



Fondation de France

# Gender Parity:

## Challenges, issues, and opportunities for foundations and endowment funds in France



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The authors extend their gratitude to all interviewees for their insightful comments and observations. Special thanks to **Réjane Sénac** (Research Director, Cevipof, CNRS/Sciences Po) and **Anne Monier** (Researcher, Philanthropy Chair of ESSEC) for their precious support throughout the study. Thanks also to **Marie-Frédérique Legras**, assistant to the Direction of Fondation de France for her role in data collection and to **Geoffrey Stucklin** for his careful translation.

# Editorial

The changing socio-political and environmental context over the past few years has highlighted the need for a thorough examination of the role, place and responsibility of philanthropy in responding to both local and global challenges.

In line with its purpose, the Observatory of Philanthropy of Fondation de France inaugurates today a new series entitled 'Philanthropy and Society' to start and contribute to this discussion and hone our understanding of the societal and environmental issues at hand. More than ever, we believe in the importance of understanding foundations and endowment funds' practices in light of the environment in which they operate.

In order to have a nuanced and thorough understanding of the matters at stake, the contribution of academic research is crucial. Accordingly, the Observatory of Philanthropy has chosen to collaborate with academics specializing in the fields relevant to each issue of this series.

The 'Philanthropy and Society' series opens with a groundbreaking study on gender parity in the philanthropic sector in France. Gender parity is closely related to cognate notions such as equality, diversity and inclusion, which are ultimately at the very heart of philanthropy. This study focuses on the governance of foundations, viewed as strategic decision-making bodies, and further analyzes how foundations address gender issues in their actions, internal functioning and organization.

We hope that this first issue and, more broadly, this series will feed into the already ongoing discussions in the philanthropic sector and will afford us the much-needed perspective to continue to strive together for a fairer and more inclusive society, and a more sustainable planet.

**Maja Spanu**, Head of Philanthropy and  
International Affairs – Fondation de France



**1**

**Context  
and approach**

Gender parity is a major tool to fight against gender inequality. At its core, gender parity describes a situation in which each sex is equally represented within given institutions, and it therefore invites to question the social component of gender roles<sup>1</sup>. In the words of Geneviève Fraisse, “gender parity is a goal as much as a tool, an end as much as a means”<sup>2</sup>. The issue of gender parity is tightly linked with the broader calls for equality and policies thereof. This notion came to the fore in the second half of the 20th century, thanks to the efforts of global women’s rights movements and organizations, and of governments, which enacted gender equality policies. The demand for gender parity stems from the change in politics of equality: from the recognition of equality under the law to proactive steps to eliminate discrimination and ensure de facto equality.

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<sup>1</sup> Sénac, Réjane (2008). *Gender Parity*. Paris: PUF, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Fraisse, Geneviève (2001). *La controverse des sexes*. (*The controversy of the sexes*) Paris: PUF, p. 319.

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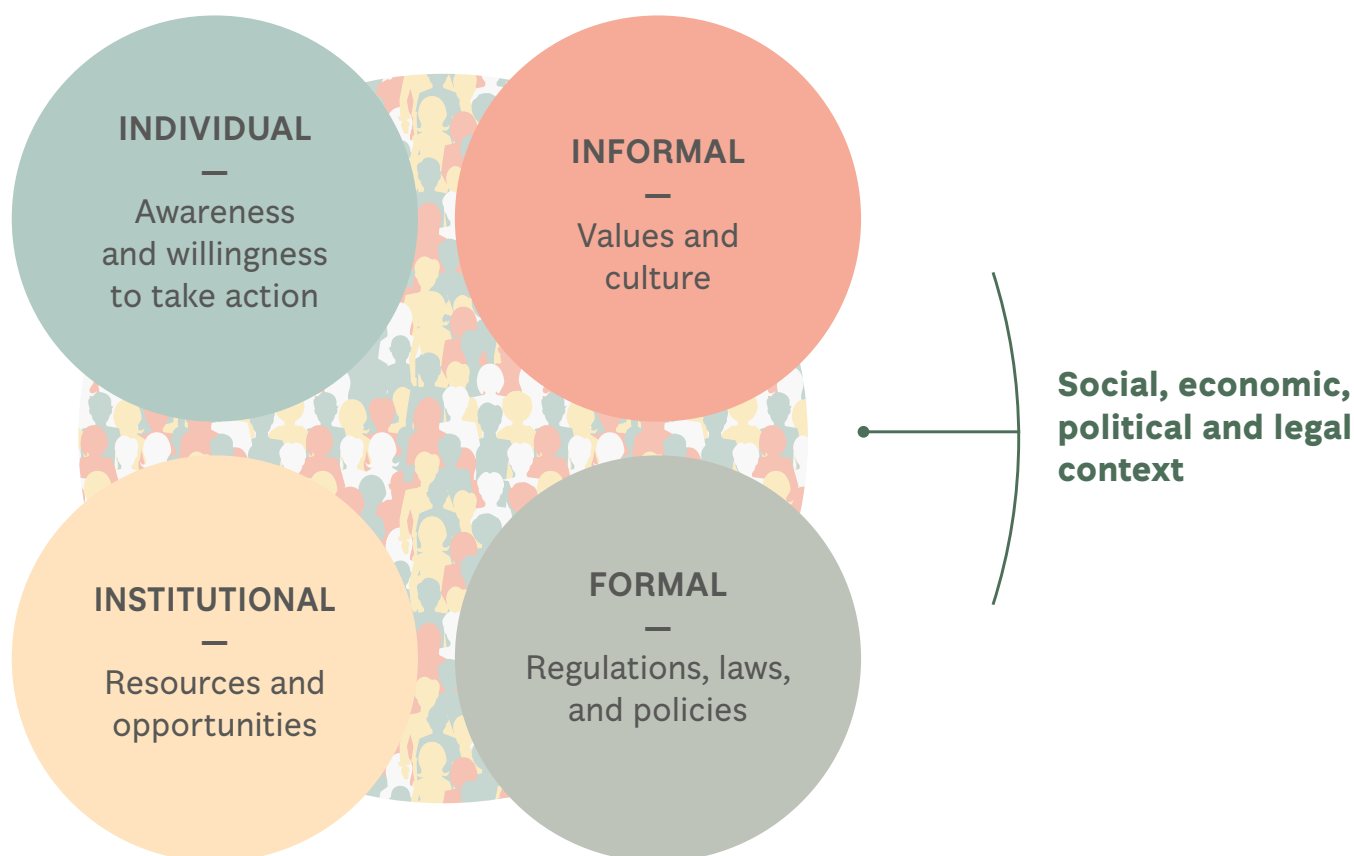
## 1.1. Gender parity, a matter of public interest

Though it is often expressed in numeral terms, gender parity is not limited to numbers<sup>3</sup>. It stands for a societal and institutional ideal. As both a practical tool and an objective for enacting gender equality, it also suggests a more equalitarian vision of the division of labor and power. As such, it aims to make society fairer and institutions more representative. Therefore, gender parity is integral to the public interest, which is the essential purpose of foundations and endowment funds (FEFs).

More importantly, this issue is crucial for their governance members, who are at the helm of their strategic direction.

The theoretical framework of gender parity used in this study builds on four dimensions<sup>4</sup>: Individual, institutional, formal and informal (see diagram below). These dimensions should not be considered separately, but rather holistically.

### The four dimensions of gender parity



<sup>3</sup> Dahlerup, Drude (2017). *Has democracy failed women?* Polity Press, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> This theoretical concept was designed on the basis of the survey's outcome.

The individual dimension captures both the awareness and willingness of individuals to take action. This can encompass the informal dimension whereby a group or organization shares a vision of gender equality and gender parity, more specifically. In this instance, gender parity represents a shared value, a component of the culture of a larger organization or group. The formal dimension includes rules, laws and policies that operationalize and enact gender parity. Lastly, the institutional dimension relates to the implementation of regulations, laws and policies and values, combined with the willingness of various actors and stakeholders who have resources and opportunities within a given institutional framework to take action. These dimensions are influenced by the overarching social, political and legal context in which they exist and operate.

When examining gender parity, one is inevitably led to analyze existing forms of gender inequality. This study will draw on four aspects<sup>5</sup> of gender inequality:

- **Vertical aspect:** Revealed by the barriers that prevent women from climbing the professional ladder (“glass ceiling”).
- **Horizontal aspect:** Due to the concentration of women and men in given jobs and roles, women are assigned tasks and roles with less impact on the decision-making process.
- **Symbolic aspect:** This results in a gap between institutional practices and values of equality in general, and of gender equality in particular.
- **Cultural aspect:** Due to the dissemination and reproduction of gender stereotypes, unequal values and practices in the workplace.

Addressing gender parity requires that we keep the various features of gender inequality in focus. Gender parity is therefore not only a quantitative issue, but also a qualitative one.

While gender equality has been widely studied and debated in many fields, especially in politics and the economy, it has not been comprehensively addressed in the context of FEFs<sup>6</sup>. This study examines the place of gender parity in FEFs in France, with a focus on their governance structures. It is based on an unprecedented collection of data from more than 500 philanthropic organisations and interviews with executives and boards members of FEFs.

**This study examines how governance structures fare with regard to gender parity and highlights different ways of implementing and discussing gender parity within and across foundations and endowments funds.** We conceive of this study as a preliminary examination of the issues related to gender parity in FEFs in France, and do hope that more discussions on this subject will take place.

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<sup>5</sup> The definition of these aspects is inspired by the work of Dahlerup, Drude (2017). *Has democracy failed women?* Polity Press.

<sup>6</sup> France Générosités published a study in 2022 on its members, whom some are foundations. <https://www.francegenerosites.org/ressources/etude-sur-la-parite-au-sein-des-membres-de-france-generosites-mars-2022/>

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## 1.2.

# Gender parity in France: Progress and challenges

Originally limited to some advocacy groups, the issue of gender parity has acquired a global scope and gained increasing legitimacy from 1990 to 2000. In France, several laws and public policies have been adopted to enhance female representation in a series of fields and industries. In 2000, for the first time, a bill was passed to improve gender parity in the political sphere<sup>7</sup>. This law mandates an equal number of female and male candidates in regional, municipal, senatorial and European elections. France thereby became the first country in the world to adopt mandatory gender parity rules for political parties in some of its elections. Some progress is made as a result of these measures: For instance, the ratio of female departmental councilors jumped from 13.8% in 2011 to 50% in 2015<sup>8</sup>. Today, half of the European deputies of France are women.

However, parity laws have not resulted in similar advances in all areas of political life and have even yielded a range of results for some elected positions and assemblies<sup>9</sup>. These uneven outcomes can be seen at two levels. First, some political parties still fall foul of this mandate. Second, the representation of women in strategic positions with decision-making power remains low. As stressed by the Haut Conseil à l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes (High Council for Gender Equality), "a systemic sexism persists at all levels in politics, which, in practice, stigmatizes women and hinders their action in office."<sup>10</sup>

Yet, calls for gender parity are not restricted to the political field. They also guide reforms seeking equal opportunities in the workplace, such as the 2011 Copé-Zimmermann Act and the Rixain Act passed 10 years later, at the end of 2021 (see diagram below).

### Legal provisions on corporate gender parity

#### Copé-Zimmermann Act 2011

- **Which article?** L.225-18-1
- **What purpose?** To introduce gender-balanced representation in boards of directors.
- **Which obligations?** Mandates a minimum quota of seats for men and women, amounting to at least 40% of the total in boards of directors.
- **Who is affected?** Business entities with more than 250 employees and a turnover of at least 50 million euros.

#### Rixain Act 2021

- **Which article?** 14
- **What purpose?** To extend the Copé-Zimmermann Act 2011.
- **Which obligations?** Mandates 30% quotas of women in executive positions and in management by 2027, to reach 40% by 2030.
- **Who is affected?** Companies with more than 1 000 employees.

<sup>7</sup> Women in the European Parliament (2019). European Parliament. Accessed June 19, 2022. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/fr/headlines/society/20190226STO28804/les-femmes-au-parlement-europeen-infographie>.

<sup>8</sup> Political parity (2022). *Public life*. Accessed June 19, 2022. <https://www.vie-publique.fr/eclairage/19618-la-parite-politique>.

<sup>9</sup> Women in the European Parliament (2019). European Parliament. Accessed June 19, 2022. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/fr/headlines/society/20190226STO28804/les-femmes-au-parlement-europeen-infographie>.

<sup>10</sup> Pierre-Brossolette, Sylvie et al. (2022). *How to achieve parity within municipalities and across communes: Impediments and levers*. Haut Conseil à l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes. Accessed June 26, 2022. <https://www.vie-publique.fr/rapport/283626-parite-au-sein-des-communes-et-des-intercommunalites-freins-et-leviers>.



From 2011, the Copé-Zimmermann Act successfully increased female membership in the boards of directors of large companies:

*“France is now the world leader in terms of female to male ratios in the boards of directors of large listed companies, with more than 46% of women in 2021[...] in addition, this ratio has more than tripled in France in 10 years.”*<sup>11</sup>

These results suggest that quotas are effective and can be pragmatic fixes to existing forms of injustice and inequality. Yet, at the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Copé-Zimmerman Act, the Delegation for Women’s Rights and equal Opportunities for Men and Women noted in a briefing note that *“the Act did not elicit the expected trickle-down effect.”*<sup>12</sup>; at the executive level, gender parity in small businesses and unlisted companies is still limited. While the Copé-Zimmermann Act is viewed as a net positive, Viviane de Beaufort and Martin Richer emphasize in a 2021 report that *“we must match the policy of quotas (top-down) with best practices (bottom-up).”*<sup>13</sup> Among other recommendations, the report urges the creation of pools of managerial staff at all levels with an adequate proportion of female candidates.

FEFs in France are virtually not affected by these laws. However, the experience of businesses and political parties since the introduction of these schemes can serve as lessons, road maps and examples in best practices. As Kenza Tahri, coordinator of the think-tank Terra Nova’s gender equality division, underlines:

*“Corporate foundations can import best practices regarding gender equality which were introduced in the largest companies: this means introducing quotas in governance structures (boards of directors, management committees), but also lighting a path for women to climb the corporate ladder, from the very moment they are hired. What is more, non-profits, as public-minded entities, must be exemplary.”*

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<sup>11</sup> Filleul, Martine et al. (2021) *“Briefing note (...) on the outcomes of the implementation, 10 year after its adoption, of the Copé-Zimmerman Act on the balanced gender representation in boards of directors and oversight committees.”* French Senate. Delegation on Women’s Rights and equal Opportunities for Men and Women, <http://www.senat.fr/notice-rapport/2020/r20-757-notice.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> De Beaufort, Viviane et Martin Richer. (2021) *«In favor of a quota of women in of company leadership positions»*. Terra Nova. [https://tnova.fr/site/assets/files/10486/terra-nova\\_pour-un-quota-de-femmes-dans-les-instances-de-direction-des-entreprises\\_080321.pdf](https://tnova.fr/site/assets/files/10486/terra-nova_pour-un-quota-de-femmes-dans-les-instances-de-direction-des-entreprises_080321.pdf).

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## 1.3.

# Gender parity and foundations: A challenge for gender equality?

Though gender parity has been discussed in a larger context, FEFs have rarely been part of this conversation. Despite this, several reports have broached the issue of gender equality in the social and solidarity economy (SSE). The Conseil supérieur de l'économie sociale et solidaire (High Council for the Social and Solidarity Economy) highlights that the not-for-profit sector has a high proportion of women: 69% of employees are women<sup>14</sup>. However, women hold 56% of managerial positions, 51% of executive positions, while 45% sit on the boards of directors and serve in senior administrative positions, and 37% are chairs<sup>15</sup>. Despite the high proportion of women in the field, a glass ceiling still hinders women in their progression to senior positions. According to 'ESS France', the French network for social and solidarity economy actors, men are twice more likely to occupy an executive position than women. Moreover, while gender parity in the SSE seems to be stagnant, the position of women is further compounded by vertical and horizontal forms of exclusion. Women frequently hold jobs with worse working conditions, and 41% of them work part-time.

These forms of gender inequality also impact FEFs: the share of women amongst salaried employees stands at 72.4% , while only 13% of them hold managerial positions. Moreover, women are paid on average 14.4% less than men<sup>16</sup>. In managerial positions, the wage gap widens to 21%. It is **then clear that the SSE and FEFs face a real challenge in terms of gender equality and parity.**

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<sup>14</sup> Conseil supérieur de l'économie sociale et solidaire (2021). "Gender equality in the SSE. Triennial Report 2021-2024". <https://www.economie.gouv.fr/files/files/2021/DP-rapport-egalite-fh-CSESS-2021.pdf>.

Figures in this report relate to associations, mutuals and cooperatives. FEFs are not accounted for.

<sup>15</sup> Observatory for Gender Equality in the Social and Solidarity Economy, ESS France (2019), Status quo of Gender Equality in the Social and Solidarity Economy. <https://www.ess-france.org/un-premier-etat-des-lieux-de-l-egalite-femmes-hommes-dans-l-ess>.

<sup>16</sup> Salaried employment in foundations and endowment funds in France (2022). French Center for Funds and Foundations. Accessed July 09, 2022. <https://www.centre-francais-fondations.org/ressources-pratiques/publications-du-centre/guides-et-etudes/2021-01-20-ess-france-etude-cff-exe-bd.pdf>.

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## 1.4. Framework of the study

The hybrid methodology of this study uses both quantitative data on the gender make-up of the boards of FEFs, and qualitative data from in-depth interviews with executives of FEFs.

Quantitative data relate to the gender make-up of the governance structure of three out of eight categories of legal entities in France: Public Benefit Foundations Corporate Foundations and Endowment Funds. Two-thirds of all FEFs fall into the three above categories. The composition of the governance of each legal status is famed by the distinct laws that govern these different statuses (see diagram below).

### Gender make-up of the governing bodies of the three legal entities examined

#### Corporate Foundations

##### Board of directors with:

- Founding members or founding members with employees (max. 1/3)
- Qualified experts (min. 1/3)

#### Endowment Funds

##### Board of directors (min. 3 members)

#### Public Benefit Foundations

**EITHER board of directors  
OR supervisory committee  
+ management board**  
(3 to 5 members appointed  
by the supervisory board)

**Board of directors /  
supervisory committee**  
(9 to 15 members, optimally) **with:**

- Founding members (max. 1/3)
- Qualified experts (min. 1/3)
- Ex-officio members or institutional partners if Government relations Commissioner is attending
- Optional members: employees, “Friends”, beneficiaries, sponsors, etc.
- Government relations Commissioner - optionnal (advisory capacity)

A sample of 1288 French FEFs was selected from the 2018 National survey on foundations and endowment funds<sup>17</sup> and from the updated census of the Observatory of Philanthropy, in order to include entities registered in France after 2018. Data on the boards of directors were collected in October and

November 2021 from information available on the websites of FEFs or in their activity reports<sup>18</sup>.

Of the 1288 FEFs in the initial sample, the collection yielded information on 520 FEFs, as shown in the table below.

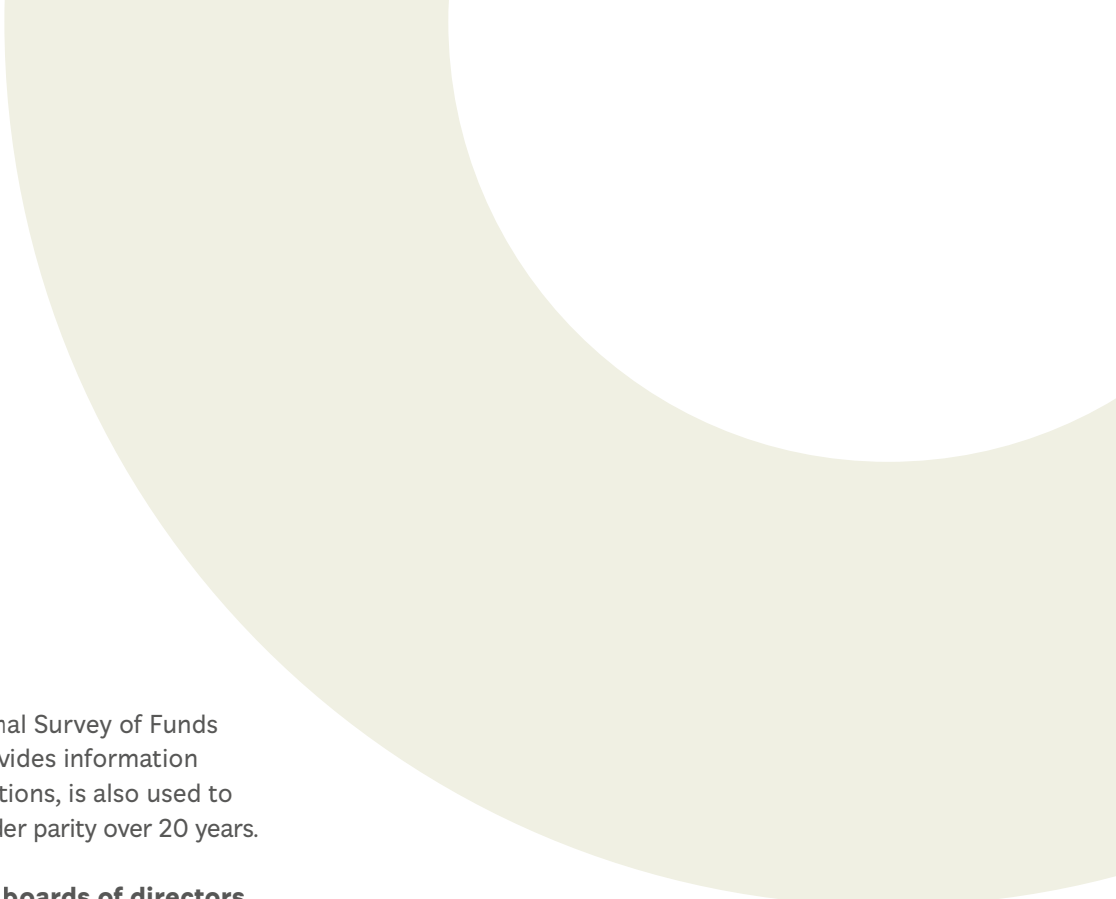
## Examined Sample according to legal status

Legal status	Number in France in 2021	Initial sample	Final sample
Corporate foundations	433	195	111
Public Benefit Foundations	642	408	246
Endowment funds	2 163	685	163
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3 238</b>	<b>1 288</b>	<b>520</b>

*Data from 111 corporate foundations were collected based on an initial sample of 195 corporate foundations. As of 2021, 433 corporate foundations were registered in France.*

<sup>17</sup> Observatory of Philanthropy, Fondation de France (2019). *National Survey Foundations and Endowment Funds*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition.

<sup>18</sup> The data used in the analysis is as follows: the number of men and women in governance bodies, the gender make-up for specific positions (chair, vice chair, treasurer, secretary) and information on the profile of foundations/endowment funds (year of creation, field of activity, expenditure, etc.).



The first edition of the National Survey of Funds and Foundations<sup>19</sup>, which provides information on 151 Public Benefit Foundations, is also used to benchmark the change in gender parity over 20 years.

**This survey considers that boards of directors have parity of representation when the share of women is between 40% and 60%.**

Once qualitative data were collected, two gender parity specialists and 19 executives or board members of FEFs were interviewed between March and June 2022<sup>20</sup>. The sample was selected to include FEFs with equal and unequal gender representation. Legal status, seniority, field of activity and location were also considered ensuring adequate sample diversity. The foundations, endowment funds and experts taking part in this study are listed in the annex.

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<sup>19</sup> Observatory of Philanthropy, Fondation de France (2001). *National Survey Funds and Foundations, 1st edition*.

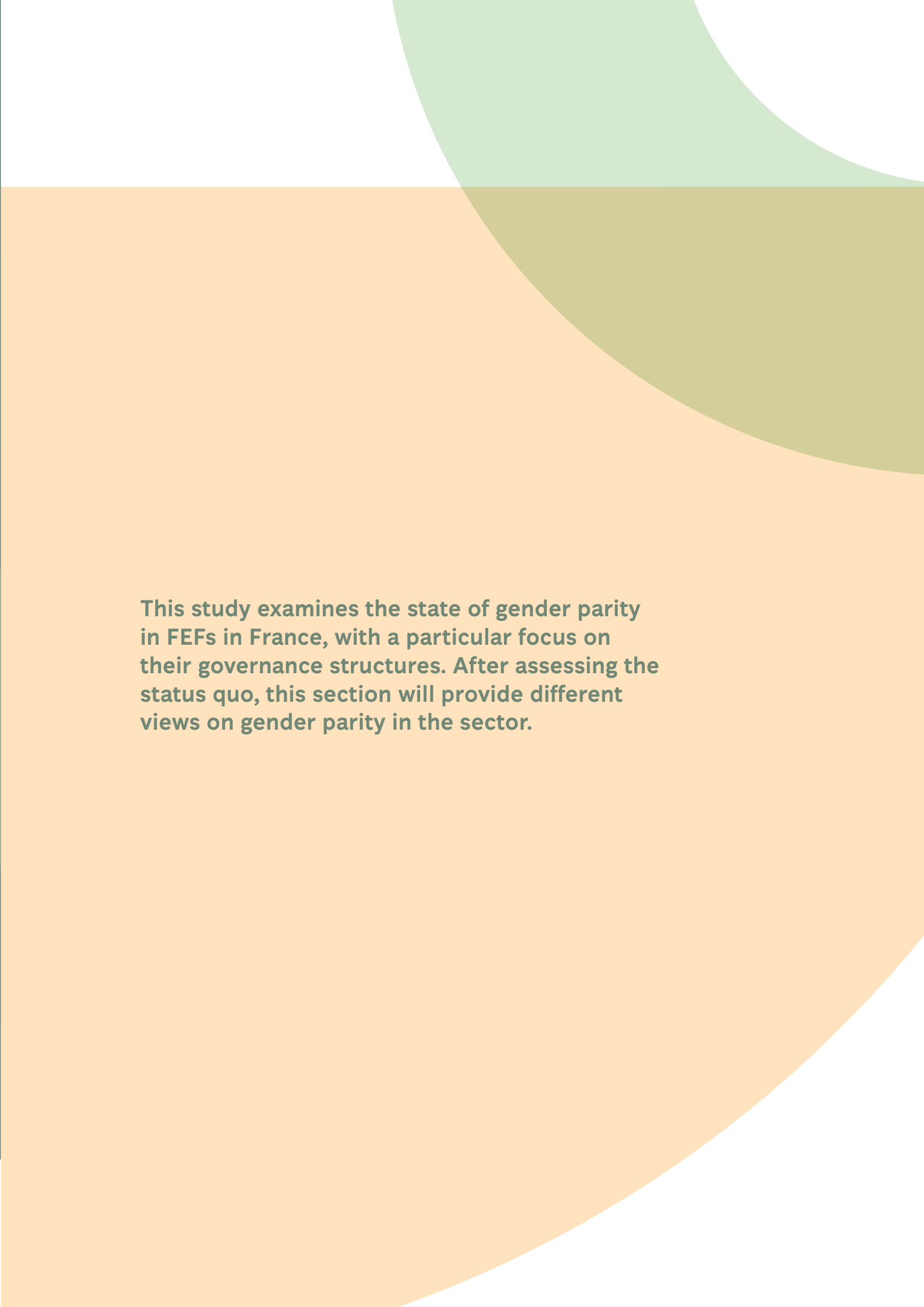
<sup>20</sup> Out of the 62 FEFs that we contacted, 19 agreed to participate. The 42 FEFs which were not interviewed have a 2/3 male to female ratio in their governance structures. The interviews were conducted by Hazal Atay, researcher at Sciences Po, Laura Corral, Anne Cornilleau and Adèle Pellet, members of the Observatory of Philanthropy. Some quotes are kept anonymous to protect the confidentiality of interviewees.

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2

**Assessing  
gender parity  
and philanthropic  
organizations**



**This study examines the state of gender parity in FEFs in France, with a particular focus on their governance structures. After assessing the status quo, this section will provide different views on gender parity in the sector.**

## 2.1. Gender parity in boards: An overview

### Only 1 out of 3 managers of FEFs are women

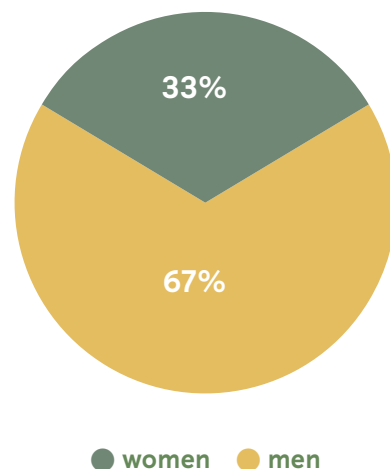
In general, women are considerably under-represented in the leadership of French FEFs: In total, **they make up one third of the boards examined in this study.**

This rate is much lower than that of other entities in the SSE, where women account for 45% of board members<sup>21</sup>. Women hold only 27% of all senior positions in FEFs' boards of directors. In addition, about 12% of FEFs have no women on their boards, while there are only 2% of boards without men<sup>22</sup>. Finally, in half of FEFs boards, there are fewer than two female members. This acute under-representation of women in FEFs reflects the vertical nature of gender inequality, which can be explained in part

by the interpersonal relationships of boards members, which play a major role during the renewal of terms, as highlighted by **Michel Enet**, president of Fondation OVE:

*“One of the main issue is that we, men, have more professional relationships with other men, and this partly explains why most applicants or recommended candidates are males.”*

**33% of women  
on the boards in FEFs**

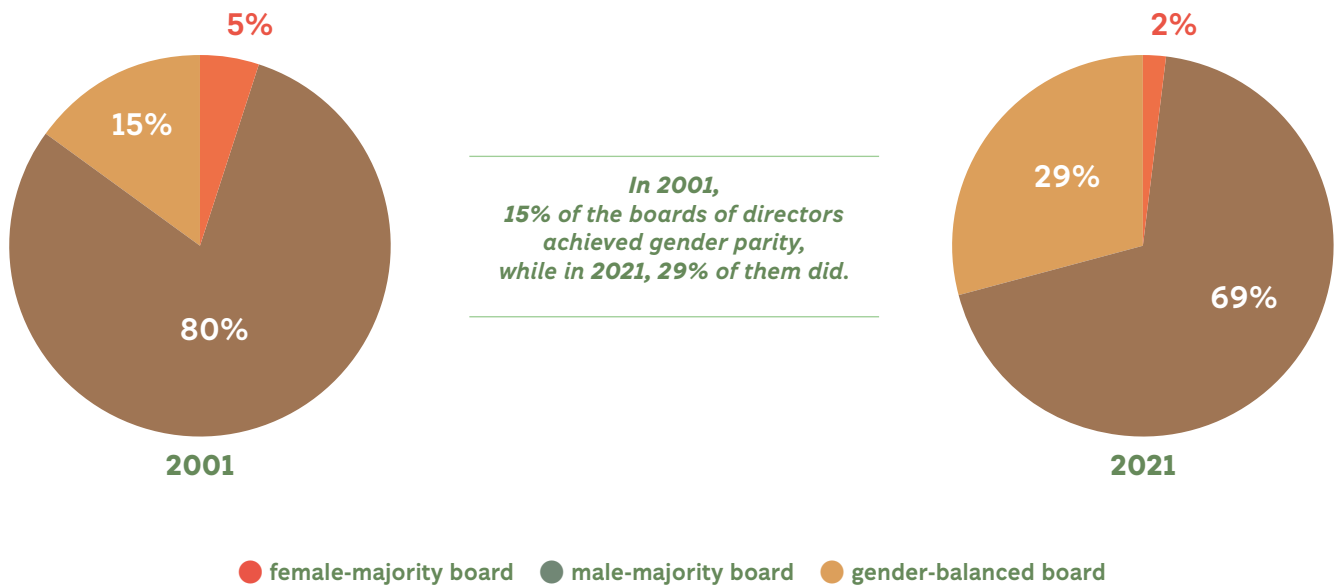


<sup>21</sup> Observatory for Gender Equality in the Social and Solidarity Economy, 'ESS France' (2019), Status quo of Gender Equality in the Social and Solidarity Economy. <https://www.ess-france.org/un-premier-etat-des-lieux-de-l-egalite-femmes-hommes-dans-l-ess>.

<sup>22</sup> FEFs with boards of directors with three or fewer members were excluded.

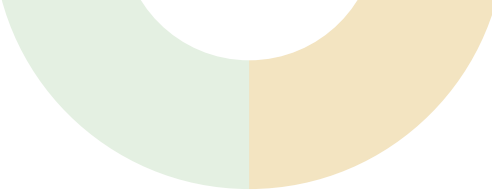


## Gender make-up of the boards of directors of PBFs in 2001 and 2021



### In 20 years, Gender Parity has made gains in Public Benefit Foundations

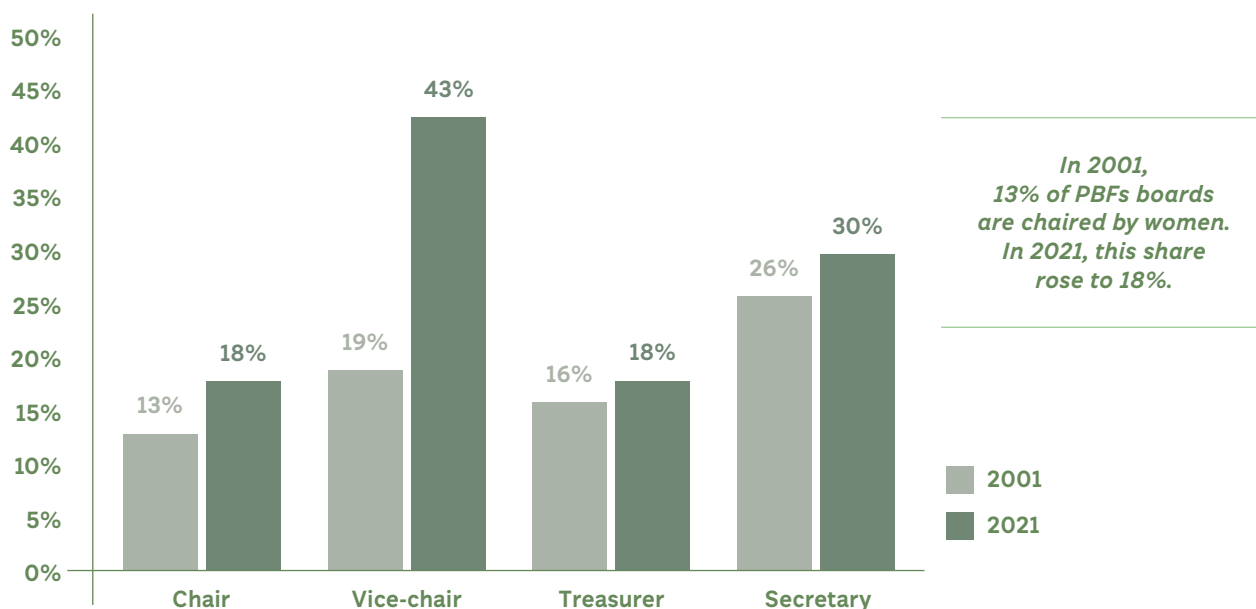
However, worthy of note is that in 20 years, the number of women has almost tripled in the boards of PBFs: While one in ten board members was female in 2001, the ratio now stands at 30%. These gains redounded positively to the gender balance of the boards of directors of these foundations. While in 2001, only 15% of the boards had gender parity, in 2021, 29% of them have equal gender representation.



Women also account for a larger share of various positions on the boards of directors, though there is some variation across positions. In particular, the position of vice chair has seen the most notable development: While just over 20% of vice chairs were women in 2001, 20 years later, 43% of PBF boards have a female vice chair. This progress is very likely due to foundations seeking a more gender balanced chairmanship.

However, though the ratio rose from 13% in 2001 to 18% in 2021, there still are very few female chairs. The position of treasurer has also seen modest gains. The gender imbalance in these positions reflects the horizontal nature of gender inequality.

### Trending share of women in various positions on the boards of directors of PBFs

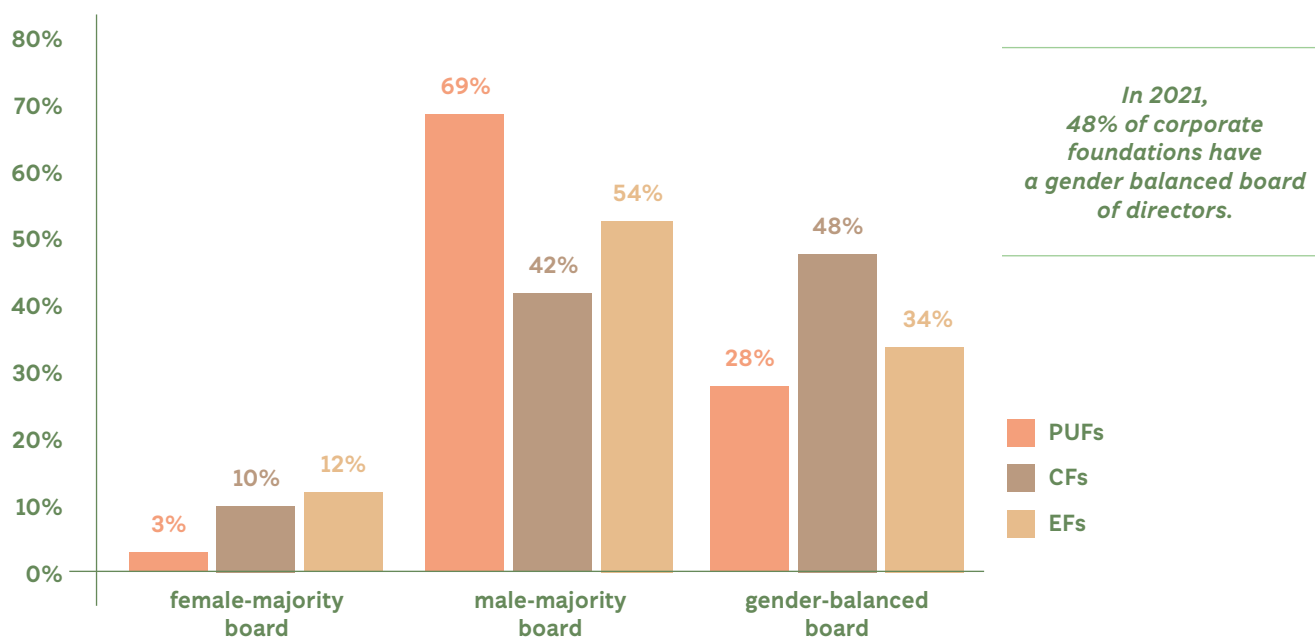


### Gender parity in corporate foundations is more common

In 2021, the gender make-up of the boards of directors of FEFs varied greatly across legal entities: 28% of the boards of PBFs are balanced, while about a third of endowment funds have equal representation. Corporate foundations stand out, as approximately half of them have achieved gender parity.

Boards of directors with a majority of men are found in more than two-thirds of PBFs (69%) and in more than half of endowment funds (54%).

## Boards of directors according to legal status in 2021



The series of gender equality laws that have been introduced since 2011, including the Coppé-Zimmerman Act mandating quotas in corporate governance, have opened the door to women in these bodies. Admittedly, this law regulates only some companies: those with more than 250 employees and with more than 50 million euros of turnover in the last three years (see diagram in 1.1).

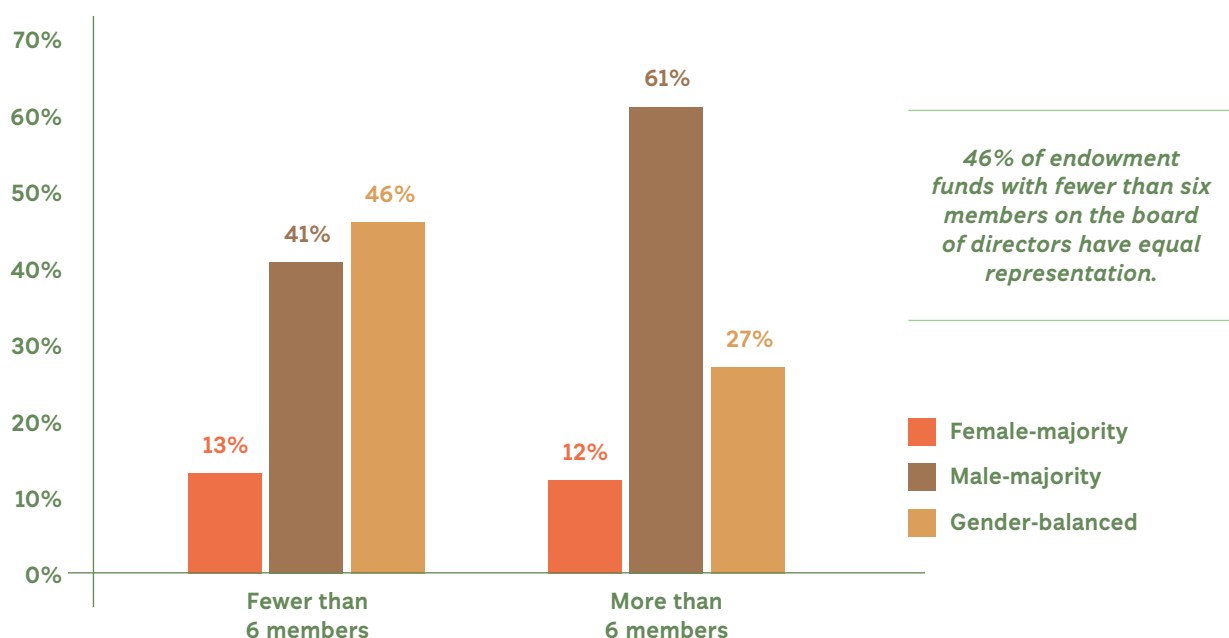
That corporate foundations are an outgrowth of this type of corporate structure is noteworthy. In the study sample, half of corporate foundations originate from companies bound by legal strictures.

## Boards of directors: the smaller, the more equalitarian

The size of the board of directors also affects the number of women members, especially for endowment funds and PBFs: The larger the board of directors, the less female representation. On the other hand, smaller boards of directors are more likely to be gender-balanced.

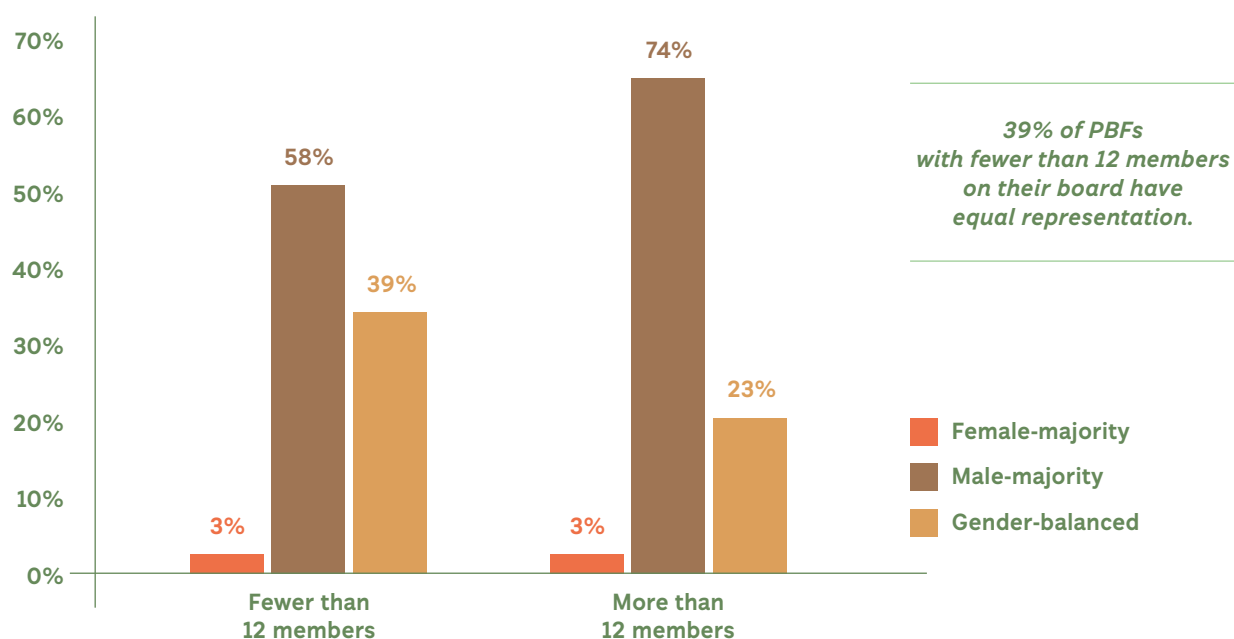
The size of the board is linked with the scope and financial means of FEFs. This observation also holds true for associations<sup>23</sup>, where the share of female presidents is smaller in larger entities. One could thus posit that entities with the most expansive boards of directors tend to have high stakes in terms of power and personal status, which could exacerbate gender inequality.

### Size of Endowment Funds Board and gender make-up



<sup>23</sup> National Observatory of the Solidarity and Social Sector(2019). Status quo of gender equality in the *social and solidarity sector*. <https://www.ess-france.org/un-premier-etat-des-lieux-de-l-egalite-femmes-hommes-dans-l-ess>.

## Size of PBFs boards and gender make-up



The correlation between a foundation's size and the gender make-up of its board seems to tally with the foundations' level of expenditure. This is especially true for PBFs. PBFs with disbursements of more than 10 million are less likely to be gender-balanced than other PBFs.<sup>24</sup>

### Some trends according to fields of activity

The examination of FEFs by area of activity also reveals major trends in the sector. In particular, the survey highlights the trend toward greater gender parity in FEFs, which work in arts and culture. On the other hand, FEFs that specialize in education

and training seem to have less balanced boards. It should be noted here that a large part of foundations dedicated to education and training that are active in higher education have men-dominated boards. The Foundations of Grandes Écoles constitute a prime example.

This quantitative review sheds light on the wider context of the state of gender parity in the governance structures of FEFs. It brings an additional and nuanced view to the second part of this study, which focuses on interviews.

<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that financial data are available for a limited number of foundations.

## 2.2.

### Crossing foundations' perspectives on gender parity

Interviews display a variety of views on what gender parity entails and refer to a number of related concepts that are key to understand this debate. This word cloud illustrates the main terms associated with gender parity:



It appears clearly that gender parity is polysemous. This notion is mainly associated with the idea of balance. Gender parity is also seen as part of broader issues such as non-discrimination, inclusiveness and diversity. Interviewees also found that gender parity is linked with leadership, responsibility, the willingness to take action and personal beliefs. While achieving

gender parity is seen as a long shot, most feel it is a desirable outcome. In most interviews, gender parity is not viewed as a static phase, but rather a dynamic process. Gender parity is only “*the first step*”, says Kenza Tahri, coordinator of the think-tank Terra Nova’s gender equality division.

## A matter of balance and equality

Interviewees present **their understanding of gender parity by referring in large part to notions of balance and equality**. Securing gender parity and equality in the governance of FEFs is seen as being a more truthful reflection of society and a positive practice overall, given the variegated perspectives that women and men can bring to leadership positions.

For **Jean-Louis Soulet**, president of the endowment fund Orphée:

*“We need all sensibilities, and perhaps the right balance between a feminine and masculine sensibility is needed to see what is essential and necessary to move forward. In my opinion, it is a matter of considering all opinions and experiences. I am completely in favor of gender parity, provided that it is justified by competence.”*

**Vincent Dennerly**, Director of the Fondation pour l’Enfance, explains why gender parity matters for FEFs.


*“The real challenge is to align the foundation’s strategy with the balance of skills that are needed to run the foundation. [...] At times, appointment issues [in the board of directors] are tied to what foundations are really after; it is less about traditional business skills than about making a commitment to a particular cause.”*

Gender parity is a two-way street, as **Jerome Deconinck**, director of Fondation Terre de liens, explains:

*“If there are more women, I sometimes think we should be inclusive toward men. Because, in my opinion, finding the right balance is what matters most.”*

However, **Dorothée Merville-Durand**, director of Fondation Hippocrène, suggests that the path to get there is strewn with obstacles.

*“The main barrier to gender quotas is that, in my view, it always feeds the suspicion that some women may not have been hired for their skills, but simply on account of their gender. However, I believe some progress has been made, even if it is still a far cry from perfection. When the idea of gender-balanced boards was raised, I was astounded to learn that directors were now required to have a degree backing their skills.”*



For **Christophe Vernier**, Secretary General of Fondation Crédit Coopératif, substituting skills requirements with gender criteria should be avoided.

*“We would perhaps do well to avoid prioritizing gender parity in the board, and only then looking for the available skills. Instead, we should select by skills and further rectify if the balance is not quite right. But, quotas can also speed up change in very skewed situations.”*

However, considering that women have historically been excluded from governance and from leadership positions, some interviewees suggest that if a meaningful gender balance is to be achieved, this should not imply including more men where women are well represented. One interviewee, for example, argued that, as the non-profit sector is women-dominated, it stands to reason that foundations which deal with issues primarily involving women would have predominantly female boards:

*“Gender parity is a good thing if it allows women to access positions they previously did not have access to. But if, in the future, we have to appoint men to the board of directors of the foundation because the law mandates it, it would set us back. We already have a female majority in our leadership, a 50-50 gender mandate would not sit well with us.”*

While the notions of equality and balance are widely referred to when discussing gender parity, the interviews highlight a range of ways and positions to interpret them in the context of gender inequality.

## A matter of inclusiveness and diversity

Several interviews point to a **cross-cutting approach to gender parity that goes beyond gender equality and that must also promote inclusiveness and diversity**. In this context, **Aurélie Amalou**, Director of Crédit Agricole Réunion Mayotte Foundation, brought to light the fact that *“gender parity is not only about gender but also about profiles.”* Similarly, **Heidi Giovacchini**, Director of Fondation Georges Boissel, elaborated on this idea:

*“If gender parity is reduced to a political dogma of absolute parity, it loses its purpose. It must be a tool to ensure inclusiveness and diversity. Gender parity does not mean always drawing female candidates from the same socioeconomic pool. The question of gender parity and equality is one of many issues that must be addressed in a more holistic way. It is part of the fight against discrimination of all kinds, whether they’re based on gender, social class, disability, skin color, age, or other factors.”*

Diversity must also capture the various stakeholders in the efforts of FEFs, including the intended beneficiaries. As **Odile Gilliot**, Head of the Leroy Merlin Corporate Foundation points out:

*“We [the foundation] take a broader view and never reduce gender parity to the equal representation of men and women. This is but one of many considerations, and perhaps it is not even the most important one. Our vision of diversity is to include very diverse profiles. As the foundation helps a range of disabled and/or marginalized residents, we try to reflect the diversity of the communities we serve.”*



Another interviewee notes that age diversity in governance structures also constitutes an issue:

*“Governance structures are often filled with middle-aged or older men, and young people are excluded or seen as mere beneficiaries of the foundation’s work. Age balance is a problem that still besets the governance structures of today’s foundations. Yet, it mostly stays off the radar.”*

The rural-urban divide is also brought up. **Jerome Deconinck** (Fondation Terre de Liaisons) argues that

*“parity should not stop in Paris. We need to include rural areas in order to bridge the power gap.”*

In the interviews, diversity is generally considered enriching, as it brings a wealth of fresh and complementary perspectives on issues at hand. Inclusiveness and diversity appear to be particularly crucial to improve work performance, as **Dorothée Merville-Durand**, from Fondation Hippocrène, mentions:

*“I am convinced that diversity at all societal levels and in all areas yields the best results. With only men or women, the performance is suboptimal.”*

Conversely, another interviewee said that the dearth of social diversity adversely impacts gender parity:

*“In some spheres, biases and cultural barriers still have strong purchase and continue to hinder access to education, to some professions, and more mixed environments sometimes, too. It is still a real issue.”*

The interviews made it clear that gender parity intersects with other principles such as diversity and inclusiveness based on racial, ethnic and national origins, age, social background, religion, etc. **It appears that gender parity is as much about diversity and inclusiveness as it is about equality and balance.**

## Vertical and horizontal dynamics

Interviewees indicate that there needs to be a conversation about gender parity at all levels, positions and professions. Still, they also suggest that these discussions are by and large a rare occurrence in the not-for-profit sector. The issue of gender parity is therefore not limited to governance alone. It also affects the way FEFs and the sector as a whole operate. This matter is as horizontal as it is vertical. In this context, **Christophe Vernier** (Fondation Crédit Coopératif) notes:

“[...] Women in foundations are over-represented compared to the general SSE sector. But there often is a glass ceiling that prevents them from rising through the ranks, as our current situation illustrates[...] I manage a team composed only of women, who are very diligent and hardworking. So I certainly hope that, just like me, they will one day have the promotion they justly deserve. As we are a corporate foundation, the team is an employee of the founder. This situation is therefore not related to the foundation’s status per se, but rather to the history of the bank’s gender parity.”

The unequal and stereotype-based distribution of positions emerges from the quantitative analysis of the governance structures of FEFs. For the three legal entities under examination – PBFs, corporate foundations, endowment funds – the share of female chairs is significantly lower than the share of female administrators of FEFs<sup>25</sup>. Across the three entries, about one in five boards of directors is chaired by a woman. While 24% of the boards of corporate foundations and endowment funds have a chairwoman, only 18% For PBFs boards do.

### Share of women and men in various positions of the boards of directors

		Endowment funds	Corporate foundations	PBFs	Total
Chair	Share of women	24%	24%	18%	22%
	Share of men	76%	76%	82%	78%
Vice-chair	Share of women	n.s.	n.s.	43%	34%
	Share of men	n.s.	n.s.	57%	66%
Treasurer	Share of women	39%	n.s.	18%	32%
	Share of men	61%	n.s.	82%	68%
Secretary	Share of women	52%	n.s.	30%	45%
	Share of men	48%	n.s.	70%	55%

n.s.: insignificant figures.

**24% of endowment funds have a chairwoman, while 76% have a chairman**

<sup>25</sup> Several positions exist with different responsibilities, notably the chair and treasurer, which are mandatory components of PBFs. The other positions of vice chairman and secretary are optional, but the vast majority of PBFs boards use them. Corporate foundations must appoint one chairperson and endowment funds must have a minimum of three members on their board.

The position of treasurer is also heavily male-dominated in PBFs. Women are as unlikely to be treasurer as they are to be chair (18%). Women are much more represented in this position in endowment funds (39%). Overall, there are women treasurers in just over a third of all boards of directors.

The vice chairmanship is more frequently occupied by women in PBFs, with almost 43% of women as vice-chairs of boards of directors<sup>26</sup>. Finally, women are also more likely to hold the position of secretary. Across all entities, 45% of boards have a female secretary, while they are more represented in endowment funds (52%), and slightly less so in PBFs (30%).

Quantitative and qualitative metrics show that gender equality in governance does not necessarily imply a balanced distribution of power. **Jérémie Chomette**, CEO of the Danielle Mitterrand Foundation, puts it this way:

“A gender-balanced governance is not tantamount to an equal share of power. The decision-making power may still rest with one or a few men. Despite a 50/50 representation, women may still have to put up a fight and run the gauntlet of discrimination.”

Moreover, while it is true that women are more often represented overall when the board is gender-balanced (50% of vice chairs; 45% of treasurers; 59% of secretaries), they remain largely under-represented in the chairmanship, with 29% of chairwomen in gender-balanced boards. It is therefore clear that women are mostly kept away from the most senior position, even in gender-balanced boards. **Elisa Braley**, who chairs the High Council on the Solidarity and Social Economy’s Gender Equality Commission, says that

“Gender parity in form does not equal gender parity in substance. We should pay close attention to women’s positions in governance and also among employees.”

It therefore appears that gender imbalance can be manifest both at vertical and horizontal levels: It does not only concern women’s under-representation in boards, but also the unequal distribution of power and roles.

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<sup>26</sup> It should be noted that the position of vice chair does not exist in all boards of directors: 58% of PBFs have one.

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## An external and internal matter

FEFs work in a social environment rife with many forms of gender inequality, and, more broadly, discrimination against women. The types of inequality that are apparent in FEFs are thus a reflection of more general practices.

**Jérémie Chomette** (Fondation Danielle Mitterrand) explains that the issue of gender parity has an internal and external dimension:

*“There is the big picture and the context of foundations. At the general level, there is a lot of research being done, and the literature on the issue of gender parity is growing by the day. This is why I think we need to revert to politics and the broader issue of the patriarchy. The issue of gender equality must be addressed within this framework. Only then, should we implement action plans specific to foundations, which would likely require external support to be successful.”*

**Heidi Giovacchini** (Georges Boissel Foundation) also said she felt that the current social context generated roadblocks:

*“The issue of gender parity hearkens back to the issue of women’s rights. Some advances notwithstanding, women’s rights are unfortunately not a topical issue in France. Progress is too slow.”*

Asked about progress and achievements in gender equality and balance, **Heidi Giovacchini** adds:

*“Why don’t we see gender parity or equality everywhere? This is because this issue is not yet rooted in our overly conservative culture, unlike in Scandinavian countries or, paradoxically, Spain, which is ahead of us, especially when it comes to the issue of violence against women.”*

Another interviewee points to the effects of unconscious biases regarding male and female roles in society:

*“A number of enablers can help to dispel the oft unconscious obstacles stopping young girls from choosing careers in the digital sphere: For example, schools should foster a culture of equality from an early age between girls and boys.”*

While training may help to overcome these biases and reduce gender inequality, **Cristina Lunghi**, CEO of the endowment fund Arborus, cautions training programs against reproducing stereotypes and prejudices:

*“All too often, women are still viewed as unfit to be leaders. This is because the norm is set by men for men. Women are therefore offered specific training or coaching. What’s problematic, is that instead of promoting and legitimizing a new form of leadership, women are taught to lead like men. In my opinion, this is no way to shift our culture from the patriarchy to a world of equality. This is also what Arborus is about. Through the GEEIS label (Gender Equality & Diversity for European & International Standard), we put forth a monitoring and formative process with a view to gradually move toward a system of equality and inclusion.”*

Throughout the interviews, it therefore was stressed that advances on gender issues are closely tied to a profound societal sea change that must be replicated within FEFs.



## A matter of leading by example and seeking consistency

While FEFs are influenced by the context and culture in which they operate, the interviews show that they have **a major role to play in bringing about change toward gender parity and equality, in their work and social environments alike.**

During interviews, this topic was often seen through the lens of leading by example: *“FEFs can set an example and be role models.”* (Bernard Jambon, president of the endowment fund Égal Accès). Charities, being public minded in essence, should meet this leadership requirement. *“Foundations are treading carefully on these issues. We cannot act in the public interest with an all-male board of directors; it would make no sense.”*

**Christophe Vernier** (Fondation Crédit Coopératif), added that FEFs can play a role in advocating for gender parity and equality. All FEFs, regardless of their area of activity, can work on this issue:

*“We certainly have a role to play in terms of influence and advocacy. Some foundations see the gender issue as an end to be pursued, and, as such, they strive to protect women who are victims of violence or to defend women’s rights everywhere and for all. Foundations which operate in other areas can incorporate gender issues in a cross-cutting fashion via gender-based requirements in project planning. The same goes for climate or other major social challenges.”*

Role modeling is not only symbolic, but also transformative in nature. **Jérémie Chomette** (Danielle Mitterrand Foundation) says that

*“Both philanthropic and political foundations can lead by example, through their own actions and practices. [...] Foundations must play a role in supporting all those who struggle for their own emancipation. To effect a societal sea change, they have to support a cultural transformation.”*

On top of the issue of leading by example, being consistent is also crucial for FEFs because *“[a foundation] has a social purpose, so we must align it with society.”* (Cécile Suffren, Executive Director of the EF Habitat Alternatif Social). Gender equality and parity are consistent with this requirement. Fondation Hippocrène, which is dedicated to young people and Europe, is a case in point. *“Equality, especially between men and women, is one of the fundamental rights of the European Union.”*

For many interviewees, setting the example and being consistent are principles that should also be extended to partnerships and projects supported by FEFs: *“We also reflect on these issues with our partners, [...] we support specific actions that promote diversity and gender balance. As in companies, these actions foster equality in general, by changing mindsets and representations about diversity and its value. So for me, seeking consistency and alignment seems self-evident.”*

*“For foundations, to set gender-based quotas or criteria without holding themselves and the projects they support to the same standards can be rather counter-productive. We must create and sustain a culture. Otherwise, these ideas are just mechanisms, mere fads.”* (Jérémie Chomette, Fondation Danielle Mitterrand).


Interviewees agree that as entities promoting the public interest, **FEFs must set an example** in their processes and actions.



**3**

# **Acting further for gender equality**





This study shows that a shift toward gender equality is both crucial and multi-faceted. The issue of gender parity and equality underpins, among other aspects, individual and collective arrangements on shorter and longer terms, as well as cultural and practical change. It is therefore necessary to have a nuanced understanding of the realities in which this issue is embedded.

## 3.1. Main insights

**Four major lessons emerge from quantitative and qualitative analyses, and can be drawn upon to navigate toward gender parity and equality:**

1. Women are under-represented in the governance of FEFs (boards have 1/3 of women) and there is a strong imbalance in board positions (22% of chairwomen, 45% of female secretary).
2. Corporate foundations tend to have more gender-balanced boards, due to quotas under the Copé-Zimmerman Act. However, they still suffer from an imbalance across positions (1/4 of chairwomen).
3. As entities dedicated to the public interest, FEFs have a duty to achieve gender parity. In this respect, gender parity is inseparable from the requirements that philanthropic entities must meet in terms of setting an example and seeking consistency. Accordingly, FEFs should promote diversity and inclusiveness, not only in the governance, but also in their organization, planning and efforts.
4. It appears that FEFs do not sufficiently share information about, discuss and enact gender-positive measures. This prevents a more general awareness, as well as effective change on issues related to gender parity, inclusion, diversity and equity.

If awareness is a prerequisite for change, it is also and above all, *“a matter of action”*, as **Elisa Braley**, Chair of the High Council on the Solidarity and Social Economy Gender Equality Commission, emphasizes.

Based on the survey, the following diagram describes tentative actions conducive to gender parity, divided in five major functional steps. These steps are mutually reinforcing and not prescriptive. Furthermore, they can be implemented simultaneously.



## Transformative action cycle toward gender parity in FEFs





## 3.2. Key proposals

**Building on existing resources and reports and guided by the findings, this study identifies the following proposals to achieve and go beyond gender parity:**

- **Promote recurring discussions on these issues within FEFs, as well as philanthropic groups and networks**, for instance, by creating a platform to discuss gender parity, diversity and inclusion, through fora of exchange, training programs, awareness-raising actions, information pages, guidance on best practices and other useful resources.
- **Ensure that sex-disaggregated data is regularly collected**, shared and discussed internally by FEFs, philanthropy groups and networks. Based on this data, they could define and implement action plans to achieve gender parity, diversity and inclusion, while providing progress updates.
- FEFs should **support the creation of training programs on gender, diversity and inclusion** to train and raise awareness among management, employees and volunteer teams, including members of boards.
- **Establish application processes promoting diversity** within boards.

### Further steps

- Promote gender parity, diversity and inclusion in employee and volunteer recruitment processes.
- Make commitments by signing charters, applying for specific labels and participating in French and European platforms dedicated to gender parity, diversity and inclusion (see Resources).
- Where relevant, include gender parity, diversity and inclusiveness in selection criteria for project leaders and partners.
- Include metrics related to gender parity, diversity, inclusion in sector labeling frameworks.

## Useful resources on gender parity

This study builds on previous studies on gender equality and parity in the SSE and companies. A range of resources can be brought to bear on the issue of gender parity, and, more generally, diversity:

- **Gender audit:**

An inventory on gender by the European Institute for Gender Equality: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/methods-tools/gender-audit>

- **Best Practices:**

A collection of recommended actions in favor of diversity by Les Entreprises pour la cité: <https://www.charte-diversite.com/bonnes-pratiques/>

- **Gender equality:**

A practical guide for VSEs-SMEs published by le Laboratoire de l'égalité: [https://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/guide\\_egalite\\_tpe\\_pme\\_2021.pdf](https://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/guide_egalite_tpe_pme_2021.pdf)

- **Labels for Gender equality in the workplace:**

AFNOR: <https://certification.afnor.org/ressources-humaines/label-egalite-professionnelle-entre-les-femmes-et-les-hommes>

- **Diversity label:**

Created by the French government, the Diversity label captures diversity in all shapes and forms and is accessible to companies, organizations, ministries, public institutions and local authorities: <https://travail-emploi.gouv.fr/emploi-et-insertion/label-diversite>

- **Label Gender Equality – European & International Standard (GEEIS):**

International label on the issue of gender equality created by the endowment fund Arborus: <https://arborus.org/label/>

- **Expertes:**

A database of experts produced by EGAE (D'égal à égale): <https://expertes.fr/>

- **Gender Equality Network:**

A European network of foundations coordinated by Philea to encourage mutual learning on and a better understanding of gender issues, and to promote the use of gender perspective throughout the work of foundations: <https://philea.eu/how-we-can-help/collaboration-and-networking/gender-equality-network/>

- **The Diversity Charter:**

Charter for any employer: Large companies, SMEs/VSEs, not-for-profit organizations, public institutions, local authorities... Drafted by Les Entreprises pour la cité: <https://www.charte-diversite.com/>

- **Guide of best practice for the Solidarity and Social Sector:**

Conducted by the Conseil supérieur de l'économie sociale et solidaire (High Council for the Social and Solidarity Sector): [https://www.economie.gouv.fr/files/files/PDF/2017/guide\\_bonnes\\_pratiques\\_ess.pdf](https://www.economie.gouv.fr/files/files/PDF/2017/guide_bonnes_pratiques_ess.pdf)

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## List of interviewees<sup>27</sup>

### Members of foundations and endowment funds

- **Aurélie Amalou**, Director of the **Crédit Agricole Réunion Mayotte Foundation**
- **Jérémie Chomette**, CEO of the **Danielle Mitterrand Foundation**
- **Jérôme Deconinck**, Director of **Fondation Terre de liens**
- **Vincent Dennerly**, Director of the **Fondation pour l'Enfance**
- **Michel Enet**, President of **Fondation OVE**
- **Odile Gilliot**, Head of the **Leroy Merlin Corporate Foundation**
- **Heidi Giovacchini**, Director of **Fondation Georges Boissel**
- **Stéphane Godlewski**, Director of the **Fondaher**
- **Laetitia Gourbeille**, Director the **SNCF Corporate Foundation**
- **Bernard Jambon**, President of the endowment fund **Égal Accès**
- **Cristina Lunghi**, CEO of the endowment fund **Arborus**
- **Dorothée Merville-Durand**, Director of **Fondation Hippocrène**
- **Jean-Louis Soulet**, President of the endowment fund **Orphée**
- **Cécile Suffren**, CEO of the **endowment fund Habitat Alternatif Social**
- **Christophe Vernier**, Secretary general of **Fondation Crédit Coopératif**
- **Isabelle Verrecchia**, Head of the **M6 Group Corporate Foundation**


### Gender equality Specialists

- **Elisa Braley**, Chair of the High Council on the Solidarity and Social Economy's Gender Equality Commission from 2015 to 2022
- **Kenza Tahri**, coordinator of the think-tank Terra Nova's gender equality division

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<sup>27</sup> This list only includes the names of members of foundations and endowment funds who agreed to have their names mentioned in the appendix of the report. For the other foundations and endowment funds interviewed, we do not mention their names in respect of their anonymity.

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