



Women's social entrepreneurship in

BELGIUM

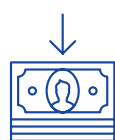
IN THE WALLOON REGION AND IN THE BRUSSELS CAPITAL REGION

Changing society by doing business differently

In Belgium, women entrepreneurs bring added value by creating a more inclusive, cohesive, equitable and participatory society.

SNAPSHOT *

*of 25 interviewed women



Annual turnover:

- 1/3: less than €10,000
- 1/3: from €10,000 to €250,000
- 1/3: more than €500,000



A little under half of the social enterprises have been in existence less than 5 years and one third are more than 10 years old.

95%

feel their social entrepreneurship experience contributes to their empowerment as a woman.



On average, **11** full-time jobs and **7,4** part-time jobs are generated by women-led social enterprises (with some significant differences).

56% of women reinvest **more than 90%** of their surplus back into their social enterprises to achieve their social objective.



More the **40%** of the turnover is generated by the private sector for the majority of women (60%).

KEY FINDINGS

"In our social grocery store, we develop both the economic and social aspects of the enterprise, always trying to help the maximum number of struggling families."

Emilie Many

MANAGER OF LES CAPUCINES

(a social grocery store promoting the employment and training of disadvantaged persons)

ECOSYSTEM • The social economy sector encompasses mainly non-profit associations, cooperatives, Social Enterprises (SFS: Société à finalité sociale), mutual organisations and foundations.

SECTORS • Health and social work, housing and catering, other service activities, education, arts, entertainment and recreation, recycling and environment.

MISSIONS • Socio-professional integration, Environment and sustainable development, Diversity and inclusion, Gender equality.

MOTIVATIONS • Having a specific social impact; An innovative idea for a new product, a new process, a new market or a new service; Responding to an unmet need in the community.

BARRIERS • Not enough funding available, National level politics and legislation, Societal attitudes

GENDER • Women's empowerment is highly prioritised in women-led social enterprises; Women have a participatory and collaborative way of managing their social enterprises.

IMPACT • The majority measure their social impact and seek to produce an impact at a societal level.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

P2 Background. P3 Women social entrepreneurs P4 Social impact P5 Policy recommendations P6 Cited works P6 About the project



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SOCIAL ENTERPRISE IN BELGIUM

History

In 1990, the Walloon Council of Social Economy (CWES: Conseil Wallon de l'Économie Sociale) adopted the first definition of social economy, which continues to be widely used today. According to this definition, "social economy encompasses economic activities carried out by companies - mainly cooperatives, mutual societies, associations, and foundations - whose ethical purpose is based on the following principles. Firstly, the overall purpose of the company is based on providing services to members or to the community rather than making profit; secondly, the management of the company is autonomous; thirdly, decision-making processes are democratic; and finally, the distribution of revenues privileges people and work, over accumulation of capital."

Legal status

Historically, companies wishing to be recognised as social enterprises in Belgium were registered as non-profit associations (ASBL: Association sans but lucratif), foundations (1921 Act), cooperatives (establishment of the National Council for cooperation in 1955) or as mutual organisations (1990 Act).

In 1995, the legal status of "social enterprise" was established to allow trading companies, such as to public or private limited companies, to have a social objective. In this kind of enterprise, making a profit is not an end of itself, but rather a means to achieve the social objective of the company. Both the Walloon and Brussels Capital Regions (WR and BCR) have adopted laws that define social economy as a whole.

The following schemes exist in the Walloon Region:

- **Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs)** (Entreprises d'insertion), whose social mission is to support the integration of disadvantaged and severely disadvantaged people
- **Recognition as Work Integration Social Enterprises** (previously under federal government) ;
- **Adapted Work Enterprises** (ETA: Entreprises de Travail Adapté), which employ disabled people as the majority of their workers, providing them with a valuable and paid employment opportunity and creating disability-friendly jobs
- **Work-Training Enterprises** (EFT Entreprises de Formation par le Travail) and Social and Professional Integration Organisations (OISP: Organismes d'Insertion Socio-Professionnelle), which focus on people who are far from traditional training schemes in order to facilitate their

integration into employment or a sustainable and high quality vocational training.

- **Employment Development Initiatives in the field of Social Community-based Services** (I.D.E.S.S.: Initiatives de développement de l'emploi dans le secteur des services de proximité à finalité sociale), which provide community-based services to individuals. Their objectives include job creation and strengthening of social cohesion
- **The decree concerning the integration of disabled people** (AWIPH: Agence Wallonne pour l'Intégration des Personnes Handicapées)
- **Social Economy pilot projects** which stimulate the ecosystem and enable the development of a wide variety of experiences

Similar schemes exist also for Work Integration social Enterprises in the Brussels Capital Region, including the recognition as WISE (EI: agrément en entreprises d'insertion) or the Local Employment Development Initiatives (ILDE: Initiatives Locales de Développement de l'Emploi".

Sectors and Size

Social economy includes a wide range of sectors of activities. Social enterprises operate in various sectors and the vast majority are focused on the professional integration of disadvantaged groups of workers. The community-based services, health sector and social work are also strongly represented. Sectors such as recycling and environment are also pioneers in social innovation and constitute specific economic niches for social enterprises.

At the end of 2014, 10,530 associations (nearly 95 per cent of social enterprises) provided 215,736 jobs (88 percent of the Social Enterprise workforce). The breakdown by region is currently as follows: BCR: 4,401 and WR: 6,129.

Social economy and Women

Seventy percent of employees in the social economy are women. The reasons for this can be attributed to the numerous parallels between the sector work tasks and household tasks (which have been traditionally undertaken by women).

The Walloon Decree of 9 January 2014 aims to promote a gender-balanced representation on non-profit association's boards of directors. In 2011, 36 percent of members of the management boards of the non-profit associations of the Walloon Region were women; a higher gender parity rate than on boards of directors of large publicly listed companies, where nearly 27 percent are women (in the first half of 2016).

Gender-specific data collected in Belgium and listed by the European Institute for gender Equality (EIGE) are not updated regularly.

CASE STUDY



Réconfort+

Victoria Diyakova founded her social enterprise “Réconfort+” in 2012. This social cooperative, which operates in the field of sustainable eco-construction and eco-renovation, aims at fostering the vocational rehabilitation of disadvantaged people, who often lack formal skills and training. Victoria arrived in Belgium in 2000. She initially started to work as an employee at a social cooperative, later becoming a manager. The values underlying and driving this social enterprise inspired her to start her own social enterprise. She gives priority to her environmental and social missions, whilst fostering an economic model that promotes the active participation of workers in the enterprise’s decision-making process.

Today, Réconfort+ has 20 employees. Victoria is always seeking to increase this impact. The growth was due to public procurement and the establishment of a cooperation agreement with Le Foyer Anderlechtois, a good example of a successful cooperation between a public authority and a social enterprise. Victoria is constantly yearning for new projects that promote the inclusion of disadvantaged people. This explains why training also plays a key role in the enterprise. Victoria is currently developing a new project in interior design decoration, with a focus on vulnerable women who are often excluded from employment in the construction sector. To be continued!

“My idea is to create a small business where women only would work in the field of interior design (paintwork, tiling, etc.). A lot of women are trained in building careers but don’t find any work in this sector. First of all, the regulations to hire women are very strict and require a lot of resources and investments. I still need to find the resources and some support”

WOMEN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS



Motivations

There are many reasons why women decide to start a social business or to engage for the first time in a social enterprise. **“Responding to an unmet need in the community”** was cited as a top motivation by 90% of women interviewed. 100% of the women unanimously responded that **“innovation”** and **“Having a specific social impact”** were strong to very strong motivating factors. Emilie Many, manager of the social grocery store Les Capucines, notes that the multiculturalism and diversity that she was exposed to and experienced through her project were the highlights of her experience with social entrepreneurship.

Another motivating factor is related to decision-making power. Nearly 58% of the women **“are seeking to have greater decision-making and leadership power in their job/career”**.

Finally, **“seeking to make a profit”** is not a motivating factor or a relatively small motivating factor for 84% of the respondents.

Two thirds of the respondents cited **“the lack of funding available”** as a barrier preventing them from achieving their social impact objectives.

Doing business differently

The vast majority of the respondents seek an alternative to the traditional economic model and to the business community. More than 80% seek to create **“a more ethical and sustainable way”** of doing business. Hafida Bakioui, manager of Alia wellness centre, explains that through her project she sought **“social diversity, ethnic diversity and intergenerational diversity”**. She adds also the importance of developing a quality project at an environmental level.

As part of this project on women's social entrepreneurship, we found that new and emerging economic trends often overlap with the concept of social economy, for example, circular economy, and blue, green or collaborative economy. It is important to note that several of these kinds of organisations have been included in the WEstart database, although their legal structure is a trading company (SA or SPRL). After consideration within the WEstart project team, it was agreed to integrate them in the study, although the differentiation is clear between a "social enterprise" (with the legal status thereto) and the concept of "social entrepreneurship" which rather refers to the woman entrepreneur as an individual who operates under a business activity that responds to values of ethics, fair trade, and environment-friendly behaviour or citizen commitment. Unlike social enterprises, trading companies are not required to reinvest a part of their revenues to achieve a specific social objective.

Social enterprises are also characterized by a participatory and transparent management model. A large majority of women (86%) feel that they **"manage their social enterprise using a participatory and collaborative way, rather than taking a top-down approach"**. Dominique Bricoult, manager of Gerموir, a work-training enterprise focusing exclusively on women, defines the project as a participatory project. She declares: *"It's really important that the whole team share in the construction of the project. All workers are members of the General Assembly"*. Regarding workers' participation, Hafida Bakioui also adds: *"We ask them to express their views on the centre development. They are involved in the strategy that we are implementing"*.

THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE WOMEN-LED SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

The social impact sought by women tends to be focused on different levels: societal, community and individual. More than 70% of the women respondents seek to achieve a societal impact: **"changing the way people view certain issues or groups of people, changing attitudes and behaviours of society at large."** Stéphanie Fellen, manager and founder of Made and More, a Web shop dedicated to promote sustainable fashion and foster the clarity of labels, wants to raise consumers' awareness about responsible purchasing that respect people and the environment. Nadine Moreau, manager of an adapted work enterprise (ETA: Entreprise de travail adapté): les ateliers de Tertre, shares her positive work experience within her social enterprise: *"I need to do something that has meaning. Here we feel useful. There is a strong social purpose"*.

More than half of women interviewed (57%) are aiming for a change at community level: **"having an impact on a larger group people, for example, a neighbourhood, a specific marginalised population within a limited geographic area"**. According to Nadine Moreau, through the professional inclusion of people with disabilities, the enterprise seeks to provide opportunities to vulnerable people: *"There are a lot of different profiles who cannot find work elsewhere. As we say here: "the right person at the right place." It is clearly our aim and we are doing everything we can to reach it"*.

Dominique Bricoult is also a member of an Equal Opportunities Advisory Council in cooperation with the municipality of Charleroi and notes, *"We are sharing on our involvement in the municipality"*.

Finally, with regard to the individual impact, approximately one in two women social entrepreneurs seek **"to have a direct impact on the life of one or more individuals"**.

Marleen Teugels, director of the non-profit association Amazone, that offers a professional rehabilitation via a social restaurant and a convention hall, notes, *"What is important is not ONLY the individual in itself, it is all those around him/her. It's the entire family"*. Francine Feret, director of Cum Verbis, a social cooperative providing translation and interpretation services, specifies that her social mission is *"driven by the happiness that working for the well-being of others can bring. Defending the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people, in particular those socially isolated, provides a deeper meaning to life"*. Emilie Many tells us about the social impact of her enterprise: *"We are recruiting workers (art. 60) who live in the same precarious conditions as the families who are coming here (in the social grocery shop). We are working with them on budget management training and nutrition. We follow the group during a whole year, so we can work with them on a long-term basis impacting thus also their entire families"*.



Gender and social enterprises

A vast majority of women felt that **"being a woman has affected the way they manage their social enterprise"**, although gender equality is not an issue to which women entrepreneurs pay a lot of attention at first. Many of them, not always consciously, try to maintain a gender balance across various aspects of their work when managing their business. Hafida Bakioui notes that: *"At the wellness centre, people are sharing their opinions about social problems and the status of women....we established the conditions to make this happen"*.

From a personal point of view, **"being social entrepreneur"** means also facing

some challenges in managing work-life balance, since the personal commitment of these women is generally very strong. Victoria Diyakova believes that social entrepreneurship entails *“more responsibilities and heavier workloads. I had great difficulties to find time to care for my family”*.

Sometimes women who express their professional career ambitions face value judgments from close relatives. Emilie Many claims to be very sensitive to the issue of gender: *“I strongly encourage the women around me to take up responsibilities, to divide the household duties, to promote gender equality and equity overall”*.

Two thirds of the women respondents feel that **“women in Belgium have to overcome greater barriers than men when starting and developing a social enterprise”**.

For some of them, **“Being a woman”** has in various ways affected their involvement in their business management. Stéphanie Fellen experienced both the positive and the negative sides of this: *“A woman is sensitive; communication and empathy*

are her areas of competence. (...) However, particularly when I started raising funds, I faced many ‘male’ barriers”. Francine Feret finds that gender issue has not really affected her involvement in social entrepreneurship, explaining: *“I have moved passed the need for affirmation ‘as a woman’. It seems natural for me to consider myself equal to men...”*.

Empowerment

Nearly 90% of women consider **“that through their social entrepreneurship they contribute to women’s empowerment”**. For most of the social enterprises, capacity building is a central concept. Marleen Teugels attaches a great deal of importance to it within her association: *“One woman who started working in the cleaning team has since become kitchen chef. This career progression is in line with our empowerment vision. Providing the opportunity to become stronger and able to grow and progress in one’s professional life. (...) We call our assessment interviews ‘development’ sessions”*.

Dominique Bricoult explains that the purpose of their trainees’ welcome packs is to facilitate the discovery of the skills: *“At first women often say: ‘I can’t do anything’. Then later they say: ‘But yes! Of course I can do that!’ It’s all about confidence-building. It is our job to develop this assertiveness during the training, which will lead to work or to any kind of skill bridging or help to undertake a project they really want to develop”*.

Stéphanie Fellen thinks that being in contact with other young entrepreneurs helped her to achieve her business start-up project: *“I was lucky to be surrounded by other entrepreneurs because I have been in a business incubator over the course of a year and was very lucky to have them around, otherwise I would have not continued because of loneliness and by lack of understanding”*. Moreover, a vast majority of the respondents have indicated that they are **“in contact with other women social entrepreneurs in their community and country”**.

CASE STUDY



Made and More

Made and More was founded in 2012 to pursue the social missions of creating and maintaining employment, and promoting fair, conscious and sustainable consumption. The Web shop offers its customers various brands that are manufactured locally in Europe in order to reduce environmental impact, and offers specialised products and materials, e.g. vegan leather products. Stéphanie Fellen, founder of Made and More started her business when she

was 27. Since Made and More’s creation, Stéphanie’s lifestyle has completely changed. Her career decision has created some distance between herself and her friends. It’s been a constant struggle for this woman entrepreneur, and she never imagined being a woman entrepreneur would be so difficult.

Today, many women tell her they consider her as a woman entrepreneur role model who really inspire them by showing that it is possible. Stéphanie tries as much as she can to provide them guidance and advice. She adds: *“I hear a lot of women saying they want to make a successful career but it is representing a problem. I never hear this sort of things from men”*.

Policy Recommendations

- * Investing in public awareness actions (public consultations, communication campaigns....) to enhance the visibility of social enterprises and women's social entrepreneurship.
- * Encouraging and promoting gender equality within all enterprises.
- * Developing social entrepreneurship training targeting women in particular.
- * Increasing and facilitating access, in particular through administrative simplification, to support measures, fundings and taxation measures designed for social enterprises and other key social economy sector networks.
- * Promoting and facilitating the award of public procurement contracts for social enterprises through social considerations and reserved markets.
- * Ensuring that funds specifically destined to tackle poverty and social exclusion are allocated to enterprises with a social purpose.
- * Investing in social and economic impact measurement of social enterprises and their added value for the society as a whole, and in particular for women's access to employment.

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Interviews with the following women social entrepreneurs

Hafida Bakioui - Centre Alia / Dominique Bricoult - Le Gerموir / Victoria Diyakova - Réconfort+/ Stéphanie Fellen - Made and More / Francine Feret - Cum Verbis / Emilie Many - Les Capucines / Nadine Moreau - Ateliers de Tertre / Marleen Teugels - Amazone

ABOUT THE PROJECT

This mini report is based on empirical data collected by Erika Lambert, from April to July 2016, in Belgium on behalf of the European Women's Lobby. The collected data were drawn from desk research and in-depth and semi-structured interviews using feminist research methods and a free online survey in French. A total of 34 women were interviewed.

These findings are part of a continuation of "WEstart: Mapping Women's Social Entrepreneurship in Europe", a pilot study launched in 2015 by the European Women Lobby. The core aim of WEstart is to gain a better understanding of the situation and a state of play of women's social entrepreneurship in the European Union.

More information about WEstart is available on www.womenlobby.org ou www.WEstartEurope.org

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