

# WOMEN CSO LEADERS FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE

HOW TO SUPPORT FEMINIST  
LEADERSHIP IN EUROPE

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# WHAT WAS THE PROCESS?

We surveyed 148 women in leadership roles in civil society in Europe  
25 bilateral interviews

Feminist methodology: based on lived experience; supportive and caring; seeking to transform systems; transformative  
50 lightning coaching sessions

We held two focus groups to discuss the findings so far and get deeper into the stories and recommendations



(YOUR)

POWER WITHIN



(OUR)

POWER WITH



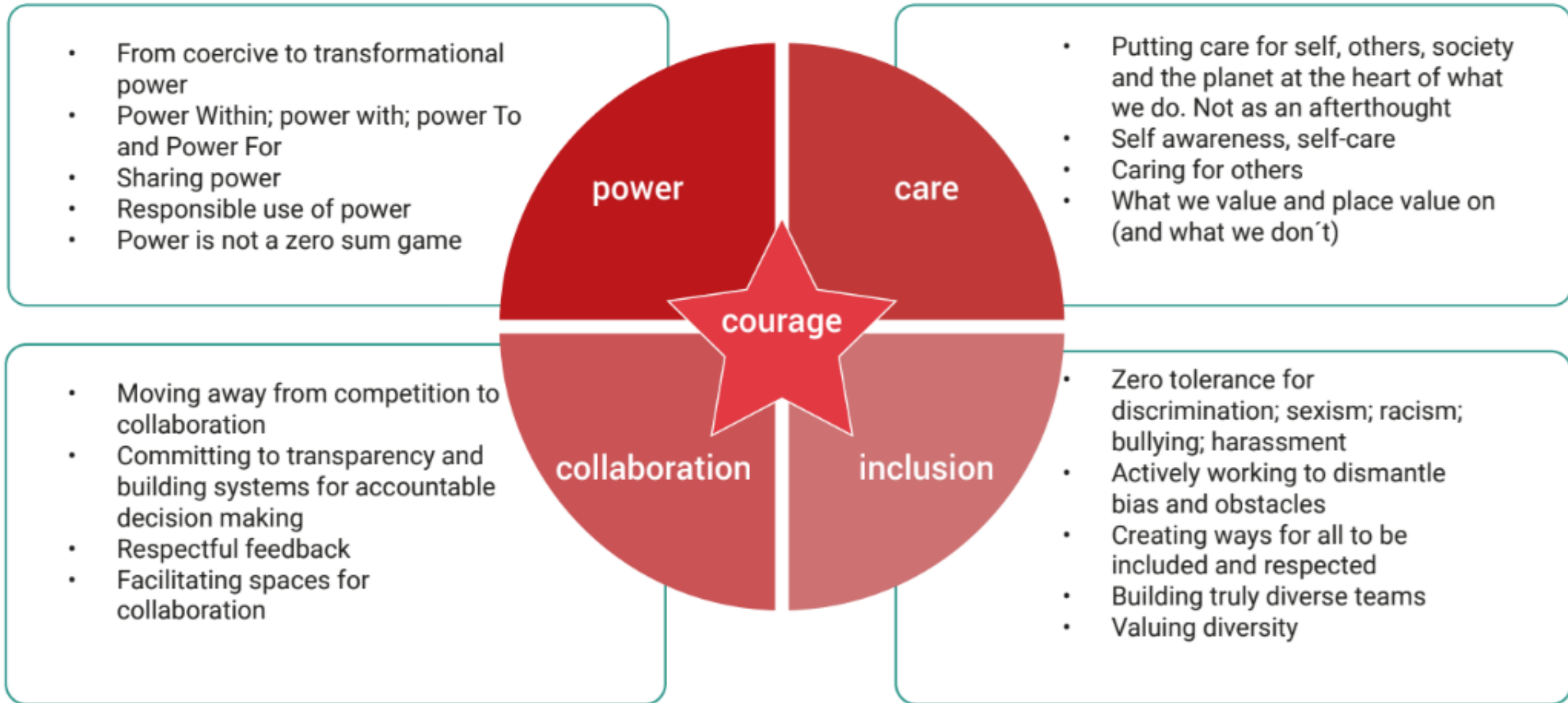
(BRIDGING SYSTEMS)

SHIFTING POWER





**Figure 1. The five dimensions of feminist leadership according to Joanna Maycock.**



# WHAT HAVE WE FOUND SO FAR?

Committed, filled with purpose and drive...

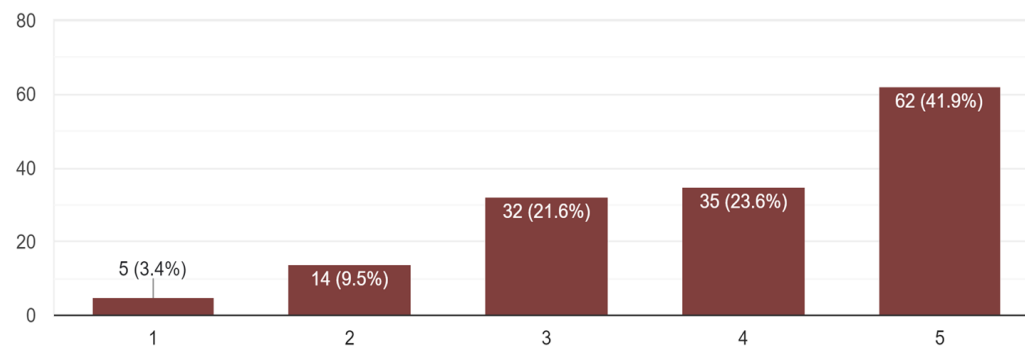
But exhausted and burned out

No time for innovation, systemic thinking and creative space for rethinking organisational and leadership culture

# DUTY OF CARE?

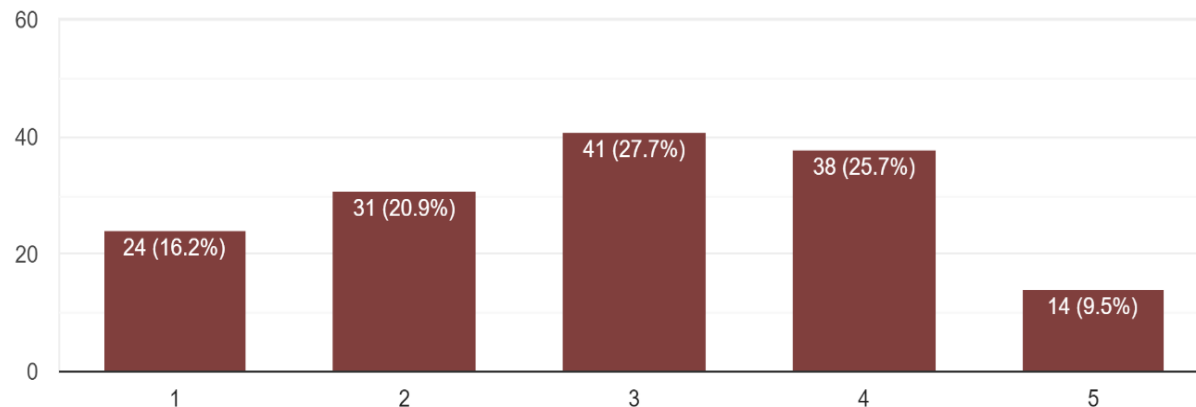
I work overtime to finish my work

148 responses



I manage to get through my to-do list on a weekly basis

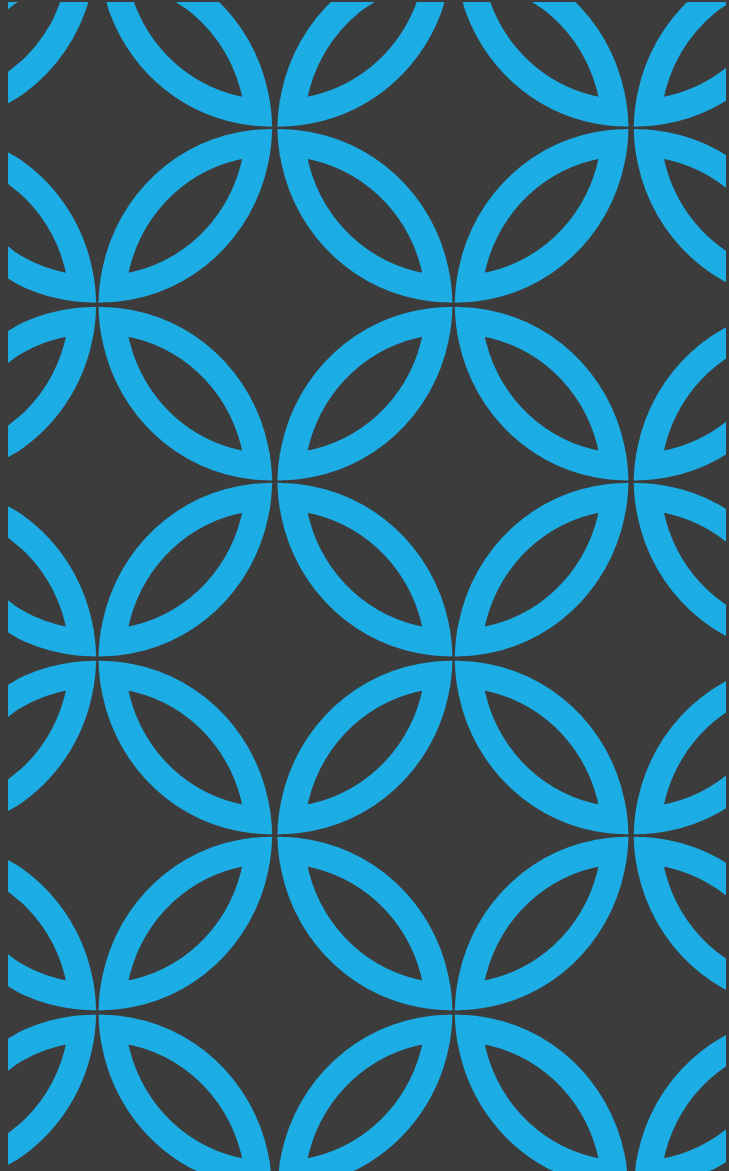
148 responses



Only 25% are calm and relaxed at work most of the time.

50% of them feel depleted after a workday and 63% work overtime to finish work.

Most women with children feel they are made to choose between their professional and personal lives, and they are unanimous in saying that household chores is what tips them over the edge.



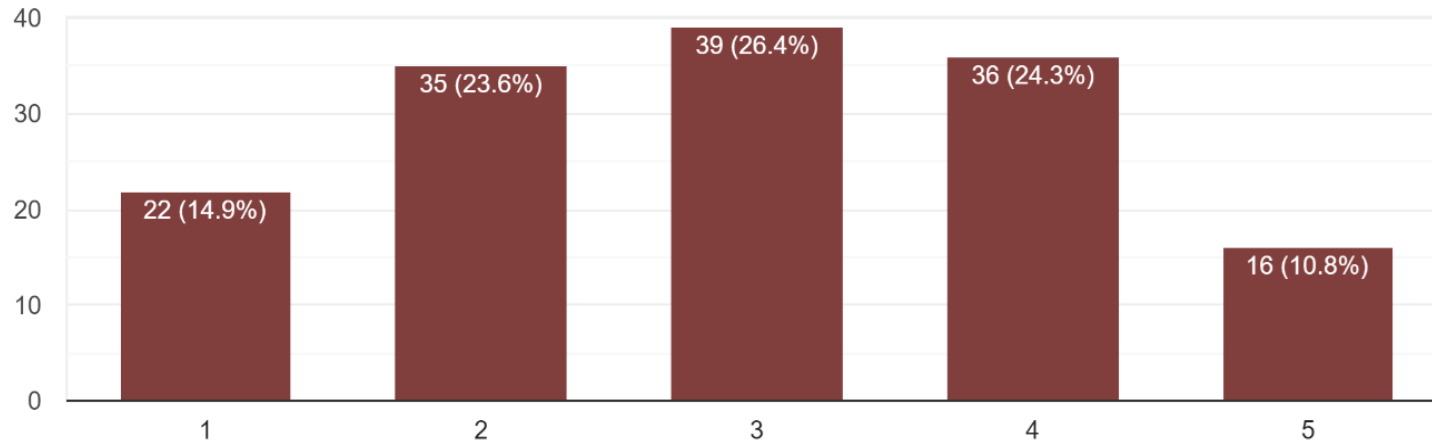
“I want BETTER work life balance so how do I care LESS in order to say NO to things?”

How can I focus on achievement AND well-being at the same time?”

# WELLBEING AND HEALTH

I look for my words or lose my train of thought during the week

148 responses



Around 70% of respondents say they feel happy & healthy at the moment.

However, when asked if their work stands in the way of self-care, 70% of them confirmed this is the case.

50% of them exhibit signs of pre-burnout, in the form of insomnia or losing their train of thought.

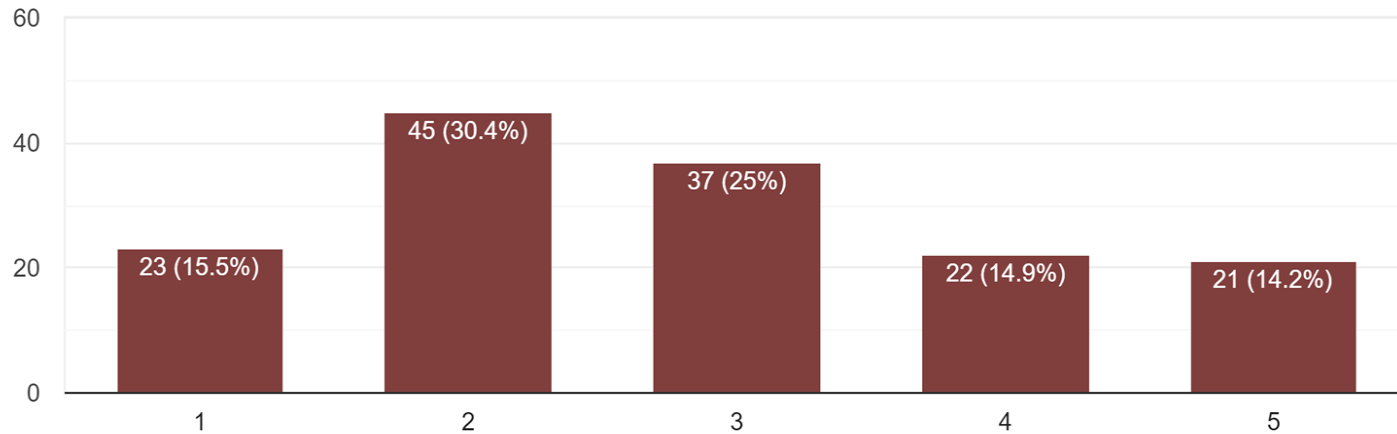
To our open question on menstrual, reproductive and menopause most respondents said that no one had ever asked them about that and its impact at work



# WHEN IS A HOLIDAY NOT A HOLIDAY?

I can completely switch off work during my vacation

148 responses



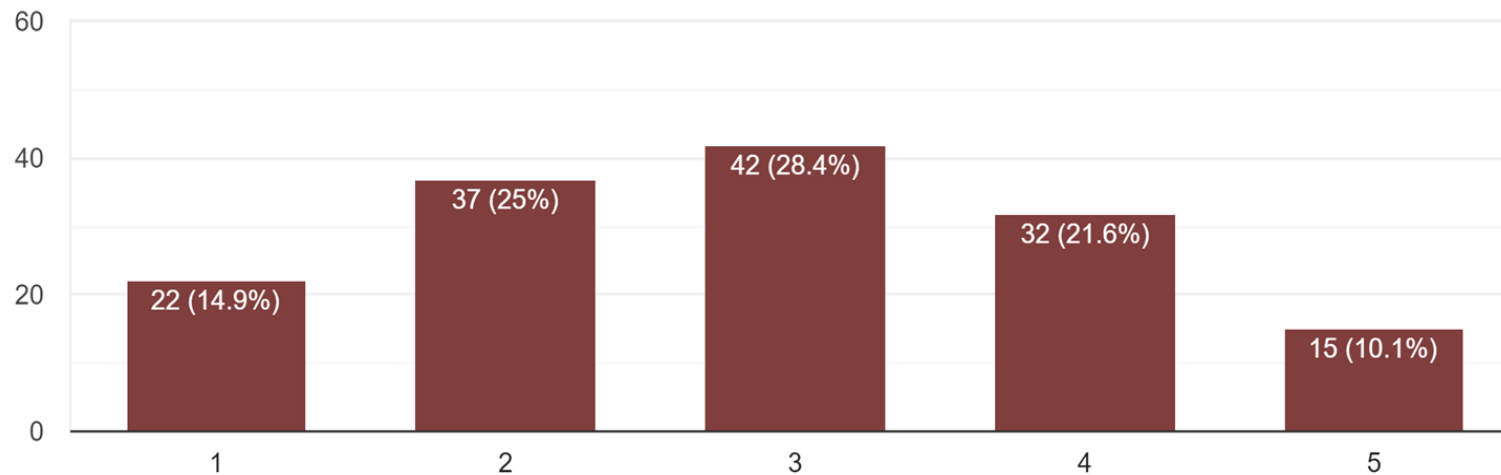
More than half the respondents cannot fully switch off from work related responsibilities during their holidays with 15 % never able to switch off and more than half expected to respond to work related enquiries while on holiday

50% did not take sick leave although they needed it

# POWER AND CAREERS ?

I have a clear career/growth plan

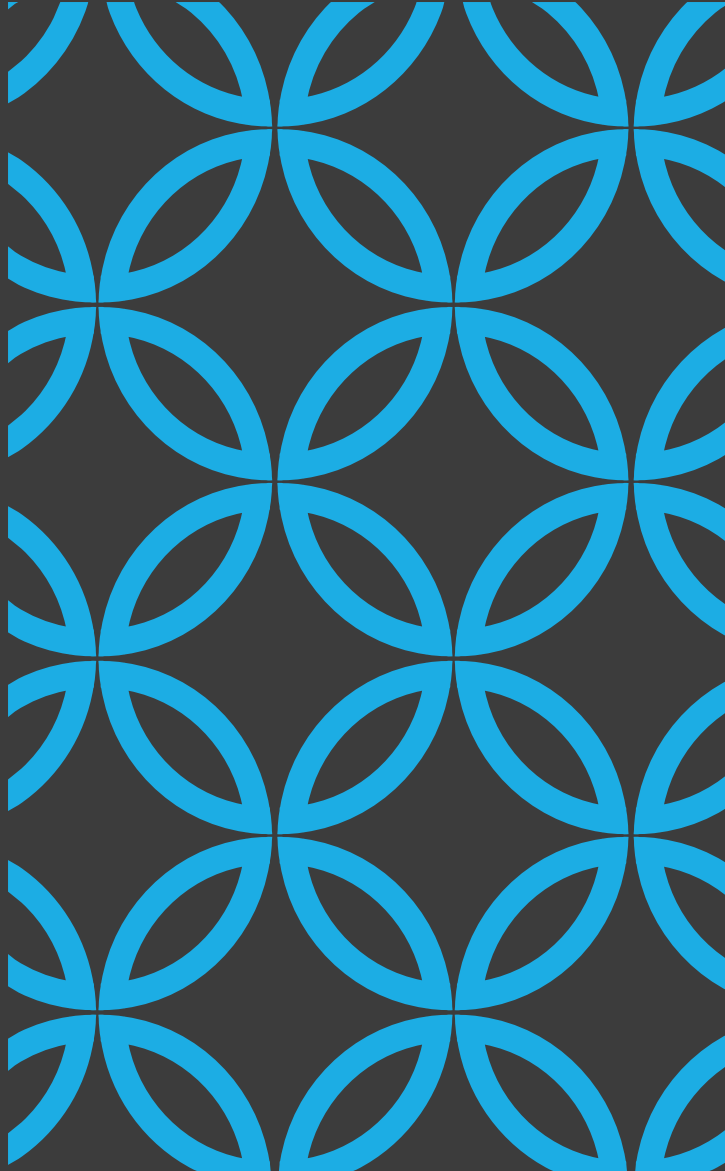
148 responses



More than 40% lack any real career path

And more than 50% state that they have unmet support needs in terms of training, coaching or mentoring

More than 50% have not had a performance appraisal or evaluation in the past 12 months



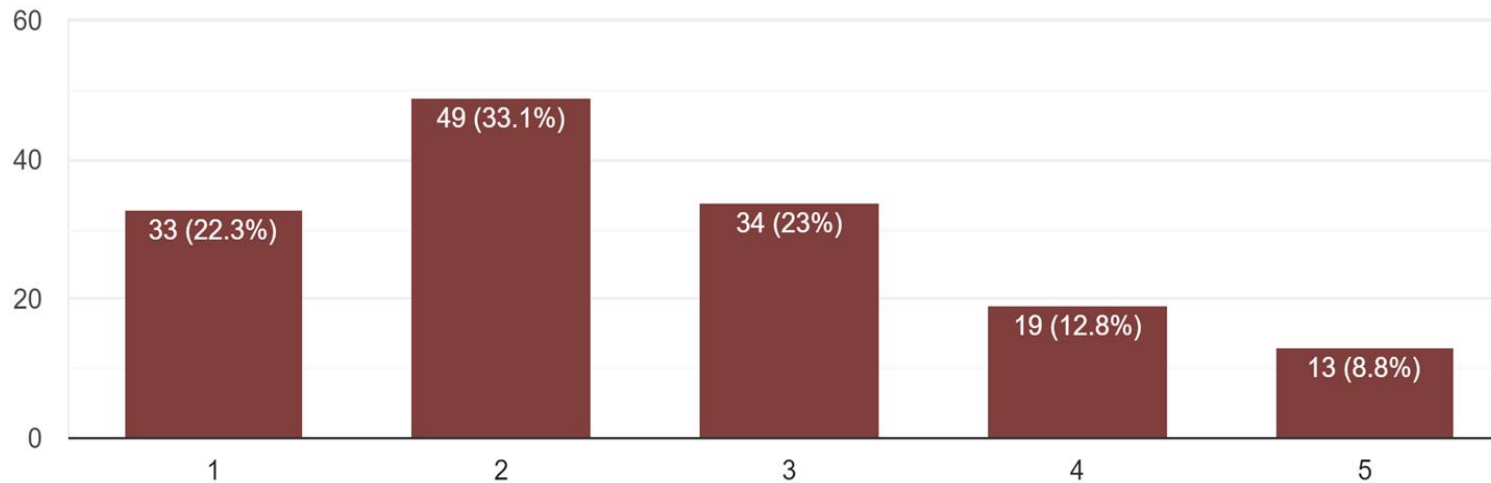
“THERE’S NO ROOM FOR  
CELEBRATING ACHIEVEMENTS:  
THERE’S SO MUCH MORE TO DO.  
WE DON’T DESERVE TO CELEBRATE  
WHEN THERE’S SO MUCH NOT YET  
DONE”

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# SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO?

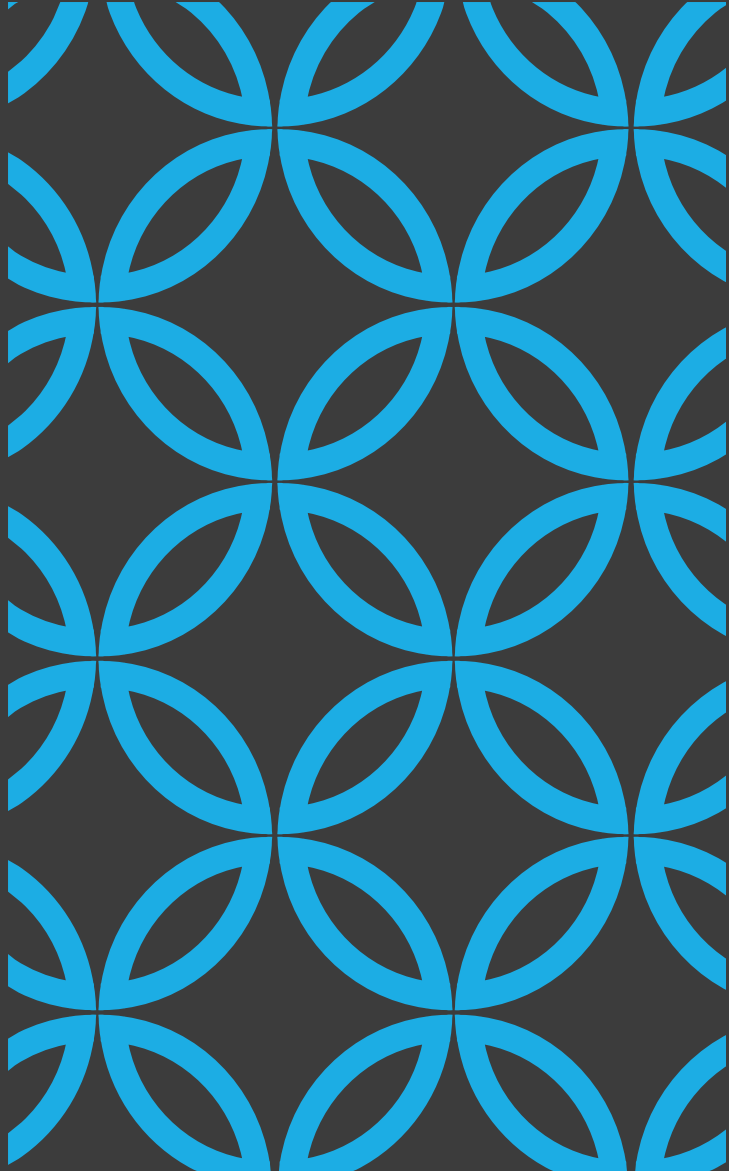
I often feel like quitting my job

148 responses



One fifth of respondents are regularly or always thinking about quitting their job

Others say that even though they are exhausted or overwhelmed they still love their job and want to stay



“I am exhausted. I wish I had a clone, but there is no part of me that would like to quit his job.”

# FINDINGS



The perfect storm many women leaders find themselves in is not only endangering women themselves which is bad enough ... it is also hurting the very mission of civil society organisations.



While unparalleled societal challenges require a giant reset, women leaders are not provided with the space, the support and the enabling environment they need.



We heard about the challenge of unrealistic expectations and workloads, and societal challenges, eroding the space to exercise leadership at a strategic level. This limits women leaders' ability to bring transformative change in our organisations, our leadership styles and our system at large.



The roots of include, unreasonable expectations, the persistence of misogyny, structural underinvestment in the sector and grossly inadequate support systems within civil society and in wider society.



# KEY MESSAGES



WE NEED RADICALLY DIFFERENT FORMS OF LEADERSHIP TO UNLEASH THE CREATIVITY, COURAGE AND POWER TO BUILD A NEW WAY OF LIVING AND BEING



WE CANNOT DO THIS UNLESS WE REIMAGINE POWER AS A FORCE TO LIBERATE COLLECTIVE JOY AND ACTION: THIS MEANS REDESIGNING REIMAGINING ORGANISATIONS AND STRUCTURES THAT WERE BUILT FOR A DIFFERENT AGE



THERE ARE MORE WOMEN THAN EVER LEADING CIVIL SOCIETY AND WE NEED THEIR SKILLS, PASSION AND KNOWHOW TO MAKE THE SHIFTS NEEDED, BUT THEY ARE BEING EXHAUSTED BY THE UNREASONABLE EXPECTATIONS AND LACK OF SUPPORT WITHIN THEIR ORGANISATIONS AND IN WIDER SOCIETY

# KEY MESSAGES



CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND THEIR FUNDERS ARE MISSING OPPORTUNITIES TO BETTER STRUCTURE SUPPORT AND INVESTMENT IN MAKING THIS MORE SUSTAINABLE FOR WOMEN WILL PAY OFF IN MORE IMPACT AND HAPPIER MORE WELL-BALANCED PEOPLE ABLE TO CONTRIBUTE.



BIG SHIFTS IN POLICY AND LEGISLATION ARE STILL NEEDED AT EU AND NATIONAL LEVEL TO SUPPORT GREATER GENDER EQUALITY



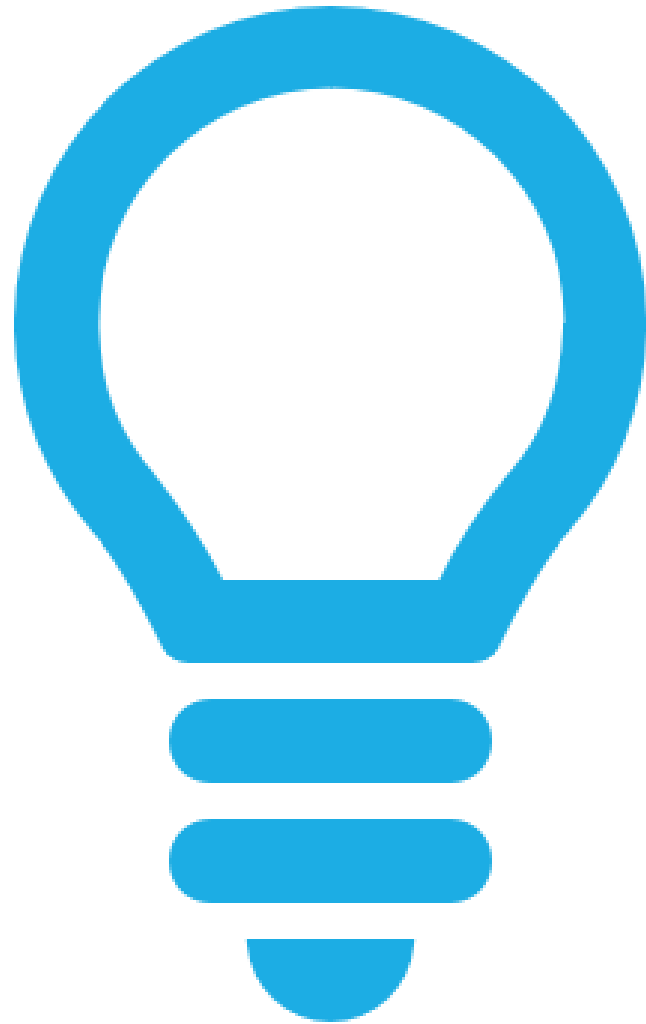
FEMINIST LEADERSHIP OFFERS AN EXCITING KEY TO UNLOCKING NEW WAYS OF BEING AND BUILDING SOCIETIES

# POLICY&PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

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To respond to the crisis, the women we surveyed for this project identified four priority areas for action

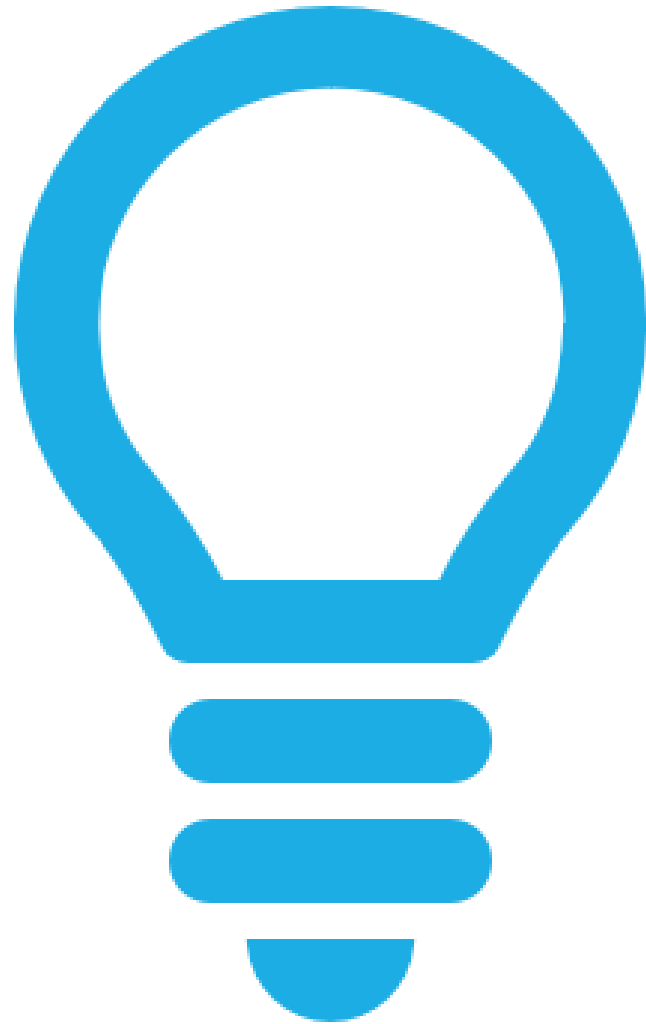




# CREATING AN ENABLING FRAMEWORK FOR THE SOCIAL ECONOMY

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**Gender-sensitive implementation of the October 2023 EU Council recommendations on the social economy sector by EU member states, including adapted legal provisions, access to training and funding, tax exemptions, access to public procurement**



# BUILDING A CARE & SUSTAINABLE WELL-BEING ECONOMY

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*New investments in redistributing and supporting care work, based on ILO's 5R framework and building on the current EU care strategy*

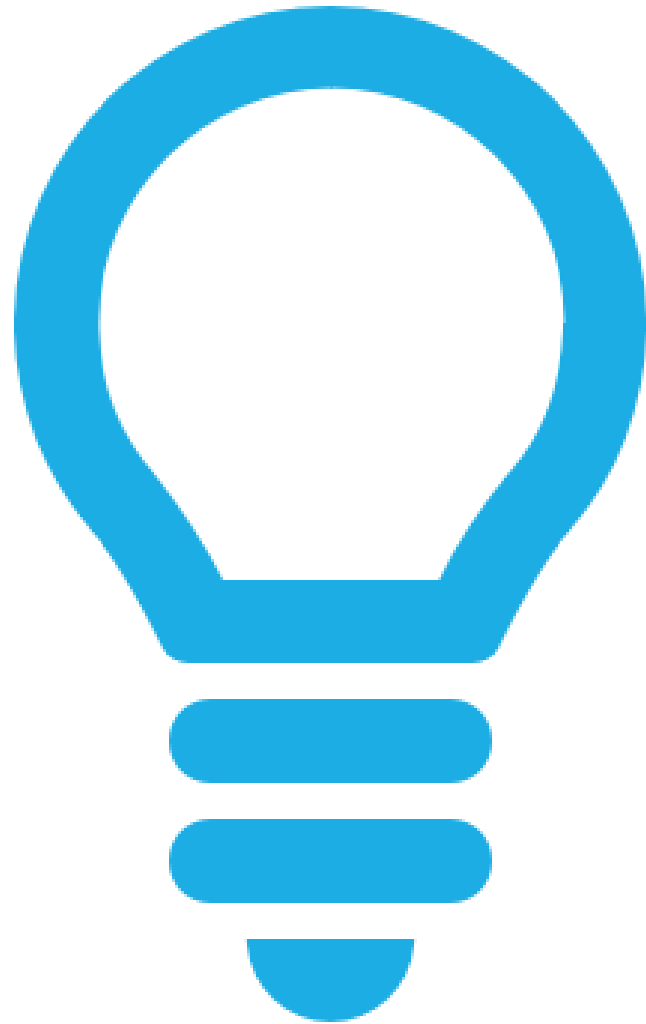


# OVERHAUL OF THE FUNDING LANDSCAPE FOR CSOs

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Creating greater accountability for instit. and private funders through a **sector target for core funding and donor effectiveness principles** that would be independently verified, similar to the INGO accountability charter.

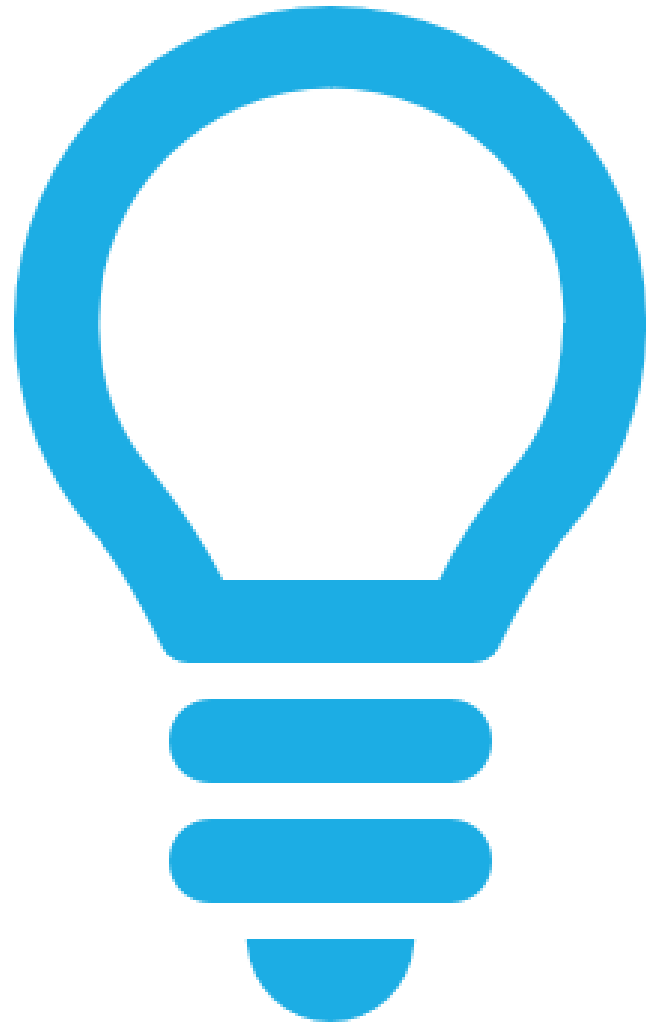




# PROMOTING FEMINIST LEADERSHIP CULTURES

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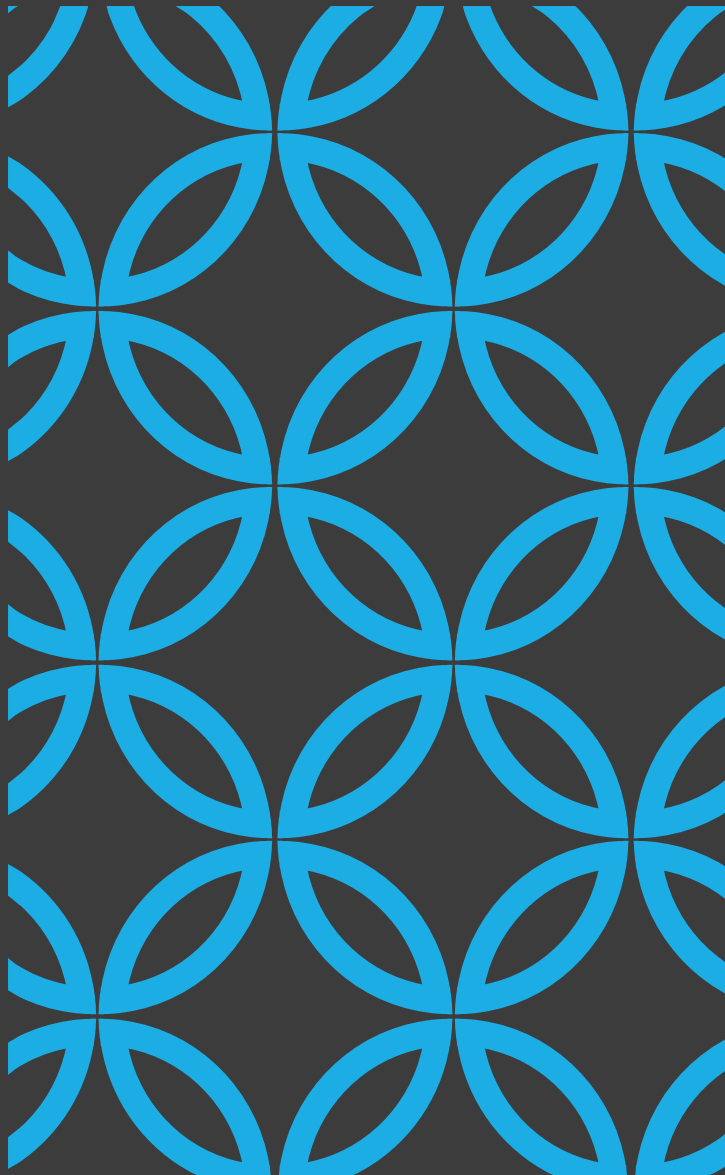
*A leadership academy program made available to support, connect and accompany women CSO leaders during their mandate.*



# MAKING GENDER EQUALITY DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION A PRIORITY

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*NGO boards taking direct responsibility at an organisational and sectoral level for making progress on this issue through specific investments and initiatives.*



# MERCI/THANKS/DANKE

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