



The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

Synergies between gender equality and climate action


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Comments paper – Belgium



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Synergies between gender equality and climate action - Belgium

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Abstract

Belgium has just voted its first climate law and is in the process of designing its implementation strategy. This means that gender & climate data are not systematically assembled yet by government bodies.

Some research was already done on the impact on the job market, and it is estimated that Belgium will gain some jobs due to the green transition. However, these job gains will only be in sectors where women are underrepresented and so there is a genuine risk they cannot profit from these gains. Also, women are under represented at the top of industries and so their voices are not sufficiently heard.

1. Relevant country context

On November 28, 2023, the Committee on Energy, Environment and Climate of the Federal Parliament approved the [‘draft law on the organisation of federal climate policy’](#) by Climate Minister Zakia Khattabi. This law anchors and strengthens the federal policy cycle for the follow-up and monitoring of the progress of federal policies and measures. With this law the federal state contributes to the European objectives of the [‘Fit for 55 package’](#).

The climate policy cycle as stipulated in the new law, ensures that the competent federal ministers and state secretaries contribute to and are made accountable for the follow-up, implementation and tightening of climate policy. The progress of this policy is analysed each year before 30 September in a synthesis report based on the progress reports of the federal departments and public institutions. This report will be made public, forwarded to parliament, and submitted for advice to the advisory bodies and a new committee of experts to be set up. Currently, the Royal Decrees describing the implementation of the climate law are still being written.

The climate law does not include anything specific about gender. The law establishes a governance cycle and deals with funding requests for new policies by federal ministries/administrations but does not express an opinion on the content of that new policy, which may of course have gender perspectives.

However, the executive order on the Committee of Experts, which will analyse the synthesis report of the federal policy, and which is provided for in the Climate Act, does state that the Committee of Experts provides for equal access to membership

for women and men. Therefore, at least one-third of the members must be of each gender.

1.1 Collection of gender disaggregated data

With regards to the collection of sex-disaggregated data, the Federal Institute for equality of women and man (IGVM/IEFH) is in charge of data gathering on gender issues and will most likely be in charge of collecting climate-gender data in the future (once the Climate law is implemented). However, currently this is not systematically done in Belgium. Also on a federal level, there is the Central bureau of planning that gathers a lot of data, but sex-disaggregated data on climate and gender are currently not collected by them.

Since the climate law has just been voted a couple of weeks ago and the implementation decrees are still being written, it is not yet sure how the data collection will be organised. One problem with regards to this, is that the Federal institute for the equality of men and women does not have a mandate to work on climate. This is the case for most equality bodies in Europe. It might be advisable to give them the mandate and resources to work on climate as well.

1.2 Women in STEM and green jobs

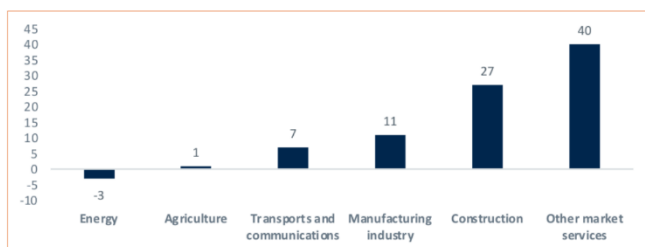
In a recent report¹ the employment impact of the green transition was measured for Belgium. It is estimated the climate transition should have a small positive impact on employment. According to the report: 'The net impact for Belgium by 2030 is estimated to be between 1% (Eurofound, 2019) and 1.7% (Climact et al., 2016). Such gain is explained by the required increased investments to trigger low-carbon transformations, concomitant with lower spending on fossil fuel importations (de Ridder et al., 2020; Eurofound, 2019). Additionally, "low-carbon industries typically require a relatively larger workforce per unit of output", so that job gains in low-carbon industries may surpass job losses in carbon-intensive industries (Cedefop, 2013).'

According to a study in 2016² sectors estimated to have the most net job gains in Belgium by 2030 are the service sector, construction sector (+12%), agriculture (+6%), followed by the manufacturing industry (+2%), transport and communications (+3%).

¹Liège University, University of Leuven, Climact; Implications of the climate transition on employment, skills, and training in Belgium, 2023. <https://climat.be/doc/just-transition-jobs-2023-final-report.pdf>

² Federaal Planbureau, VITO en Climact: De macro-economische impact van de koolstofarme transitie in België (2016); <https://klimaat.be/2050-nl/analyse-van-scenarios>

Employment impact of the low carbon transition on a selection of Belgian sectors [By 2030, net job impact in thousands of jobs]



Source: Climact, Oxford Economics and Belgian Federal Planning Bureau (2016)

Table 1. The ten directly impacted sectors with the highest number of jobs [Belgium, 2019, in thousands of jobs or shares]

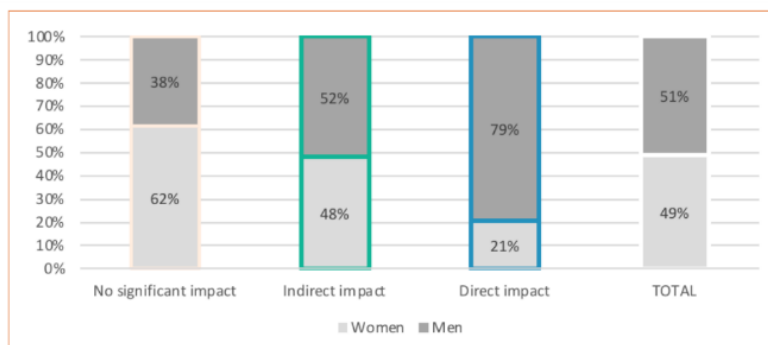
	JOBS	SHARE TOTAL	SHARE DIRECT	CML JOBS	CML SHARE TOTAL	CML SHARE DIRECT
41-43 Construction	287	5.9%	24%	287	6%	24%
49 Land transport and transport via pipelines	122	2.5%	10%	409	8%	34%
10-12 Manufacture of food products, beverages, and tobacco products	101	2.1%	8%	509	10%	42%
52 Warehousing and support activities for transportation	95	1.9%	8%	604	12%	50%
45 Wholesale and retail trade and repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	76	1.6%	6%	681	14%	57%
01 Crop and animal production, hunting and related service activities	57	1.2%	5%	737	15%	61%
25 Manufacture of fabricated metal products, except machinery and equipment	52	1.1%	4%	789	16%	66%
20 Manufacture of chemicals and chemical products	43	0.9%	4%	832	17%	69%
53 Postal and courier activities	36	0.7%	3%	868	18%	72%
29 Manufacture of motor vehicles, trailers and semi-trailers	30	0.6%	3%	898	18%	75%

Source: ¹Liège University, University of Leuven, Climact; Implications of the climate transition on employment, skills, and training in Belgium, 2023. <https://climat.be/doc/just-transition-jobs-2023-final-report.pdf> page 26. ³

Now the question at hand is if women can profit from these job gains.

³ The first column lists the top 10 directly impacted sectors. The second column shows the number of jobs (thousands) for each of the top 10 sectors. The third column shows the share of this sector in the total number of jobs (%) and the fourth column shows the share of directly impacted jobs (%). Column five, six and seven show respectively the cumulative number of jobs (thousands) for each of the top 10 sectors, the cumulative share of this sector in the total number of jobs (%) and the cumulative share of directly impacted jobs (%).

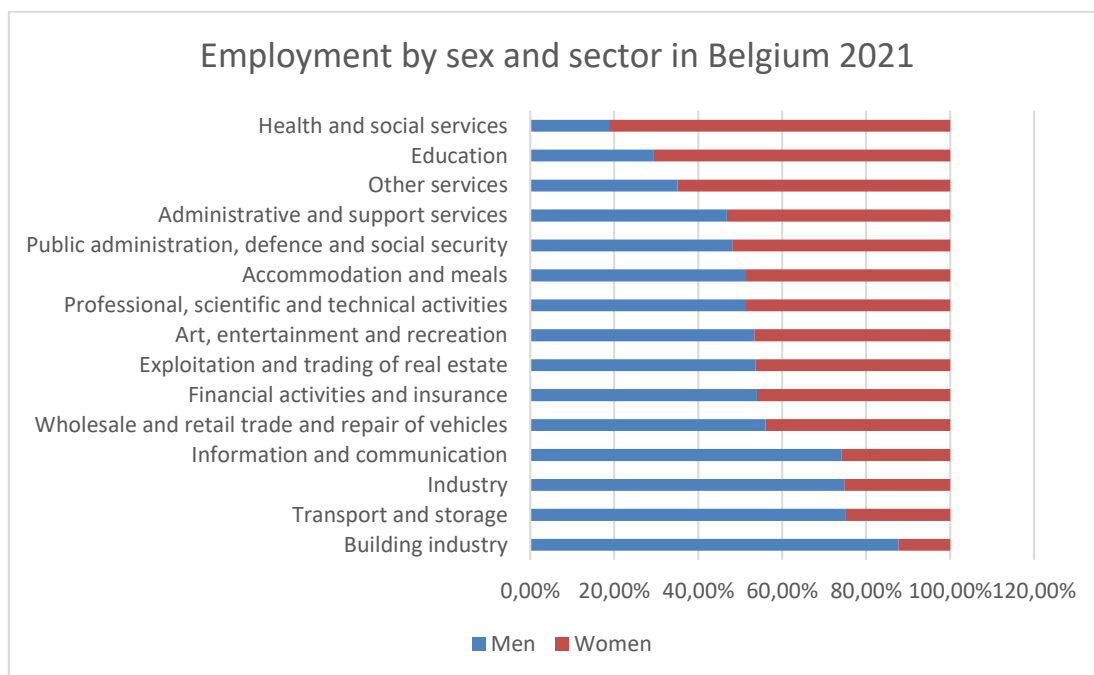
As almost everywhere in Europe, women are underrepresented in the sectors impacted by the transition. Specifically, sectors most directly impacted employ 21% of women versus 62% in sectors not significantly impacted.



Share employed men and women in sectors directly or less impacted by the transition [Belgium, 2019].

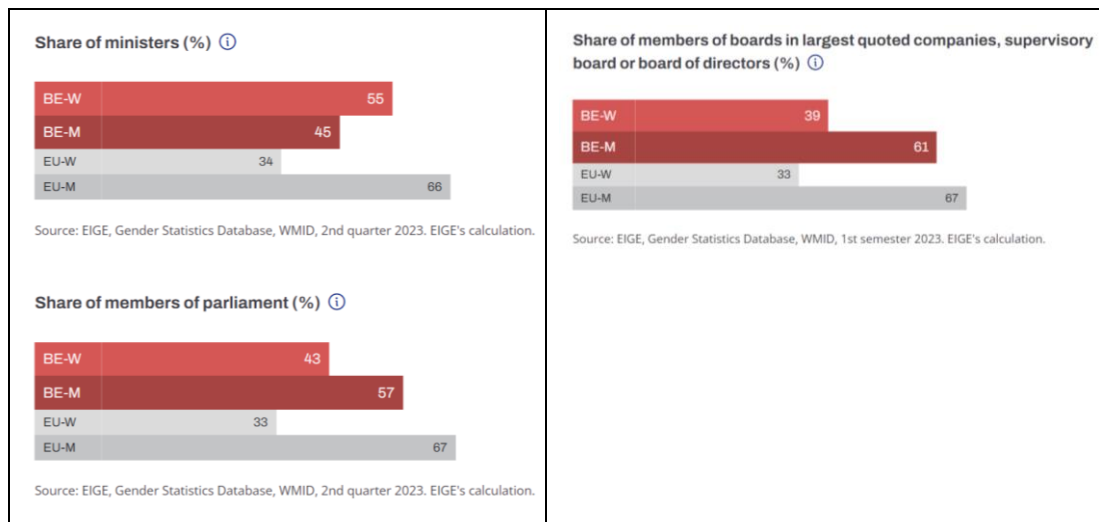
Source: ¹Liège University, University of Leuven, Climact; Implications of the climate transition on employment, skills, and training in Belgium, 2023. <https://climat.be/doc/just-transition-jobs-2023-final-report.pdf> page 27

As can be seen in the table below, women are indeed underrepresented in the sectors where the biggest employment gain is expected, risking missing out on the transitional employment opportunities.



Source: EAK Statbel (Algemene Directie Statistiek - Statistics Belgium), bewerking Steunpunt Werk en Statistiek Vlaanderen, 2021.

1.3 Women in green decision-making (political and public sector)

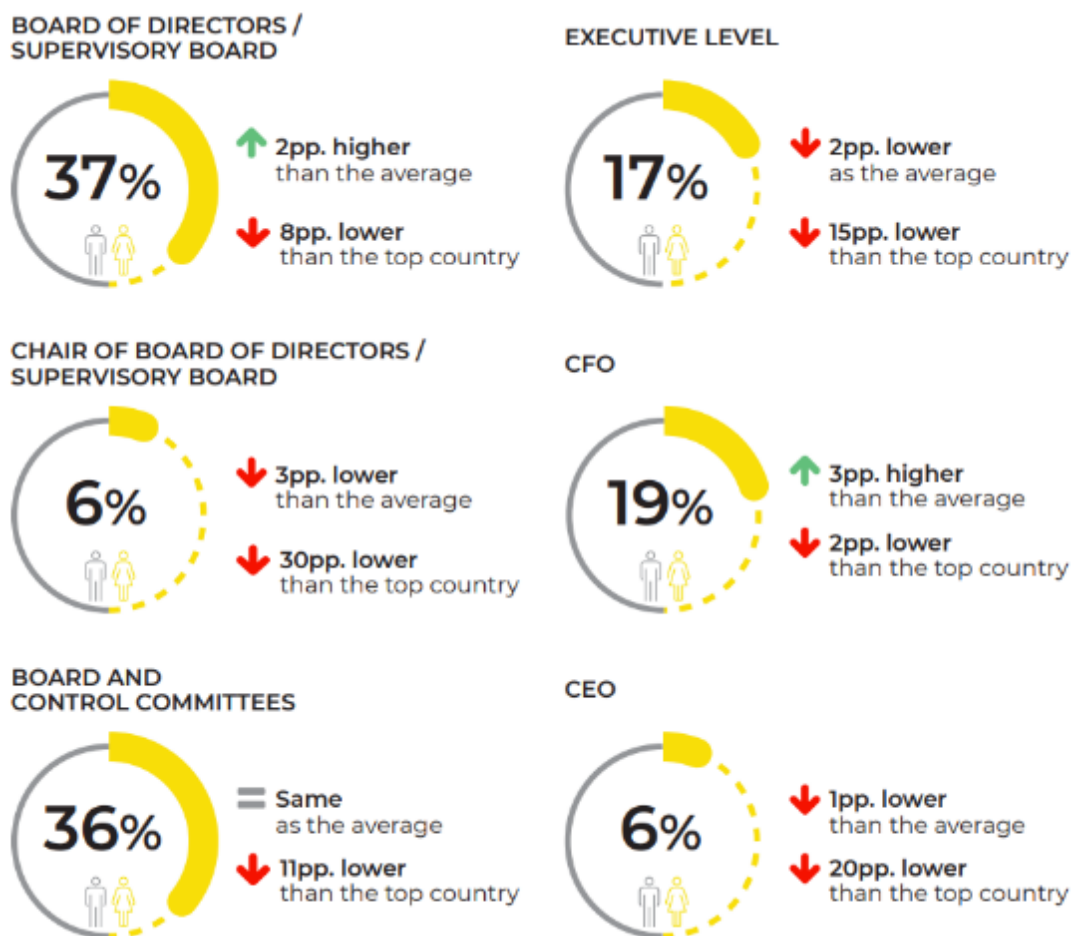


As can be seen in the figures above, Belgium does slightly better than the European average when it comes to having women at the top politically or economic power positions.

Since Belgium has a very complicated political structure, there are many climate ministers: 1 federal (a woman Mrs. Zakia Khattabi); 1 Flemish government (A women Mrs. Zuhair Demir), 1 Brussels government (a man Mr. Alain Maron) and 1 Walloon government (a man Mr. Philippe Henry). As such this a well-balanced according to sex.

However, As we have seen in the previous chapter women are underrepresented in sectors that will be impacted (positively) by the green transition, and they are also under represented at the top of these companies.

Belgium does not have many women at the top⁴:



The comparison made in the figures left are referring to the other countries in the research, which were a total of 19 European countries.

2. Policy debate

Belgian society is currently quite polarised between the left and right political spectrum, with climate change and climate policies as one of the hot topics reinforcing this divide.

Gender is not a prominent topic in this public debate as the focus is still on whether or not climate action should be taken (sooner or later). As little data is being gathered

⁴ Women on boards and in corporate leadership: Gender diversity index, 2021; <https://europeanwomenonboards.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Belgium-Country-report-2021-GDI.pdf>

at this moment, there is a high chance that the link between climate and gender will remain invisible for the time being.

However, since the Social Climate Fund on a European level obliges all states to write up a Social Climate Plan, a discussion is starting about the fairness of climate measures and how to tackle the risk of inequality in climate catastrophes or climate measures. It remains to be seen how gender can be properly integrated in these discussions.

3. Good Practice examples

Good Practice case 1:

The Belgian Development Cooperation wants to be gender sensitive in its approach and gender mainstreaming is important. With regards to the climate, Belgium is developing a climate financing strategy oriented towards global south countries. The draft Belgian climate financing strategy confirms that gender equality is a transversal priority for all actions. Once adopted, the strategy will cover a period to 2030 and beyond, to cross several legislatures.

Examples of this gender mainstreaming can be found in the partnerships in the Sahel and in Mozambique. In both programmes climate and gender are linked. For example, in the Sahel, a 50 million euro programme of 5 years in Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Senegal, focuses i.a. on restoration of the soil, the land. 650.000 people will be reached. There is desertification and many gender issues that need to be taken into account. The programme wants to work with the women as partners. For example, if ENABEL (the Belgian Official Cooperation Agency) is restoring soil, they want to ensure that a minimum of 40 to 50% of that land to belong to women. This means they will be working together with women's organisations directly.

Good Practice case 2:

The Federal Equality Body for discrimination in Belgium (UNIA) is starting to look at possibilities of defending the rights of those discriminated against by climate policy measures. One example is that they received quite a number of complaints from citizens living in Belgian cities where Low Emission Zones (LEZ) are introduced. Those LEZ typically reject old and cheap cars thereby creating a de facto discrimination against poor people (many of whom are women). The Equality Body (UNIA), is trying to gather data on these phenomena, cluster the complaints and take them to court to get a policy that is more fair across the socio economic spectrum of the population. However, the only reason why this is possible, is because poverty is a recognised ground for discrimination and a mandate for this Equality body. Many other equality bodies in European countries do not have the mandate to work on socio-economic issues.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

- How can EU Member States stimulate the collection, reporting and monitoring of gender-disaggregated data on the national and European level?
 - ✓ Enlarge the mandate of equality bodies to include Climate & Gender and give them the necessary resources to implement this.
- How to stimulate a more gender equal and diverse workforce in sectors relevant for the green and just transition?
 - ✓ Invest in specific female training programmes
 - ✓ Set quotas for women in leadership positions
 - ✓ Develop good life-work balance measures in all sectors
 - ✓ Specific projects to stop sexual harassment in male dominated economic sectors
- How can broader communities be engaged in the green and just transition?
 - ✓ Include NGO's and women's organization in the making of the Social Climate Fund (planning the social climate fund is obligatory in each country to be able to receive the EU funding).
- How to promote female leadership in the green and just transition particularly in the political and public sector?
 - ✓ Set quota's for women in leadership positions.