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WOMEN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

A CONSOLIDATED REPORT OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN PARTNER COUNTRIES





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This publication is a part of the project U.POWER (Unlocking the POtential of Women in social EntRepreneurship). The project focuses on the development of social entrepreneurship competencies among women aged 25-55 to unlock their entrepreneurial potential and engages with adult educators to ensure the sustainability of resources and support developed by the U.Power consortium.

The online version of this publication is available on <https://www.upowererasmus.com/>



SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

U.POWER HIGHLIGHTS THE ROLE OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS A TOOL TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN

Women constitute 51% of the total European population (52% in Armenia). [1] However, despite this large percentage, women make up only one third of the self-employed and start-up entrepreneurs in the EU. Women represent almost half of all employed persons in the EU (46%). However, they remain underrepresented among managers, accounting for only 35.5% of managerial roles. Only 36.9% of employed women, between 25-55 occupy managerial positions. Among the project partnerships, the lowest representation is recorded in Italy at 29.5% and in Germany at 30.5% (2022), while the highest is in Latvia at 42.7% (2022). [2][3]

Eurostat data also reveals that women, primarily driven by their caregiving responsibilities and family commitments, are more likely than men to refrain from seeking employment or primarily seek part-time jobs. [4] [5]

Starting a business or becoming self-employed appears to be a predominantly masculine endeavour, and projections indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic might further exacerbate these gender disparities in the labour and entrepreneurship market.

The limited representation of female entrepreneurs is attributed to numerous barriers that women face in establishing and running businesses.

These include socio-cultural obstacles like prejudices and stereotypes, difficulties related to balancing work and family life, limited financial opportunities, and a lack of opportunities for lifelong learning, education, and training to develop entrepreneurship key competence and business skills.

Various studies and communities of experts, such as the British Council, the World Economic Forum (Davos Agenda), European Social Enterprise Monitor (ESEM)-Euclid Network, European Women's Lobby, and others, confirm that social entrepreneurship can play a vital role in empowering women in their professional life and business environment. Women-led social enterprises drive positive changes in societal and environmental issues, making a significant impact on the lives of women. In addition, social enterprises can motivate other females to start their business.

Therefore, the vision of the U.POWER project is to highlight the role of social entrepreneurship as a tool to address the aforementioned socio-economic challenges faced by women in Europe and beyond.

[1] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/DEMO_PJANGROUP/default/table?lang=en

[2] <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tqoe1c2/default/table?lang=en>

[3] https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/LFSI_EMP_A__custom_7042372/default/table?lang=en

[4] <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/EDN-20230303-1>

[5] <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20220622-1>

INTRODUCTION

The overall aim of the U.POWER project is to facilitate skills and awareness among females, with a specific focus on women aged 25-55, and those representing vulnerable groups (single mothers, refugees, persons with disabilities, etc.). The research analysis was conducted to map specific information on social entrepreneurship in partner countries and to collect valuable information for the development of training materials for women, including those representing vulnerable groups, and adult educators.

The U.POWER Consolidated Report is prepared by the LECSA - Latvian European Community Studies Association, based on the results of the seven U.POWER Country Reports from Latvia, Ireland, Armenia, Germany, Spain, Italy and France, as well as analysis of the literature and Internet resources.

The Consolidated Report presents a comprehensive analysis of social entrepreneurship among women, addressing the needs, challenges, competencies, country-specific insights, and success stories. Additionally, it offers recommendations for the U.POWER MOOC training and policy improvements to foster better conditions for SE development in partner countries

This report consists of four sections:

Section One: shares the results of a questionnaire (N=374) evaluating the interest of women aged 25-55 towards social entrepreneurship, their needs for training focused on starting a successful social enterprise, and the obstacles preventing them from becoming social entrepreneurs.

Section Two: presents the outcomes of expert interviews (N=30) from each country, highlighting the drivers behind, the key obstacles women face in becoming social entrepreneurs, and the required competencies and skills to run a social enterprise. It also includes some recommendations for the U.POWER MOOC training, exploring the involvement of women from vulnerable groups to the training, and suggesting policy improvements.

Section Three: provides an insightful overview of social entrepreneurship in each partner country (Latvia, Ireland, Armenia, Germany, Spain, Italy and France). It includes a background on the development of attitudes towards social entrepreneurship, key findings on women in social enterprises, the main challenges and opportunities in social enterprise environments, key stakeholders, and a list of the main financial and non-financial support opportunities for creating/ managing social businesses led by women.

Section Four: comprises of 21 success stories of women-led social enterprises, serving as inspiring examples. These real-life stories showcase how women have made a positive impact on their communities and demonstrate the transformative potential of social entrepreneurship.



SECTION 2

RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

There were 374 responses received from all project partner countries (Latvia, Armenia, Ireland, Spain, Italy, Germany and France).

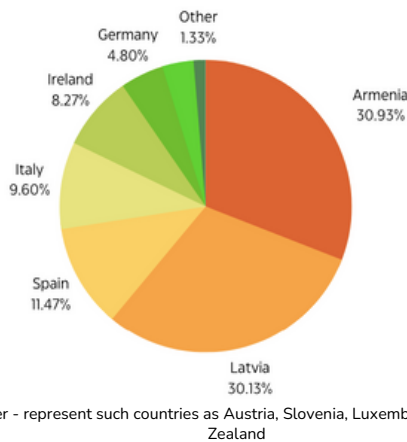


Figure 1. Share of female respondents by country of residence

The average age of respondents was 33.4 years. Almost a half of the respondents (49%) were employed and one quarter were self-employed (25%). One tenth of the respondents (10%) were unemployed and one tenth (10%) were students.

The chart below shows the breakdown of respondents based on their main occupation

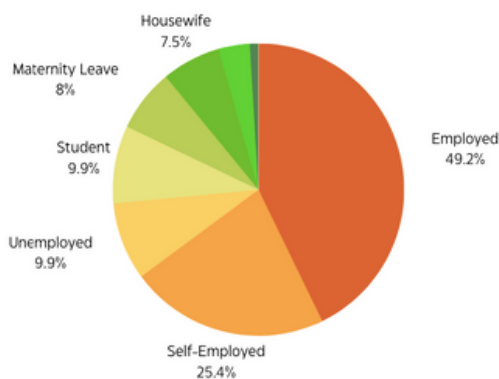


Figure 2. Main occupation of respondents (n=374, multiple responses accepted)

In total, more than half of the respondents, 53% (198), did not identify as belonging to any of the vulnerable groups. In total, 176 of all respondents (47%) belong to vulnerable groups and around 15% of them have a low-income status and 15% of the respondents come from rural areas.

The following figure represents the various groups, which the respondents belong to

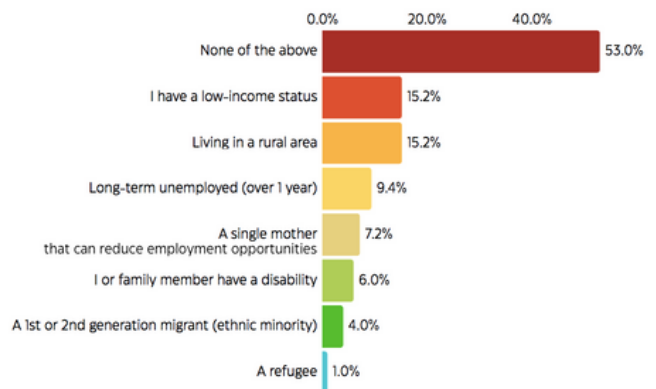


Figure 3. Vulnerable groups among respondents (n=374, multiple responses accepted)

As expected, for many participants who are in receipt of a low income also identified with being a single mother, having a disability or caring for a family member. In only one case did a participant who was from a 1st or 2nd generation migrant background also express receiving a low income.

All respondents answered the question on how interested they were in working in the field of social entrepreneurship. Respondents were asked to rate their interest from 1 ("Not at all interested") to 5 ("Yes, definitely interested!") and the average score was 4.

RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Signifying that there is **high interest among respondents to work in the field of social entrepreneurship.**

The question identifying the main obstacles that prevent women from pursuing a career in entrepreneurship, particular social entrepreneurship, resulted in participants identifying many obstacles.

These results were also analysed against the 176 women who identified as belonging to a vulnerable group. In result, the two most important obstacles for women from vulnerable groups were the same as for an overall group of respondents - lack of access to financial support (65%) and lack of knowledge about Social Entrepreneurship (45%),

These obstacles are displayed in figure 4

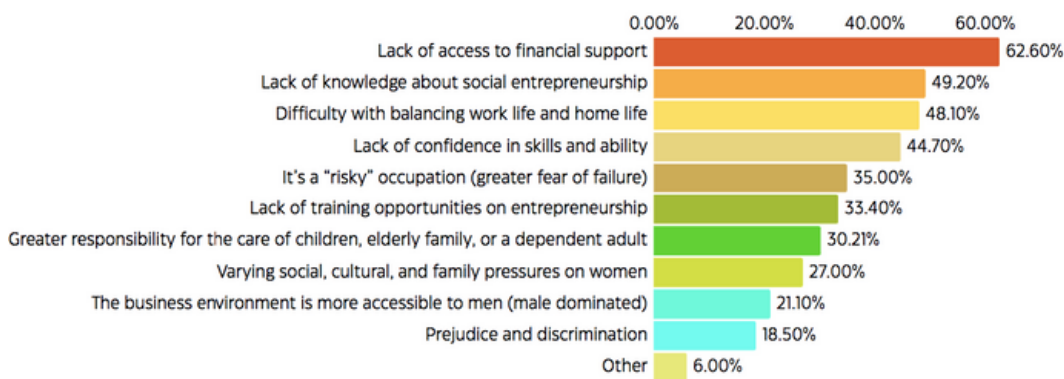


Figure 4. Obstacles for women in entrepreneurship (n=374, multiple responses accepted)

The most prevalent obstacle facing women who want to enter into social entrepreneurship is the lack of access to financial support (63%) followed by the lack of knowledge about Social Entrepreneurship (50%), difficulty with balancing work and home life (48%), and lack of confidence in skills and ability (45%).

According to the results, most of the respondents (approx. 80%) do not believe that the business environment is more accessible to men or that prejudice and discrimination is a major obstacle (81.5%). Factors such as a fear of failure, a lack of training opportunities, and social, cultural, and family pressures on women (27%) are also at play.

The third most important obstacle with the same impact is varying social, cultural and family pressures on women (45%), which is considered as much more important for vulnerable groups of women than for an overall group of respondents.

Surprisingly, difficulty with balancing work life and home life (40%), lack of confidence in skills and ability (38%), and greater responsibility for the care of children, elderly family, or a dependent adult (26%) were not weighted as high in comparison. The remaining obstacles, such as a lack of training opportunities, fear of failure, accessibility to the business environment, as well as prejudice and discrimination had similar weight for both groups of respondents.

RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The results concerning women representing vulnerable groups are reflected in the chart below

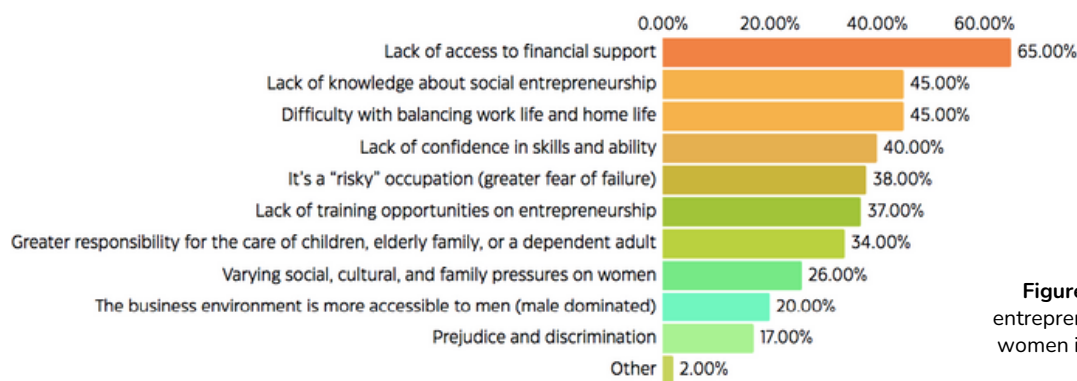


Figure 5. Obstacles to women in entrepreneurship (n=176/ n=374, only women in vulnerable groups, multiple responses accepted)

Respondents were asked about the knowledge they feel is required to be a social entrepreneur. Participants' responses confirmed what the project consortium expected.

The most sought after knowledge was on the topics of financial management (61%), business plan development (59%), social entrepreneurship fundamentals (58%), and financial literacy (57%) and fundraising basics (54%).



Topics and interests are documented in Figure 6

69% of respondents (of which 126 women were from vulnerable groups) expressed an interest in participating in training opportunities, specifically opportunities with no fees. Additionally, participants' preferred method of delivery was online, on a flexible schedule.

Participants were asked to identify training or support opportunities which were available in their country or region on social entrepreneurship. Respondents were currently not aware of training or support opportunities on social entrepreneurship.

Therefore, the development of U.Power training resources is very important to raise awareness and educate on social entrepreneurship and support opportunities.

Figure 6. Topics of interest (n=374, multiple responses accepted)

U RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE



Source: canva.com

KEY FINDINGS

The findings of the survey confirm that many women seek ways to balance work and home life, and family issues that hinder their participation in entrepreneurial activities. Unfortunately, important obstacles holding back women in vulnerable groups from getting involved in social entrepreneurship remain.

The varying social, cultural, and family pressures on women could be interpreted as strengths which set women entrepreneurs apart from their male counterparts. The most pressing obstacles identified by all respondents relate to the lack of financial support and knowledge on social entrepreneurship.

A majority of respondents confirm that they require additional knowledge and training. They expressed an interest to learn, free of charge. The most required training would be in financial management, business plan development, social entrepreneurship fundamentals, as well as financial literacy and fundraising basics. According to the survey, the most appropriate learning mode would be an online setting following a flexible schedule, which should be considered by the U.POWER project in organising training activities involving vulnerable groups of women.



SECTION 3

RESULTS OF EXPERT INTERVIEWS

RESULTS OF EXPERT INTERVIEWS

In total 30 stakeholders from seven partner countries were interviewed representing women in social entrepreneurship, educators and mentors, policy makers, and field experts from project partnership countries.

The interviews provided insight into the drivers behind women becoming social entrepreneurs, the obstacles preventing more women becoming social entrepreneurs, and the required competencies and skills to run a social enterprise. Finally, interviewees provided some recommendations for the U.POWER MOOC training elaboration and policy improvements to facilitate better conditions for Social Entrepreneur development in partner countries.

Common aspects among partner countries

Social entrepreneurship appeared to be a more female orientated sector in all project countries (except Italy). While the commercial business sector tends to be dominated by men, social entrepreneurship provides women with their own niche where they can pursue their ideas and vision, achieving self-realisation and building confidence. Social enterprises set up by women are often born out of a natural need, as women desire to improve the well-being of society or address environmental issues, reflecting their inherent nature to care for others. Women in social enterprises focus on a different set of issues, such as education, health, and eliminating poverty in comparison to their male counterparts.

Moreover, experts from Spain also believe that women are better equipped to come up with sustainable solutions due to their increased understanding of the complexities of societal issues.

Interestingly, in Latvia social entrepreneurship serves as a transition point for gaining entrepreneurship experience and skills, which may lead to further transformation into traditional businesses or switch to becoming contracted employees if women conclude that the business activity is not suitable for them.

**INTERVIEWED EXPERTS
UNANIMOUSLY CONFIRMED THAT
SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IS A
VALUABLE TOOL FOR EMPOWERING
WOMEN AND MAXIMISING THEIR
POTENTIAL**

Among the common drivers for women in becoming social entrepreneurs – the flexibility to manage their schedule freely, allowing them to balance between professional and personal commitments was highlighted as a key motivators. Women are also motivated by the potential to engage with other women, their empathy to empower others, and the desire for financial autonomy. They are also more likely to hire other women and provide them with opportunities for leadership and advancement.

Experts also stressed that running a social enterprise doesn't always ensure a stable income and financial stability. Social enterprises require more effort to maintain them in the long term. Women often have to rely on support from their family or financial support available in their state or region. At the same time, it is believed that women are more resourceful in making the most of limited financial resources compared to men thus expanding their entrepreneurial potential.

The main obstacles preventing women from becoming social entrepreneurs vary across project countries and regions. Based on the results of interviews, some common challenges include:

Difficulty in balancing work and family responsibilities, which can be particularly pronounced in regions with a lack of support services for childcare and among single mothers. Women are often seen as primarily responsible for running the household and taking care of the children, adding to the complexity of their entrepreneurial endeavours.

RESULTS OF EXPERT INTERVIEWS

Another common obstacle lies in the lack of access to financial resources. Many women may not have savings that could be invested in launching and sustaining a social enterprise due to other priorities such as family living, particularly those from vulnerable groups. Experts admitted that registering a social enterprise is relatively easy, but building a sustainable social enterprise that can operate in the long term is far more challenging. Women need to not only ensure a profit for reinvestment into their social enterprise, but also generate income to sustain themselves and their family. Moreover, as a social enterprise expands, there is an even greater requirement for financial resources, support, and skills expansion.

Women often struggle to create or access a suitable professional network, which is crucial for the success of social entrepreneurship, along with individual support from experienced entrepreneurs. This network is essential for practical advice or moral support. When starting a business alone, women may risk burnout and struggle to find collaborative partners without sufficient financial resources.

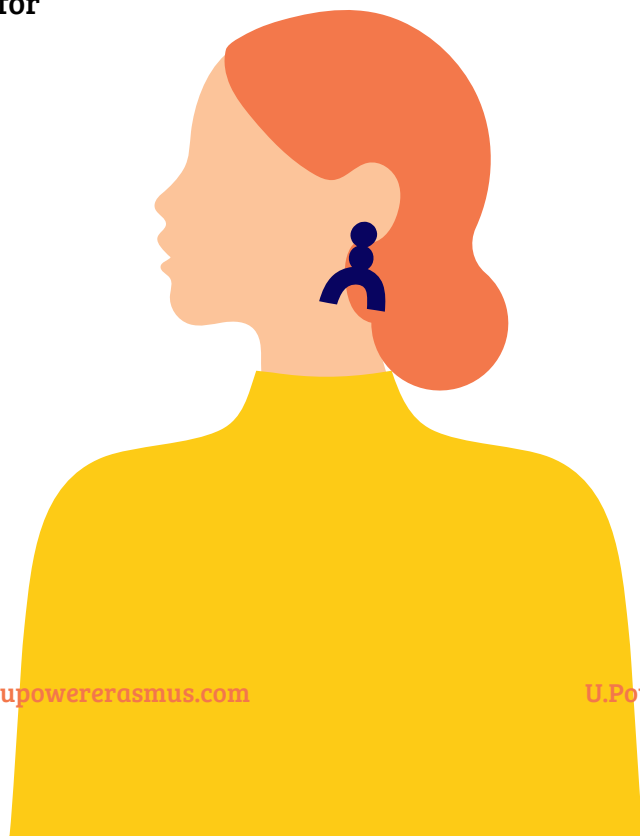
More detailed information about the key findings from the experts interviewed for each country is described below.

Other common barriers relate to the lack of support for those without any managerial experience, "fear of failure," lack of self-confidence and encouragement, gender bias, and limited knowledge on sustaining a business

Bureaucratic and administrative complexities, as well as a lack of awareness about social entrepreneurship and available support possibilities outside the sector, can also pose challenges for aspiring social entrepreneurs.

Experts suggested that women should take advantage of support provided to build self-confidence as women receive more negative feedback and messages of discouragement in comparison to their male counterparts. In addition, women must also confront unnecessary stereotypes regarding the business and their potential.

Despite these challenges, women continue to make significant contributions to the field of social entrepreneurship and there are many examples of successful female social entrepreneurs.



RESULTS OF EXPERT INTERVIEWS

KEY FINDINGS IN:



IRELAND

The main drivers

The **main driver** for women in becoming social entrepreneurs is the flexibility that working for themselves provides. Being able to work around the family schedule or outside of a fulltime job is seen as an advantage in becoming a social entrepreneur. Social entrepreneurship is considered an empowering tool for personal development, increasing personal transformation, and providing women who may be experiencing isolation an opportunity to shift their perspectives.

The main obstacles

Interviewed experts highlighted the difficulty to balance work life and home life, lack of knowledge on sustaining a business, lack of support in taking the first step to become a social entrepreneur as the **main obstacles**. Additionally, a lack of support at a government level regarding childcare was identified as a systemic issue preventing the closing of the gender gap seen in the workplace.

Crucial knowledge, competencies and soft skills

Vital components that must be decided before creating a business plan is understanding the company's goals and objectives, the capacity to prioritise these goals, and the self-assurance to set limitations. Good ideas must be developed in terms of short, medium and long-term outcomes. If a social enterprise wants to succeed and expand, having a distinct brand identity is crucial.

Initiatives and support that are lacking

Ireland does not segregate **support programmes and initiatives** around social entrepreneurship. Public and governmental organisations supporting all types of enterprises no longer offer grants, or training specifically designed for women.

However, there is a push at a national and local level to increase the number of women engaging in social entrepreneurship.

Recommendations for organisation of a training course

The following actions were **recommended**: creating a brand identity and brand tone of voice, registering a social enterprise and organising taxes, social media training, and networking.

Promotion of social entrepreneurship and its training possibilities among vulnerable groups

Understanding the different types of visas and the restrictions is essential when working with **immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers**. Providing training to a group who cannot set up a business in Ireland is viewed as a means of disengaging the group. In addition, other groups might not have access to the same technology, meaning that those who live in rural areas may no longer be at a disadvantage as a result of its availability. While making contact through support groups, parent groups and networking groups are advised, interviewees felt there was little engagement from these groups, and further analysis was required to determine methods of increasing engagement.

Recommendations for policy improvements in Ireland to empower women

To involve more women in engaging in social entrepreneurship, policies regarding childcare and healthcare for women must be evaluated. Childcare was noted as the 'full-time job' women undertake alongside other employment. The primary barrier was seen to be the cost of childcare in Ireland, and **suggestions** were made to change this on a policy level.

U RESULTS OF EXPERT INTERVIEWS

KEY FINDINGS IN:



ARMENIA

The main drivers

Most interviewed stakeholders believe that having a woman as the founder of a social enterprise has **advantages**. The women are more likely to address problems because they naturally have a tendency to care more about social issues. Some of the experts also believed that women are better equipped to come up with long-lasting solutions due to their increased understanding of the complexities of societal issues.

All stakeholders agreed that social entrepreneurship is a very effective instrument for empowering women. Since men dominate the commercial business sector, social enterprises give women their own niche where they could pursue both business and vital social or environmental causes.

Numerous nationwide initiatives promote female entrepreneurs, giving them the chance to learn more about the business world, make mistakes, and yet accomplish meaningful goals.

The main obstacles

There is an **obvious necessity** for social entrepreneurs to receive a strong business education. Additionally, the environment in which Armenian women grow up doesn't mould them into leaders or teach them to take the initiative. Women also frequently have a small network because they are rarely in regular contact with influential or wealthy people, which makes it more challenging for them to raise money for their company ideas.

Crucial knowledge, competencies and soft skills

Women need a **foundational understanding** of business start-up and management, including knowledge in product development, marketing, sales, fundamental finance, and other areas. A variety of soft skills, including networking, leadership, negotiating, and communication, must also be acquired.

Initiatives and support that are lacking

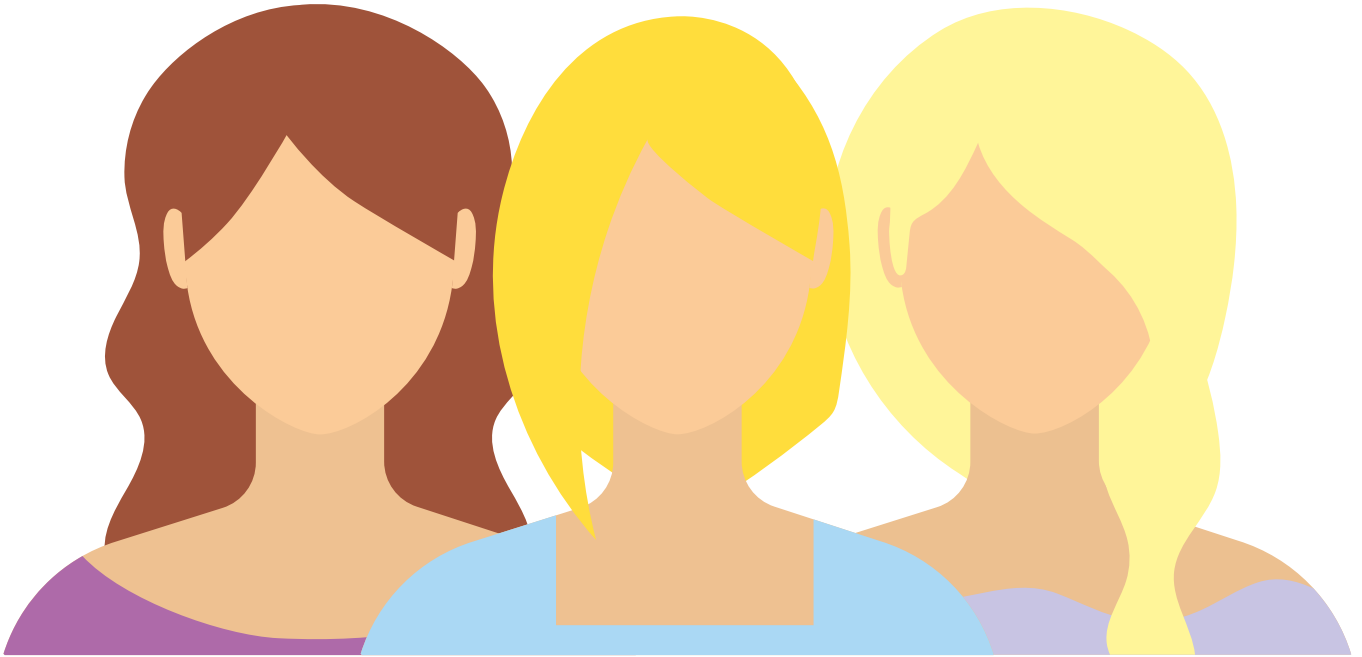
An **initiative to encourage** female self-confidence, as well as female entrepreneurship in general, is necessary. Experts interviewed suggested that women need to build self-confidence more than men because they are more likely to be discouraged by the community and told that they cannot succeed. In addition, women need to learn to confront stereotypes regarding the business. According to one expert, if a man enters the room of a village administrator to discuss conditions for his business, it is considered acceptable, but if a woman does so in rural Armenia, she may face criticism for being in the room alone with a man who is not a family member.

Recommendations for organisation of a training course

The necessity for participant coaching is one of the obvious **recommendations** for U.POWER that came out of the expert interviews.

Although training and mentoring are tremendously helpful, self-confidence difficulties and other human variables frequently determine whether a social venture succeeds or fails.

RESULTS OF EXPERT INTERVIEWS



Source: canva.com

Promotion of social entrepreneurship and its training possibilities among vulnerable groups

In order to include **disadvantaged women** in the training programme, the curriculum should be carefully created with increased time flexibility.

Women generally have additional domestic responsibilities that place significant time demands on them, but disadvantaged women may find it even harder to balance their numerous duties. For example, a mother of a child with a disability may have no way of knowing in advance whether she will be able to join a scheduled training session (even if it is online) because her day is too unpredictable.

Recommendations for policy improvements in Armenia to empower women

In terms of **suggested policy changes**, Armenia's current laws are gender-neutral and provide more-or-less equal protections for both men and women. One of the interviewed stakeholders, having experience on the policy side, suggested that perhaps the best course of action is to promote a more gender-balanced policy, meaning that provisions could be made to actively involve women (especially disadvantaged ones), as the current "equal playing field" meant that, in reality, women weren't getting involved to their full potential.

RESULTS OF EXPERT INTERVIEWS

KEY FINDINGS IN:



LATVIA

The main drivers

Female social entrepreneurship is often **driven by the desire** to improve the well-being of society, reflecting women's inherent nature to care for others.

It is an opportunity for women to pursue their own ideas, build confidence, and achieve self-realisation. Experts confirmed that social enterprises in Latvia are female driven. Social entrepreneurship often serves as a tool for opening the entrepreneurial potential of women.

After starting and running a social enterprise for a certain period, Latvian women quite often decide to transition to traditional business. Through their experience in social enterprise, women can gain entrepreneurial competences, stronger confidence, and new skills.

However, experts stressed running a social enterprise doesn't always guarantee a stable income and financial situation. Often, women can afford to run a social enterprise if they receive additional support from their family or if they receive public financial support. At the same time, it was expressed that women are more resourceful and can make the most of limited financial resources compared to men. Despite existing challenges, there are many examples of profitable social entrepreneurs in Latvia.

The main obstacles

The key obstacles identified by experts – disorganised legislation (lack of communication after legislative changes);

a complex tax system; lack of support for sustainable development of social enterprises; and a lack of awareness about social entrepreneurship outside the sector.

Women, especially single mothers or those facing socio-economic difficulties, encounter challenges in finding the funding and encouragement to start a social enterprise. Women starting businesses alone risk burnout and often do not consider opportunities to find collaborative partners even without financial resources, as it seems unlikely that others would engage in unpaid work with the hope of eventual income generation.

Experts admitted that starting a social enterprise is relatively easy, whereas creating a sustainable enterprise that can operate in the long term is more challenging. Women need to ensure not only profit for reinvestment into their social enterprises but also generate income for themselves and their family.

Crucial knowledge, competencies and soft skills

Interviewed experts stressed **the importance** of financial literacy and knowledge, especially for women who haven't been involved in entrepreneurship, economics, or the financial sector before. Developing a business model, strategic planning, and social impact analysis are crucial for achieving sustainability within a social enterprise. Analytical skills are necessary to orientate a large amount of information and conduct research. Communication skills and psychology are essential for interacting and working with various socio-economic groups of people.



RESULTS OF EXPERT INTERVIEWS

In addition to the fundamentals of social entrepreneurship, the essential topics are marketing and sustainable business models, innovation and creativity, leadership, management, and team building. Industry-specific skills and knowledge are sometimes more important in the field where social enterprises operate.

Initiatives and support that are lacking

In Latvia, there is a **significant lack** of stable, strategic, and consistent forms of support that social entrepreneurs can rely upon. As soon as society understands the principle and conditions of the certain support programme, its funding runs out (the programme is completed). The support provided is highly discontinuous.

Recommendations for organisation of a training course

Given the international nature of U.POWER training it was **suggested** to create universally applicable modules with a separate element having information on each partner country, e.g., a PDF page with key country-specific information on social entrepreneurship and support available or frequently asked questions. Other recommendations include practical content with “real stories” and examples from existing entrepreneurs; exercises to develop analytical thinking; promotion of available support mechanisms.

There should also be an interaction with other participants to avoid feelings of isolation during the training (group meetings, a reporting partner).

Promotion of social entrepreneurship and its training possibilities among vulnerable groups

Social entrepreneurship is considered as a highly enabling tool suitable for **disadvantaged groups**. Often, women themselves or someone from their environment – close friends or family – have experienced social problems and developed potential solutions, which they want to offer to a wider audience.

Recommendations for policy improvements in Latvia to empower women

There is a need for systematic and continuous support that would be accessible to a wider range of social entrepreneurs and would cover all cycles of social enterprise development – from idea development to growth and expansion. In terms of public procurement, it is important to provide some preferences for social enterprises, because it is difficult for them to compete with traditional enterprises. Organisations disseminating information on social entrepreneurship and available support need to explore new communication channels to reach a wider audience, particularly those beyond the social enterprise sector, who may not already be familiar with the topic.



RESULTS OF EXPERT INTERVIEWS

KEY FINDINGS IN:



GERMANY

The main drivers

The **identified drivers** are the potential of engaging with other women, and the empathy and ability to empower others. One of the benefits is self-employment, which enables women with children to better manage and allocate their time around their family. Social aspects play a more important role than egoism. For women, social entrepreneurship includes the prospect of being able to determine many things for herself, and thus to follow one's own ideas, to implement one's own vision.

The main obstacles

In addition to **obstacles** related to funding issues - the complexity of public financing, the lack of start-up financing, the lack of follow-up financing after the start-up, experts mentioned a difficulty to reconcile work and family life. Besides that, Germany lacks a start-up culture and tradition, which translates to insufficient encouragement and support in the decision to become a social entrepreneur. Also, there is an excessive amount of bureaucracy within the enterprise sector.

Crucial knowledge, competencies and soft skills

It is necessary to have a **basic understanding** of economics and accounting, legal structure (non-profit status and profitability), business administration, marketing, ICT and bureaucracy. In terms of soft skills, leadership and team-building skills, along with the empathy and sensitivity, are important in order to delegate responsibilities and have confidence in your employees' ability to find solutions.

Initiatives and support that are lacking

In Germany, experts identified an abundance of available networks.

However, networks with a more practical side, in which products and services can be exchanged are lacking.

A kind of support website or office services are needed, especially in the early stages of a social enterprise.

Recommendations for organisation of a training course

Experts highlighted that the **best way to achieve** above mentioned key skills and knowledge is having training with individual coaching sessions. Proposed recommendations included "organisation of a kind of fair for beginners", having a meeting place, working together with coaches on the core topics - *what is my product? "This outside eye is so important and helpful! Whenever possible, individual coaching, personal support is best!"*.

Radio and TV in Germany are still widely used to promote businesses. Utilise these avenues and encourage more theme weeks on radio and television to **feature** more projects and businesses and better publicise real-world examples.

Recommendations for policy improvements in Germany to empower women

Policies-wise, it would be beneficial if the city could provide office space for women. It's not always about money, there should also be more support for infrastructure, for instance, (sponsored) tickets for public transport. Regarding financial support, staggered funding over longer periods of time would often be better to ensure sustainable development of SME and support for women when they decide to establish a family. For the awareness raising on the topic of social entrepreneurship, local media can be used.

U RESULTS OF EXPERT INTERVIEWS

KEY FINDINGS IN:



SPAIN

The main drivers

In Spain, women are more likely to focus on a specific set of issues in comparison to their male counterparts. Women entrepreneurs

also tend to be more collaborative and inclusive in their approach, which can lead to more sustainable and impactful solutions. Additionally, in Spain women are more likely to hire other women and provide them with opportunities for leadership and advancement.

Experts expressed social entrepreneurship as a tool to empower women by providing them with opportunities to become financially independent and improve their social status. Social entrepreneurship is also used as a gateway to education, healthcare, and other resources that may have been inaccessible to women.

The main obstacles

Some of the **main obstacles** in Spain preventing women from running social enterprises are a lack of access to finance, lack of confidence, lack of networks and mentors, and gender bias. Women also face challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities. Despite these challenges, women continue to make significant contributions to the field of social entrepreneurship. However, experts noted that women entrepreneurs still face significant challenges in accessing funding and resources for their ventures.

Crucial knowledge, competencies and soft skills

Leadership, communication, financial management, marketing, networking, and innovation are some of the **key competencies** that

experts identified as essential for female social entrepreneurs.

In addition, it is important to have a strong understanding of the target market and the ability to identify opportunities for growth and development. Empathy, resiliency, adaptability, creativity, and problem-solving are a few of crucial soft skills highlighted as necessary for female social entrepreneurs. Female social entrepreneurs must be able to navigate complex social issues and collaborate with stakeholders from diverse backgrounds.

Initiatives and support that are lacking

There are **several barriers** that female entrepreneurs face and for which initiatives and support are needed, such as lack of education, experience and training opportunities; limited spatial mobility; lack of support from families; lack of institutional support; and problems in the acquisition of financial resources.

Recommendations for organisation of a training course

Within the MOOC **it is recommended** to provide information about support programs relating to SE establishment or management available in every country or region (Women's Institute of Madrid, Mujeres Tech, etc.), to promote networking opportunities for female entrepreneurs (Womentalia), sharing lessons and practices of active businesses (Academy for Women Entrepreneurs).

In terms of digital tools for female entrepreneurs' management, there are several options available such as Trello, Asana.

U RESULTS OF EXPERT INTERVIEWS

Promotion of social entrepreneurship and its training possibilities among vulnerable groups

Several ways were highlighted to promote SE among **disadvantaged groups** - including ensuring access to resources (funding, mentorship, and networks), offering training programmes, and creating networking opportunities specifically for disadvantaged groups of females to help them build relationships and find new business opportunities. Partnering with organisations that work with disadvantaged groups of females was also advised to help promote social entrepreneurship opportunities and provide access to resources and training programmes.



Source: canva.com



Source: canva.com

Recommendations for policy improvements in Spain to empower women

Female entrepreneurs often face challenges in accessing funding for their business, which can be addressed through government initiatives. Training and mentorship programs **can help** female entrepreneurs develop the skills they need to start and run a successful business. Access to networks can be limited for some female entrepreneurs, prompting the need for government-supported networking opportunities. Encouraging gender equality can help create a more level playing field for female entrepreneurs. This can include measures such as equal pay, parental leave policies, and anti-discrimination laws.

RESULTS OF EXPERT INTERVIEWS

KEY FINDINGS IN:



ITALY

The main drivers

Women's social enterprises are often born out of a natural need.

Being a woman in a social enterprise holds meaning beyond the business aspect – they work not

only for profit but also because of the high emotional commitment involved. Social entrepreneurship can be a useful tool for unlocking the potential of females because it is dedicated to a larger public, and one of its aims is to involve people from disadvantaged or vulnerable backgrounds.

The main obstacles

Interviewed experts indicated that women social entrepreneurs remain a minority in social entrepreneurship (around one-third). The **obstacles** faced by women are primarily related to childcare and family management, particularly in regions of Italy where there is a lack of services supporting childcare (e.g., in Sicily).

Crucial knowledge, competencies and soft skills

The state lacks a full understanding of the challenges faced by vulnerable families, who often create social enterprises. In addition to managing their enterprise, women also have to deal with the pressure of raising families. Another obstacle specific to social enterprises working with persons with disabilities – if persons with disabilities receive a salary, they become ineligible for the state-provided pension. This makes it more difficult for them to gain financial independence through work.

Overall, difficulties do not depend on the entrepreneur's gender, but rather on the economic activities in which the social enterprise operates. Also, social enterprises cannot compete with traditional businesses in public tenders due to the requirement of providing pre-financing from their own resources, often forcing them to take a loan from the bank.

Based on the experience of an interviewed women entrepreneur, it was suggested to focus on managerial, linguistic, financial, and analytical skills when starting a social enterprise. Additionally, competence in the educational and psychological aspects may be helpful for working with persons with disabilities.

Initiatives and support that are lacking

There is a **lack of** financial and economic incentives at the government level, and childcare services in certain regions of Italy that could support women when they start social enterprise or enter the labour market.

Recommendations for organisation of a training course

In addition to developing self-confidence and self-esteem, it is **important to ensure** an understanding of legislative issues, human resources and psychology, including economic psychology that already exists in other countries, as social entrepreneurship often requires working with diverse groups of people.

RESULTS OF EXPERT INTERVIEWS

Systemic coaching and supervision could be very useful for analysing a woman's potential in a social enterprise and then moving on to the development of the enterprise. Focus groups and gamification of training resources could be interesting to develop creativity and bring out critical points.



Source: canva.com

Promotion of social entrepreneurship and its training possibilities among vulnerable groups

Females from **disadvantaged groups**, specifically those with disabilities, should be given the opportunity to be involved as workers in social enterprises and then, depending on their abilities, progress towards managerial positions and or supported in their own goals.

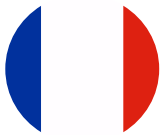
Recommendations for policy improvements in Italy to empower women

Policy needs and problems vary from region to region in Italy. In general, it would be m to have improved financial and economic incentives dedicated to social entrepreneurship at the government level. For example, property confiscated from mafias could be revalued as office space for the social enterprises started by women who are victims of violence or migrant women.

The state can provide financial support and help social enterprises in finding volunteers and civil service to support vulnerable women, migrant women, women survivors of violence, and special mothers who find it difficult to work after a certain age.

RESULTS OF EXPERT INTERVIEWS

KEY FINDINGS IN:



FRANCE

The main drivers

Experts in France described entrepreneurship as a way for women to progress from family life, gain financial autonomy and manage their schedule freely.

Social entrepreneurship leads to the enhancement of the visibility of women in entrepreneurship, challenging societal norms and **breaking free** from traditional moulds.

According to interviewed experts, entrepreneurship provides a path to women's **empowerment and freedom**. Most of the women enter the field of social entrepreneurship after having their first child or once their children have grown up. Thus indicating that women pause their career to develop their family or care for vulnerable family members.

The main obstacles

The interviewed experts classified **obstacles** into several categories: *social, genetic as well as pedagogical and educational*. The "fear of failure" and the "culture of failure" emerged as one of the crucial concerns. In France, most enterprises close within two years of operation, because "entrepreneurs are not taught how to manage failure", particularly women entrepreneurs.

In addition, there is a tendency for women to prioritise others. Despite having numerous skills and knowledge, women's potential remains largely untapped in the workforce.

Experts believe that there is a lack of access to suitable networks due to different professional or education backgrounds. Experts also identified internal obstacles related to self-awareness (own strength and weaknesses), confidence, financial beliefs, along with external obstacles – visibility of social entrepreneurship and successful examples of female social entrepreneurs.

In addition, there is a difficulty in finding funding to start a social enterprise, specifically for women who come from less privileged educational backgrounds, as they usually do not have savings to invest. While women possess technical skills for starting businesses, there is a need to prioritise soft skills training (e.g. oral communication skills).

Crucial knowledge, competencies and soft skills

Interviewers stressed that there are **no gender specific knowledge/skills**. Financial education, leadership, ability to unify, ability to make decisions, stress and risk management, self-awareness, project-awareness, communication skills and self-development are the key skills and knowledge to become a social entrepreneur.

Initiatives and support that are lacking

There is a **lack of** training delivered by educators who have experience as entrepreneurs. Experts also expressed concern that training is often too theoretical, noting potential social entrepreneurs should be inspired by real examples in the field of social enterprise, including both successful and failed social enterprises.

RESULTS OF EXPERT INTERVIEWS

Recommendations for organisation of a training course

Experts **recommended** including the "real case studies" in the content of training. The overall recommendation is that social entrepreneurship should be framed by three different types of supporters to ensure an individual approach: a coach (provides "life" advice and assesses the compatibility between the person and the social enterprise project), a technical advisor (confirms feasibility of the offered product/service) and a mentor (an experienced social entrepreneur sharing practical recommendations). One educator suggested focusing on soft skills to unlock already existing skills and boost self-confidence in women.

Promotion of social entrepreneurship and its training possibilities among vulnerable groups

One of the ways to **attract disadvantaged** groups is by providing services that ease their lives: a childcare support system during the training,

managing and adapting the time slots for women-mothers, involving them in the field at an early stage, organising entrepreneurship training through a series of games, and identifying women from the same social class who can serve as inspiration for these participants.

Recommendations for policy improvements in Italy to empower women

To simplify access to relevant information through a single counter and create a database of all fundings suitable for social entrepreneurs, as well as to address administrative burdens when starting a business ("un millefeuille administratif") that create barriers and discourage individuals from engaging in certain activities or initiatives.

In addition, it was **recommended** to introduce SE training in schools, e.g., through internships in middle school and game development, similar to mathematics, to build confidence and develop entrepreneurship skills.





CONCLUSION





CONCLUSION

Interviews with experts and observations of social entrepreneurship activities by partner organisations confirmed that the general public is not aware of what social entrepreneurship means and how it differs from traditional business. In terms of the U.Power project, this provides the following context; In addition to fostering social entrepreneurship competencies among women and educators, the U.POWER project holds significant importance and responsibility due to its role in addressing the lack of awareness surrounding social entrepreneurship in Armenia, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, and Spain.

Social entrepreneurship development in partner countries varies drastically. At present, of the seven countries included in this research, Italy is the only country with legal regulation and definition of social entrepreneurship. In contrast, Ireland, Germany and Armenia, without official definition, social enterprises act under the legal framework implemented for traditional businesses. Nevertheless, there is a fast-growing interest and increasing awareness on the importance of social entrepreneurship across Europe. Without a universal definition for social entrepreneurship, comparison of the legal and financial terms required additional attention by the consortium. For example, in France the term “social and solidarity economy” is used whereas, in Spain the term “social economy” includes business operating as a “social enterprise.”

In Spain, France and Italy, countries where the meaning of social entrepreneurship is broadly defined, there is a large variety of legal forms which a social enterprise can operate under. In contrast, social enterprises in Germany operate primarily on a self-recognised principle. Similarly, to Ireland, social enterprises in Latvia, can register as a limited liability company, however in Latvia limited liability companies can attain official “social enterprise” status. The legal form which a social enterprise can operate in in each country varies with some social enterprises operating within the form of associations (non-profit), charities or commercial companies.

Obtaining clear and comprehensive statistical data proved challenging for nearly all partner countries. This challenge is largely attributed to the gap in dedicated reporting on social enterprises, resulting from the lack of consistency, and universal understanding of the legal structures which a social enterprise can operate under within Europe. Consequently, measuring the number of social enterprises led by women proved even more challenging. Nonetheless, estimates available in partner countries, including ESEM, suggest that in most European country’s women play a significant role in the development of social enterprises, constituting the majority of managers and founders (ranging between 60-70%).

Experts interviewed in this research noted that social entrepreneurship is a predominantly female-driven sector, both in terms of the number of women leading enterprises and the number of women employed in social enterprises. It is also believed that social entrepreneurship also acts as a catalyst for women interested in sampling a career as an entrepreneur. In the participating countries, **social entrepreneurship provides an opportunity for women** to pursue their interests in entrepreneurship, gain independence (personally and financially), and achieve self-realisation. Social entrepreneurship can serve as a tool to empower women by offering them opportunities to achieve financial independence and enhance their social status.

Social enterprises are often born out of a natural need. The success of women-led social enterprises often stems from the motivation of women to address social issues, specifically those relating to their own personal experiences, such as a specific social issue they, or their family experience. Research shows that women focus more specifically on issues such as education, health, and eliminating poverty in comparison to their male counterparts.

In some partner countries entrepreneurship is increasingly integrated into formal education systems, providing opportunities for skill development.

CONCLUSION

In addition, business development courses and programmes focusing on social entrepreneurship are becoming more accessible. The results from the U.Power questionnaire with women demonstrated a high level of interest among respondents in working in the field of social entrepreneurship, or at least in trying it.

This research has identified common obstacles hindering women from becoming (social) entrepreneurship. **Balancing work and family responsibilities** is particularly challenging, especially in regions with a lack of accessible childcare services. In addition, women often assume the responsibility for running the household and taking care of the children, adding to the complexity of their entrepreneurial endeavours. This is heightened by **stereotypical societal attitudes** still at play in many countries.

Another common obstacle is the **lack of access to financial investment in social enterprises and the availability of start-up funding**, especially for women from vulnerable backgrounds. **Building and accessing a suitable professional network** is also a struggle. This network is essential for practical advice or moral support. When starting a business alone, women may risk burnout and struggle to find collaborative partners without sufficient financial resources. Interviewed experts stressed that some challenges faced by women entrepreneurs are not solely gender specific. However, given the complexity within sourcing support for a social enterprise, the pre-existing disparities between male and female entrepreneurs heighten the obstacles facing women when they enter the social enterprise environment.

The questionnaire findings confirm that many women aim to balance work and home life, but family issues often hinder their participation in entrepreneurial activities. Important obstacles impeding women, including those from vulnerable groups, in engaging with social entrepreneurship are the diverse social, cultural, and family pressures. Interestingly, these pressures can also be interpreted as strengths that distinguish women social entrepreneurs.

The most critical obstacles identified by all respondents relate to the lack of financial support and knowledge in social entrepreneurship. A majority of respondents express the need for additional knowledge and training, particularly in financial management, business plan development, social entrepreneurship fundamentals, financial literacy, and fundraising basics. According to the respondents, the most appropriate learning mode would be an online setting following a flexible schedule. The U.POWER project would consider this preference for organising training activities.

The U.POWER Consolidated Report revealed a lack of research and literature surrounding women in social entrepreneurship. The evolving landscape of social entrepreneurship further emphasises the need for dedicated research to understand and address the specific dynamics affecting women's engagement in this field. As awareness grows and gender equality becomes a priority, increased interest is beginning to shed light on the importance of women's contributions to social entrepreneurship and the potential benefits of supporting and empowering women in this context.

Overall, it can be concluded that despite the existing challenges, women continue to make significant contributions to the field of social entrepreneurship and there are many examples of successful female social entrepreneurs. Moreover, there is a growing interest and need for support in women's social entrepreneurship across U.POWER countries (Ireland, Latvia, Armenia, Germany, Italy, Spain and France).

“The information gathered serves as a valuable resource of information, providing insights into the obstacles, drivers and opportunities, and essential skills required to empower women in social entrepreneurship across diverse partner countries. Through studying this report, field experts, policy makers, and individuals interested or curious about social entrepreneurship can not only gain a better understanding of women in social entrepreneurship, but also determine the necessary actions to support them.” – Denize Ponomarjova, U.POWER Project Manager in Latvia (LECSA).



List of Interviewed Experts

Name, Surname	Organisation represented	Position	Date
Interviewed Experts in Ireland			
Lorna Cooney	Meath Local Enterprise Office	Senior Enterprise Development Officer	06.04.2023
Pat Kane	Reuzi	Founder	27.03.2023
Natalie Pavone	The Sustainable Life School	Co-Founder	04.04.2023
Interviewed Experts in Armenia			
Gevorg Poghosyan	Impact Hub Yerevan	Executive Director	28.03.2023
Silva Mesropyan	Individual consultant, trainer	Trainer, Educator	28.03.2023
Suren Mkhitarian	Association of Social Enterprises of Armenia	Chairman	03.04.2023
Gayane Simonyan	BeeLife	Executive Director	30.03.2023
Gohar Mnatsakanyan	Bohem Studio-Teahouse	Executive Director	03.04.2023
Marina Parazyan	Source Production	Executive Director	31.03.2023
Interviewed Experts in Latvia			
Regita Zeiļa	Social Entrepreneurship Association of Latvia	Executive Director	11.04.2023
Anita Kokarēviča	Rīga Stradiņš University/ Ltd Fel-Can	Lecturer/Co-founder	09.05.2023
Kristīne Verpēja	Reach for Change	Baltic Program and Partnership Manager	11.05.2023
Natālija Jermolajeva	OWA/ Correctly	CEO	03.07.2023
Liene Reine Miteva	Ligero.lv	CEO	06.07.2023
Interviewed Experts in Germany			
Stefanie Trzecinski	Kopf Hand und Fuss gGmbH	Founder & Director	27.03.2023
Carola Reifenhäuser	Beratergruppe Ehrenamt	Founder & Director	06.04.2023
Annika Brinkmann	Annika Brinkmann, Diplom-Designerin	Founder	18.04.2023
Interviewed Experts in Spain			
Liz Montero	OVS Consulting	Consultant, Expert on SE	10.04.2023
Ana Cobano	WONDERERS	CEO	13.04.2023
Yoselin Chicasaca	Yoselin Chicasaca Consulting	CEO and Trainer	18.04.2023
Interviewed Experts in Italy			
Carmelo Cutrufello	Ulisse	Legal Representative	12.04.2023
Muna Sigona	La Casa di Toti	CEO	17.04.2023
Vittoria Pompò	Coordinamento donne	Presidents	24.04.2023
Interviewed Experts in France			
Badr Jelil	Centrale Lille Institut	Educator-Teacher	17.04.2023
Domitille Gobbo	Mouvements d'Usages	Female Social Entrepreneur	09.05.2023
Ouarda Ladjal	O.LACOACHING	Expert in Female Training for SE	09.05.2023
Juliette Le Gouic	WILLA	Expert in Training Programme for Women SE	09.05.2023

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