequal distribution of care work and gender bias. By embedding gender equality into governance, promoting decent work, and enabling underrepresented voices to shape the economy, these enterprises offer concrete models for a more just and resilient future.

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## Conclusions

This report consolidates the findings of the SEGIE Project – *For a Social Economy that reduces Gender Inequalities in Europe* – and offers a roadmap for making Europe’s most transformative policy agendas truly inclusive. Rooted in rigorous research, stakeholder dialogue, and real-world experimentation with social enterprises, the SEGIE project has revealed that despite significant policy commitments under the European Pillar of Social Rights, the European Green Deal, and the Digital Agenda, their implementation remains largely gender blind.

Women and gender-diverse individuals continue to face systemic obstacles in accessing opportunities, influencing decisions, and benefiting equitably from Europe’s twin green and digital transitions. These barriers are particularly evident in the world of work, where exclusion persists even within value-driven spaces like social enterprises.

The SEGIE project has aimed not only to analyse existing gaps but also to drive change by enhancing the effectiveness of the EU’s three flagship policies by embedding gender equality throughout their implementation. The project demonstrates that a socially just, sustainable, and innovative Europe is only possible when gender equality is treated as a cross-cutting imperative, integrated from boardrooms to policy rooms, from national frameworks to daily work environments. The insights and innovations generated through this project call for bold and systemic action by policymakers, businesses, and all stakeholders to build a Europe that is not just greener and more digital, but fairer and more inclusive for all.

Gender equality is not a secondary concern, it is a strategic driver of success across all sectors. Achieving a truly inclusive green and digital transition demands that gender equality be embedded at the core of policymaking, organisational leadership, and everyday practice. We urge institutions, businesses, and civil society to act in order to turn policy promises into lived equality, and workplace practice into structural progress. A truly inclusive future is possible. But only if we design it – together.

# Recommendations for EU and National Policymakers and Businesses

The evidence gathered through the SEGIE project makes clear that closing the gap between policy ambition and real-world outcomes demands immediate, coordinated, and long-term commitment. To turn policy ambition into lived equality, the following recommendations should guide action by EU institutions, national governments, and enterprises alike. These proposals offer a clear, actionable roadmap for embedding gender equality across Europe's green and digital transformations.

## » For EU Policymakers

### ***Further Integrate Gender Mainstreaming Systematically Across All EU Policy Instruments to Advance Gender Equality***

Include in the future EU Gender Equality Strategy (2026 -2030):

- » A stronger commitment to mainstream gender equality across all EU policies, programmes and fundings, especially the Green Deal, Digital Agenda, and Social Pillar – building on the 2020–2025 Strategy outcomes.
- » A clear call for Member States to prioritise gender equality through strong leadership and consistent use of EIGE's gender mainstreaming tools. These include: Gender Impact Assessment, Gender Budgeting, Institutional Transformation, Gender Equality Training, Stakeholder Consultation and Participation, Gender-sensitive Indicators and Statistics, Gender-sensitive Monitoring and Evaluation;

### ***Ensure Pay Equity and Enforce Transparency***

Amend Directive 970/2023 on promoting equal pay for men and women by urging Member States to:

- » Extend transparency obligations to companies with fewer than 100 employees, and introduce enhanced protections for gig economy workers who are often excluded from equal pay and labour rights frameworks;
- » Establish a state-funded legal assistance mechanism for workers pursuing legal action in gender pay discrimination cases, reducing economic barriers and ensuring equal access to justice;
- » Enforce penalties for non-compliance, such as financial sanctions or public naming of companies that fail to address pay gaps;

### ***Invest in a Caring and Inclusive Economy***

- » Amend Directive 1158/2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers to include non-standard workers (e.g., self-employed, gig, and platform workers) and establish common standards for adequate compensation during parental and carers' leave, ensuring fair access and protection for all workers;
- » Introduce EU-wide quality standards and minimum working conditions in the care sector to professionalise it, while ensuring the extension of social protection rights to all care workers;
- » Call on Member States to allocate a higher share of GDP to care infrastructure, including early childhood education and care, and long-term care;

### ***Advance Inclusive Leadership***

- » Amend Directive 2022/2381 for the improvement of gender balance on boards by urging Member States to:
- » Extend binding targets or minimum thresholds for gender representation in executive roles (not just non-executive boards);

- » Adopt legislative initiatives or incentive-based approaches to promote gender balance in public institutions, political parties, higher education, and the judiciary;

### ***Close the Digital Gender Gap***

Ensure that the EU Digital Agenda:

- » Support and fund initiatives to regularly inform national stakeholders and the public about EU actions to close the digital gender gap – such as the Digital Decade Policy Programme and the European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles – through clear, accessible, and inclusive communication across all Member States;
- » Require Member States to fully adopt a gender-sensitive approach in implementing the Digital Decade targets by using EU funds to promote digital education and training for girls and women, support women-led tech initiatives, and embed gender-responsive policies across all digital programmes;
- » Accelerate and guarantee universal access to digital infrastructure and devices, especially in underserved areas, while promoting gender equality and diversity in digital leadership through targeted recruitment, mentorship, and entrepreneurship support for women;

## » **For National Policymakers**

### ***Systematically Integrate Gender into All Public Policies***

- » Make gender impact assessments mandatory for all major national reforms, especially in green and digital transition plans (e.g., recovery plans, upskilling programmes, career reorientation measures).
- » Ensure inclusive planning from the outset to avoid reproducing structural inequalities and to promote fairer transitions.

### ***Strengthen Women's Employment through Inclusive Labour Market Policies***

- » Develop targeted support programmes for women facing multiple barriers to employment, including individualised mentoring, training in high-demand sectors, and accessible job placement services.
- » Prioritise outreach to women in rural areas, minority communities, and priority urban neighbourhoods who face intersecting vulnerabilities.
- » Implement inclusive, gender-responsive, and territorially targeted active employment initiatives to address the specific needs of women in underserved areas such as subsidised or free access to training in growth sectors like digital, ecological transition, and care economy.

### ***Invest in Childcare to Reduce Care-Related Employment Barriers***

- » Expand affordable, flexible, and publicly funded childcare services tailored to diverse needs.
- » Link childcare investment to active labour market strategies to support women's participation in work and training.

## » **For Businesses and Enterprises (Including Social Enterprises)**

### ***Establish Pay Equity as a Norm***

- » Conduct systematic, data-driven reviews of pay practices to identify gender-driven discrepancies in salaries, bonuses, and benefits; and introduce pay progression frameworks to reduce subjectivity and negotiation-based disparities;
- » Train HR and leadership teams on bias-free salary structures and equitable career progression;

### ***Redesign Workplaces for Gender-Inclusive Flexibility***

- » Offer flexible work options (e.g., remote work, flexible hours, job-sharing) to all employees without penalising career progression;

- » Challenge the work culture by implementing internal policies that discourage practices like after-hours emails and meetings after 4 PM, along with other measures to promote work-life balance, such as providing childcare and eldercare support through on-site facilities, subsidies, or partnerships with care providers;

#### ***Promote Women's Leadership and Visibility***

- » Invest in leadership pipelines for women and gender minorities by developing mentorship, sponsorship, and tailored leadership development programmes;
- » Introduce bias-free recruitment procedures and redesign work culture and foster inclusive organisational culture by cultivating a culture that values diversity and challenges gender stereotypes;

#### ***Champion Gender Equality in the Green and Digital Transitions***

- » Set internal diversity goals for green and tech roles; redesign hiring and retention practices to be inclusive;
- » Invest in sustainable, care-driven innovation models that elevate both environmental and social equity;

#### ***Creating Safer Workplaces***

- » Co-design GBV policies with workers and stakeholders by involving employees, unions, and community actors. This ensures policies are relevant, inclusive, and aligned with international standards (e.g. ILO Convention 190, Istanbul Convention, EU Directive 2024/1385). A participatory process enhances legitimacy, responds to real needs, and fosters shared responsibility.
- » Build trust through confidential reporting and support by establishing secure, anonymous, and accessible reporting channels with clear protocols and trained staff. Ensure employees have full information on local support services to protect and empower survivors of GBV.

#### ***Lead through Accountability***

- » Regularly evaluate and publish gender equality performance data;
- » Link executive performance to diversity and inclusion metrics to drive cultural and structural change.



