



EmpowerMap

MINI-REPORT

MAPPING ORGANISATIONS SERVING
ECONOMICALLY VULNERABLE WOMEN IN
FRANCE, POLAND, ROMANIA AND SPAIN



France



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Citizenship and
Equality Programme.



Foundation



EmpowerMap

EmpowerMap is a joint project of the European Women's Lobby (EWL) —the largest umbrella organisation of women's associations in Europe— and the Orange Foundation.

The goal of the project is to gather information about grassroots women's organisations in Spain, France, Romania and Poland which have on-the-ground programmes aimed at the socio-economic empowerment of vulnerable women.

This mini report is based on empirical data collected by Hedvig Berntell, from March 2017 to October 2017 in France, on behalf of the European Women's Lobby and the Orange Foundation. The collected data were drawn from desk research, in-depth and semi-structured interviews and a free online survey in French.

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Introduction

Women and the Digital Divide

Today, in a world where more people have cell phones than toilets, basic digital skills are essential for a vast number of activities ranging from simple communication to finding decent employment. But even in the most developed regions, including throughout Europe, women are less likely than men to have these skills, putting them at a severe disadvantage from an economic perspective.

For women who are already in situations of economic difficulty because of poverty, lack of education, their immigration status, or surviving violence, a digital skills deficiency only increases a woman's vulnerability. The digital skills gap creates an additional barrier to seeking information, communicating with support networks, and finding a job.

The Orange Foundation's Women's Digital Centres

The lives of vulnerable women, whether they are in Africa or Europe, can be improved by learning digital skills and gaining access to information and communication technology. Telecommunications company Orange has recognised this and devoted part of the work of its charitable foundation to providing grassroots women's organisations with the means to empower vulnerable women by teaching them digital skills.

The scope of Orange's Women's Digital Centres Programme has been ambitious with hundreds of Centres being opened globally. However, the Orange Foundation is limited in its ability to be impactful by the fact that it does not have a comprehensive sense of the needs of the women it aims to serve with its Centres, nor an understanding of which grassroots organisations are the most successful at actually enabling women's empowerment.

Knowing more about the needs of the economically vulnerable women in its operating countries, as well as more about the grassroots organisations which work with these women, will allow the Orange Foundation to make more informed decisions about which organisations they choose to partner with, and which groups of vulnerable women would be the most positively impacted by their training programme.

The EmpowerMap Project

In response to this need for information, this six-month project provides a mapping of the needs of vulnerable women and the practices and capacities of grassroots organisations which assist them, in four Orange operating countries in Europe, (France, Spain, Poland and Romania).



Tapping into the European Women's Lobby's network of over 2,500 member organisations, this project illuminates the various issues and struggles that women in situations of economic difficulty face across diverse countries, how service-provision organisations assist them in their journey to empowerment, and how digital education has the potential to help them become independent.

This information will enable the Orange Foundation to make better-informed and more strategic choices about which kinds of organisations and which groups of vulnerable women can be best served by the Orange Foundation's 'Women's Digital Centres' Programme.

The European Women's Lobby

Comprised of 2,500 members, the European Women's Lobby (EWL) is the largest umbrella organisation of women's associations in Europe with 25 years of experience promoting the participation of women's organisations at the EU level and in designing and leading campaigns with its members across Europe.

The European Women's Lobby has strong national members in the four selected countries, all of whom serve as a hub for dozens of grassroots organisations working with diverse groups of vulnerable women, in different ways. Each of the four members represents the voice of women in the country and is staffed by experts who have a deep understanding of the local, regional and national economic and social contexts in which women live, as well as best practices for overcoming obstacles to empowerment and independence.

The European Women's Lobby is also known for its proprietary feminist mapping research methodology, which it debuted in 2015 with a ground-breaking ten-country study of the needs, experiences and profiles of women social entrepreneurs (WEstart). This best practice methodology has been continually refined over the course of the past two years, as the EWL has undertaken additional country mappings at the request of the governments of Belgium and Luxembourg. Using research tools that have been crafted by a group of international experts and successfully used to gather data on over 1,200 women and organisations to date, the EWL has a unique ability to quickly and efficiently gather data that would otherwise be inaccessible.



Background

In metropolitan France, as well as Guadeloupe and Martinique, men earn more money compared to women with the same education level, regardless of the level of education they have obtained¹. The participation in the labour market is also higher for men (60.9%) compared to women (51.6%). Women tend to work less if they have no higher education, more than one child or live outside of the Paris area². This is due to the centralisation of job opportunities in the Paris region and also the lack of child-care services for younger children in rural parts of France³.

Women represent the majority of higher education students, both in metropolitan France and in Guadeloupe and Martinique, but remain underrepresented in technical and digital education. 65% of the French population have access to a computer at least once a week, however, on the other side of the spectrum, 20% had never used a computer⁴. Women also seem to use computers to a lesser extent than men.

French social rights include paid maternity leave during 16 weeks⁵. Contraceptives are subsidised, and abortion is legal during the first trimester and is 100% covered by health insurance⁶. There is a state-funded, income-based unemployment scheme as well as a welfare benefit, Revenue de Solidarité Active (RSA)⁷. RSA is for people with a French residence permit who are unemployed or with a monthly income lower than 500 euros. In order to receive RSA you must take part in a social reintegration plan, for example, by looking for work. The income of the whole family is considered when applying for this benefit which sometimes discourages women's return to employment, and also complicates things for women victims of domestic violence.

Over recent decades, there has been an increasing feminisation of immigration in France⁸, especially from non-Arabic Africa and north China⁹. Non-registered female migrant workers are especially vulnerable as they lack formal rights in relation to their employer and often perform under-paid or dangerous work, or are forced into prostitution¹⁰.

¹ INSEE, 2017; Demougeot, 2017; Naulin, 2016.

² Collet, R. & Legros, D. (2016). Dynamics of female labour force participation in France, *Applied Economics*, 48:30, 2807-2821

³ Séchet, R., David, O., & Quintin, P. (2001). Les familles monoparentales et la pauvreté. *Les Travaux de l'Observatoire national de la pauvreté et de l'exclusion*, 2002.

⁴ Deroin, V. (2010). Diffusion et utilisation des tic en France et en Europe en 2009. *Culture chiffres*, 2,(2), 1-12.

⁵ ameli.fr/assure/remboursements/indemnitees-journalieres/conge-maternite 2017-07-15

⁶ LOI n° 2014-873.

⁷ Périvier, H. & Silvera, R. (2009). Généralisation du RSA : rien à signaler sur les femmes ?. *Travail, genre et sociétés*, 22,(2). 155-158.

⁸ TEF Édition 2017, INSEE references. Femmes et hommes, l'égalité en question, édition 2017 - Insee Références.

⁹ Cattelain, C., Lieber, M. Saillard, C. & Ngugen, S. (2005). « Les Déclassés du Nord », *Revue européenne des migrations internationales*.

¹⁰ Kim, Y. (2016). Mobile Phone for Empowerment? Global nannies in Paris. *bMedia, Culture and Society*. Vol. 38 (4) 525-539.



Many of them work in service work such as domestic work or childcare, and they often live with their employers which restrains their possibility to negotiate working rights like limited working hours. French sociologist Jules Falquet points out how immigration reinforces a gender-stereotypical sexual division of work where migrant women end up working in service or as prostitutes¹¹.

Muslim women have especially low status in the French society. They are often perceived as a threat against women's autonomy and the separation of religion and state (la laïcité)¹², but their low status also reflects France's unequal relationship with its former colonies and protectorates¹³. Unemployment among women with immigrant parents descending from Maghreb (Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco) was higher than among women without immigrant parents, something that is likely due to racial discrimination¹⁴. Women whose parents descended from Maghreb were also less professionally active during their childbearing years.

Responsible for the Government's work for gender-equality is the Secretary of the State, Marlène Schiappa. Recently applied policies aim to improve the economic situation of women and increase the gender-balance in every socio-professional group. One such policy obliges companies to have a strategic plan for gender equality and requires that women make up at least 50% of company boards.

Best practices for using digital skills to facilitate empowerment in France

According to a study about digital empowerment and its effects on migrant women's employability that was conducted in a number of European countries, women were more likely to benefit from digital empowerment programmes if they got a certificate at the end of the programme which allowed them to demonstrate their skills to others¹⁵. The researchers point out that the ICT training provided by NGOs also increased women's social network, their social capital, and their civic skills, which in turn increased their employability. Unemployment trainings provided by the public job centre (Pole Emploi) seemed to have a stronger effect on the return to work for unemployed people with only secondary education or less, compared to people with higher levels of education¹⁶.

¹¹ Falquet, J. (2006). Hommes en armes et femmes « de service » : tendances néolibérales dans l'évolution de la division sexuelle et internationale du travail. *Cahiers du Genre*, 40,(1), 15-37.

¹² Murray, R. (2016). Political Representation of ethnical minority women in France. *Parliamentary Affairs* 69, 586-602.

¹³ Wing, A-K, Smith, M-N. (2006). Critical Race, Feminisms Lift the Veil?: Muslim Women, France and the Headscarf Ban.

¹⁴ Boutchenik, B., Jérôme Lè, J. (2017). Les descendants d'immigrés maghrébins : des difficultés d'accès à l'emploi et aux salaires les plus élevés. Les descendants d'immigrés maghrébins: des difficultés d'accès à l'emploi et aux salaires les plus élevés.

¹⁵ Garrido, M., Rissola, G., Rastrelli, M., Diaz, A., & Ruiz, J. (2010). Immigrant women, e-skills, and employability in Europe: The case of Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, and Spain. Technology & Social Change Group, University of Washington, Seattle.

¹⁶ Crépon B., Ferracci, M., & Fougère, D. (2012). Training the unemployed in France: How does it Affect Unemployment Duration and Recurrence? *Annals of Economic and Statistics*. No. 107/108, pp. 175-199.



Mapped Organisations and their Programmes

The survey was sent out to French non-governmental women's organisations that were focusing on the socio-economic empowerment of women in metropolitan France.

Ten organisations took part in the study, out of which five organisations were interviewed. Seven of the participating organisations were only based in Paris or its suburbs, with the remaining representing other parts of France.

Out of all of the organisations, 66% had a yearly budget of more than 100,000 euros. Most of the organisations were small with three or fewer employees which meant that they depended to a large extent on volunteers (44% had between 7-10 volunteers that came every week). Because of this, most organisations did occasionally have to cancel activities.

88% of the organisations estimated that most of their employees had a basic digital competence and were able to use a smartphone, tablet or computer to write a text, look for information or write e-mails. Additionally, most organisations had access to internet (100%), computers (77%), laptops (55%), and printers (88%).

The most common services provided by the organisations were legal support, as the service-users often were women who were victims of trafficking, prostitution and violence against women, or migrant women in the process of seeking asylum or residence permits. Other services provided by the organisations were professional preparation training, literacy education, and support in order to access social rights and healthcare.

Professional preparation entailed everything from CV writing to vocational training. Some of the organisations also provided workshops concerning self-esteem. In one organisation, the programme for professional reintegration focused on self esteem and digital skills and the women also created their own newspaper.

Another organisation, which works to support and facilitate the reintegration of prostitutes, stressed that *"you cannot separate socio-economic empowerment from the total impact of general support"*, meaning that all practical and social support might have an empowering effect.

In a community-based organisation for African women, the members supported each other, for example, by providing each other with French literacy education and after school assistance for school children.

Many of the organisations worked with women with multiple problems which required different kinds of support. One organisation, for example, has a multi-professional team consisting of health professionals, a lawyer and a psychologist. Other organisations helped



the women to get in contact with external support, for example, a medical doctor or a job centre. Many of the organisation were open for women who sought urgent help in relation to partner violence, which meant that the women came when they needed it. Two of the organisations also have shelters for the homeless women they serve.

A majority of the organisations spent at least 25 hours/week or more on their socio-economic empowerment programmes. 55% of the organisations supported more than 100 women every year, 33% supported less than 25 women and 11% of the organisations supported between 11 and 25 women every year. Most of the organisations worked during several years with the women they supported.

Organisations measure the success of their programmes in different ways: through the number of women who become socially and financially independent, return to work or to education, the level of autonomy of the person before and after the various workshops, progress made learning French, improved health, or pursuing a legal process after being a victim of violence.

The Situation of Vulnerable Women in France

The organisations that took part in the study estimate that the most common situations of vulnerability that the women they serve find themselves in are being single parents (77%), immigrants (77%) and being socially isolated (88%). The most common obstacles that prevented women from obtaining employment were lack of skills in the French language, domestic violence, lack of self esteem and that they were women with an immigrant background that couldn't use their prior professional or educational experience in France.

Roughly a third of the women served by the organisations had only primary-education or less; about 50% had a high school diploma and the rest had started higher education. Two organisations worked with women with higher educational levels and digital skills than many of the other organisations.

The organisations estimated that 40% of the women they serve were born in France and 51% were born outside of Europe. An additional 6% of the women are from European middle income countries (such as Romania, Bulgaria and Albania); this was the key population served by organisations that focus on violence, prostitution and human trafficking.

In total, 60% of the women are homeless or living in temporary shelters.

Many migrant women find themselves in homelessness when they arrive in France, especially if they lack community and contacts in France. The organisations interviewed stress that this increases their vulnerability to physical and sexual violence as well as other crimes. The director of one organisation pointed out how *“violence against women is often the cause that generates different kinds of vulnerability such as social isolation, high-risk*



pregnancies, STIs such as HIV, single parenthood, mental health problems, substance abuse and migration, as many women becomes refugees in order to escape violence”.

Being a victim of violence also affects women’s economic situation negatively as they might have been absent from work due to the need to seek out care or as a result of being forced to live in a women’s shelter. Women might have to pay for legal costs in relation to a lawsuit, which means that they end up with big debts.

The female victims of prostitution and human trafficking that are served by two organisations which specialise in this topic, are to a large extent non-European women, without formal work-permits in France. One of these groups pointed out how not having formal papers often keeps women in prostitution and under the control of their pimp. Another explains;

“The women we help have been or are still prostitutes. Most of them come from poor countries, such as Nigeria, and arrive in France without family or contacts. They do not know how to get housing or to see a social worker. This, in combination with a very low level in the French language, and psychological as well as physical injuries, makes them vulnerable”.

A large part of these organisations’ work is, therefore, to provide legal support to the women so that they can obtain asylum, work permits, and other legal documents. This population of women tend to have only undertaken primary education, and many also have problems with substance abuse and mental as well as physical health problems.

The organisations working on prostitution estimated that between 80% and 90% of the women served are homeless, something that aggravates their difficulties to leave prostitution.

Having been a victim of violence, prostitution, having been outside of the labour market for a long time, or not being able to write or read are aspects that increase the lack of confidence of the women as well as their vulnerability.

Lack of confidence as an obstacle to becoming economically independent was an aspect mentioned by a majority of the organisations who took part in the study.

One interviewed organisation, which works with literacy education, points out that all administrative aspects, such as applying for social benefits or filling out a pay cheque require literacy, and often a minimum of digital competence as well.

During an interview, a representative of this organisation relayed the story of a woman who had been served by the organisation, who was finally able to cash her checks at the post office by herself, thanks to the fact that she had learned how to read and write via French literacy courses. The independence she gained as a result of her literacy was a source of great pride.



The director of another organisation, tells the story of another woman, who came to France as a refugee from southern Africa, travelling by boat over the Mediterranean sea, and had been living on the streets of Paris for six months, during which she had often been abused.

The director relates:

“She took part in our professional reintegration programme and was able to find a job in construction. She participated in the construction of a municipality building, and she told us how proud she felt how as she slowly built up her confidence again.”

Other women also suffered from vulnerability due to lack of employment possibilities or low wages. For example, many of women served by an organisation focusing on entrepreneurship, live in rural areas of France where many jobs in the agriculture sector have disappeared. A representative from this organisation notes: *“A majority of women we serve work as cleaning ladies and their salaries are often too low for their living expenses. They also work very difficult hours that are not in line with the children’s school hours”*. This representative also points out that unemployed women do not have access to full-time childcare for smaller children, which hinders this group from taking part in trainings and courses that are a part of their programmes.

Case studies

- **Entreprenre au Féminin Bretagne**

The organisation started in response to the fact that many entrepreneurship programmes were not adapted for women. For example, women often needed help improving their confidence in order to become entrepreneurs. A large part of their programme is therefore built on group activities and workshops, as Entreprenre au Féminin Bretagne points out that the strengthened network is one of the key factors that actually helps women to find work or build their enterprise.

The organisation Entreprenre au Féminin Bretagne works with women with higher education compared to many of the other organisations included in this study. The women served find themselves in financial difficulties because of geographical isolation due to living in the countryside of Brittany, having been away from work during parental leave, or because they are single parents.

During the interview with a representative of Entreprenre au Féminin Bretagne, she told a story about a woman who had started a social enterprise who had put her business on pause during two years of parental leave. When she wanted to restart her enterprise after her leave ended, she struggled to find financial support. The fact that she had chosen to be away from work during her parental leave was frowned upon by many of the financiers. The woman got help from the other women at Entreprenre au Féminin Bretagne who mobilised to support her, and in the end she got financial support from a banker who had heard her story.



The organisation provides educational programmes with psycho-social and economic support, they have regular workshops and breakfast meetings, and they also work in schools talking about gender-equality and promoting female entrepreneurship.

- **Amicale du Nid (ADN)**

This organisation aims to search out women and other people in prostitution on the street in order to offer them help with everything from legal and social support, to information and health care, both if they want to continue in prostitution, and if they want to leave it. They accompany the women who want to leave prostitution through their process of becoming totally socially and professionally reintegrated.

A part of the programme aiming to socially and professionally reintegrate women consists of professional and skill-building workshops, for example, tailoring workshops led by social workers. The organisation also provides French literacy classes, help with job applications and support in writing CVs.



ADN has about 20 women in every workshop of its' professional reintegration training which last six months. A representative of the organisation notes, *“For the women working there, it’s a great support because they can be proud of what they do. They have social workers working with them, so they get used to the codes of the working world. They have to work in teams and be on time, skills they will use in future jobs”*.

ADN also has shelters for the women they serve. However they do not have enough space for all the women who need it. This is a significant obstacle to social reintegration, as many of the women are forced to stay in prostitution because they are homeless. ADN has local centres both in Paris and its suburbs and in Toulouse, Grenoble, Lyon, Marseille and Montpellier.

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- Equipe d'Action Contre le Proxénétisme - EACP
- Entreprendre au Féminin Bretagne
- Femmes pour le Dire, Femmes pour Agir - FDFA
- Mouvement du Nid
- Ligue des Femmes Irlandaises pour la Démocratie - LFID
- Institut en Santé Génesique - ISG
- Du côté des femmes



Interviews

- Amicale du Nid - ADN
- Entreprendre au Féminin Bretagne
- Institut en Santé Genesique - ISG
- Du côté des femmes
- Association de Femmes Franco-Africaine à Paris -AFA P



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