



ASHOKA

# SHE SAYS



**ASHOKA**





# WHAT DOES ASHOKA DO AND WHY?

This is probably the most common question that we are asked. **Ashoka creates networks of social innovators to tackle the world's most pressing problems.** However, it always takes more than one sentence to give the full picture, often a whole conversation, but once you have understood what drives Ashoka and what is driven by Ashoka, you will never forget it. It burgeons from a deeply rooted motivation constantly fed by a bountiful source of energy: humanity.

Every year, we spot over 100 leading social entrepreneurs worldwide with the best system-changing ideas to address social problems and change society for the good of all. Today our network counts 3,500+ members, or Ashoka Fellows, in over 90 countries. More than 500 of them come from Europe. In Europe we elect around 50 Ashoka Fellows each year in 22 countries.

Citizen sector supporters, we included, cannot afford to work in isolation from each other anymore. Together we can explore systemic barriers that hold many changemakers back from achieving the full potential of their solutions, and many citizens – from even embarking on a changemaker path. We must jointly work on improving conditions for the whole sector of social initiatives. Unlock new resources. Redefine rules. Develop new relationships. Achieve collective impact.

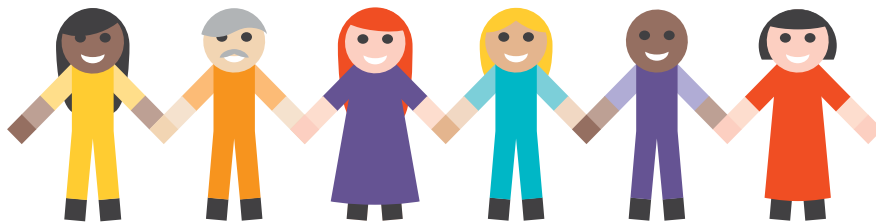
## ABOUT THIS REPORT

Ashoka with the support of Open Society Foundations seeks to create a bridge between high-level conference organizers and leading women social innovators and entrepreneurs in different fields with a gender sub-representation. Through a mapping of diverse conferences throughout Europe, this report offers

a clear examination of women's representation at such events. Moreover, this study and subsequent commentary is also meant to provide a systemic view on why the results look this way.

## ABOUT OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATION

The Open Society Foundations are active in more than 120 countries around the world. Their national and regional foundations and thematic programs give thousands of grants every year towards building inclusive and vibrant democracies. Their vision is a call for change—change in the way we think about others, and in the ways we work together.



# ASHOKA, WOMEN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS AND CONFERENCES

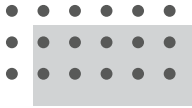
Even though women constitute almost 50% of the world's population<sup>1</sup>, they continue to be disproportionately underrepresented in leadership positions and systematically face a lack of access to the social and capital resources that would allow them to maximize their success. According to The World Bank, the structural and social barriers begin in childhood, but as boys and girls get older, the gender gap in poverty further widens.<sup>2</sup>

The ascensions of women to top leadership positions in male-dominated industries remains rather low despite breakthroughs made by women in the last decades.<sup>3</sup> In the EU, women still tend to be employed less when compared to men, are employed in lower-paid sectors, work on average 6 hours longer per week in total (paid and unpaid) but have fewer paid hours, take more career breaks and face fewer and slower promotions.<sup>4</sup>

However, the reason why women and men have different leadership paths it is not because they are innately different, but because their experiences are substantially contrasting. As a woman, it is less likely to be recognized as a leader.<sup>5</sup> It is important to know that if people are regularly exposed to certain leaders' typologies, leaders who fit the same profile in the future will be more likely to be noticed. One sure way to make people see more women as leaders is to introduce more women in authentic leadership roles. And this is where high-level conferences can be more than what they already are. Conferences are part of the work experience and that is why attending companies, non-profit organizations and public institutions can have a real impact on the representation and experiences of women. Women entrepreneurs themselves have stated that lack of visibility in their fields on a national level is one of

the main barriers to success.<sup>6</sup> Their active participation on high-level events might be game-changing opportunities.

Europe offers a great variety of conferences throughout the year. These are considered to be a space not only for connecting with people from across the continent, but for expanding your knowledge, learning beyond your field of interest and finding the unusual actors that might be a great fit for your project. Founders, investors, entrepreneurs, global thinkers are all gathered in a vibrant community that can only guarantee an experience translated in a constant evolution. However, no matter how high-level a conference is, the pattern that is so stringent in society repeats itself: women are underrepresented no matter the country, no matter the field. Why is this happening and how can we reshape the pattern?



# A DIVE INTO THE RESULTS

## AN OVERVIEW

We initially selected **300 conferences** from 27 countries in Europe. After applying our qualitative and quantitative indicators (number of participants >500, seniority of

speakers, partners connected to their relevance in the field, visibility indicators, diversity of participants) that define a high-level conference, we reduced the sample to a number of

215 high-level conferences, from 25 countries, divided in 12 fields. You can see below the division by country and by fields.

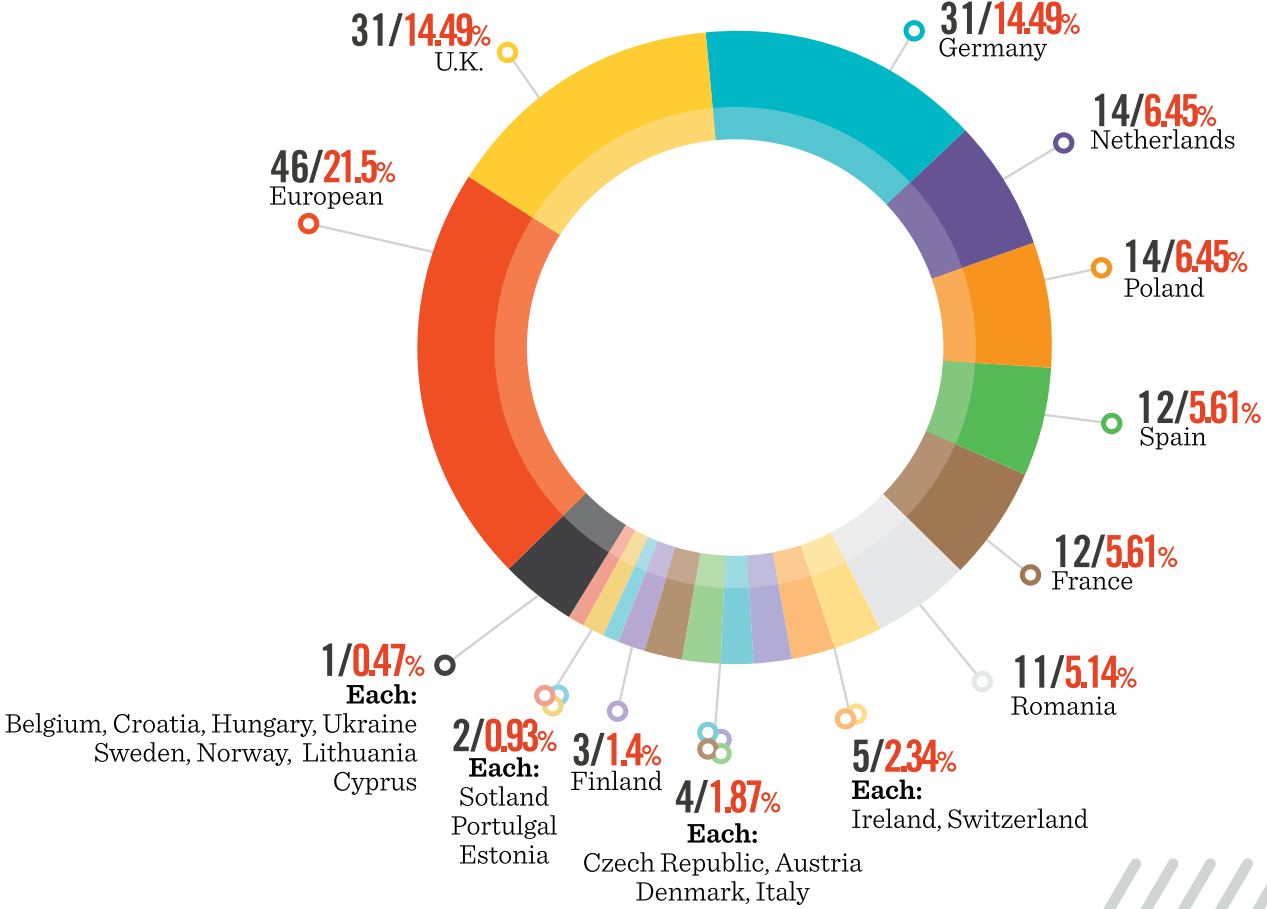


fig. 1



# 300

CONFERENCES

# 12 863

SPEAKERS IN 2019

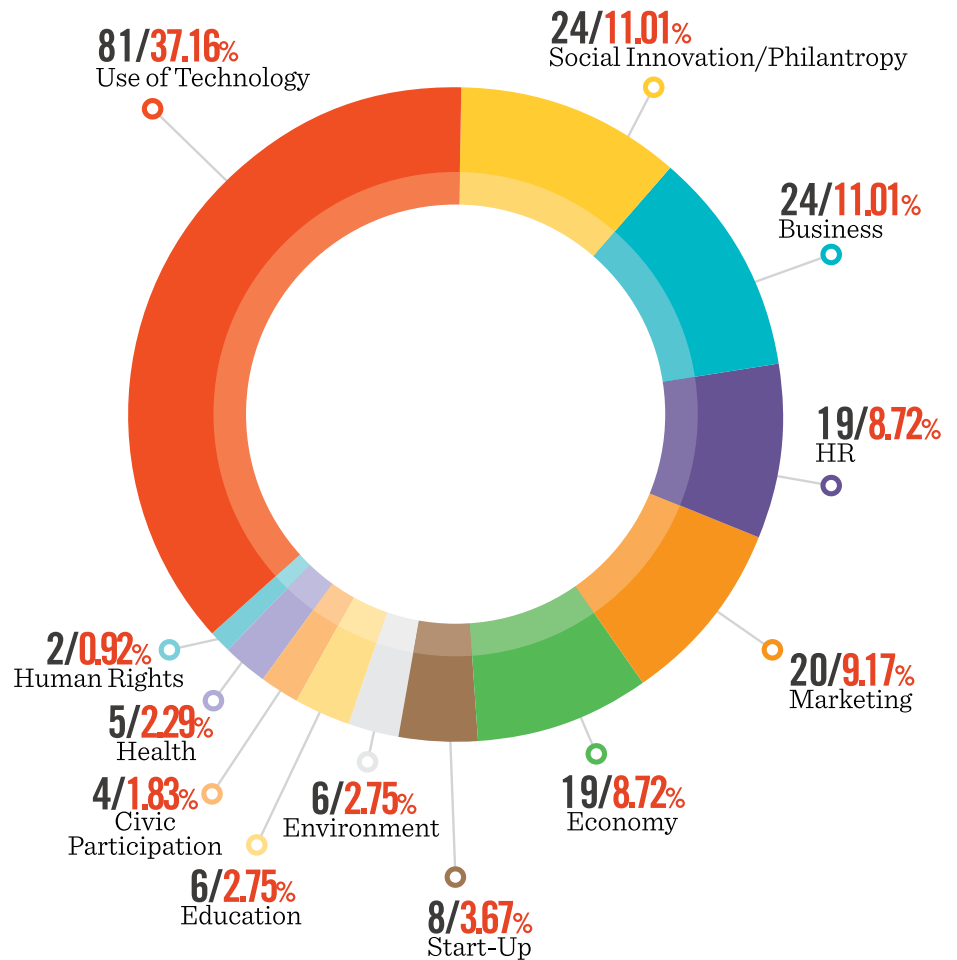
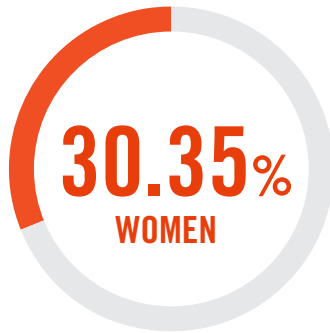


fig. 2

Altogether the conferences gathered more than **12,000** speakers in 2019. Each one of them had a main theme and a set of organizational details that makes it uniquely stand out from other similar events. However,

despite these favorable circumstances and the great number of organized conferences, there is a major alarming detail that overshadows their impact: the conferences do not manage to fully respect the principle of

gender equality, mirroring the same underrepresentation that we see so abiding in the society. **Out of 12.863 speakers in 2019, 69.65% were men, with only 30.35% were women.**

## RESULTS BY COUNTRY

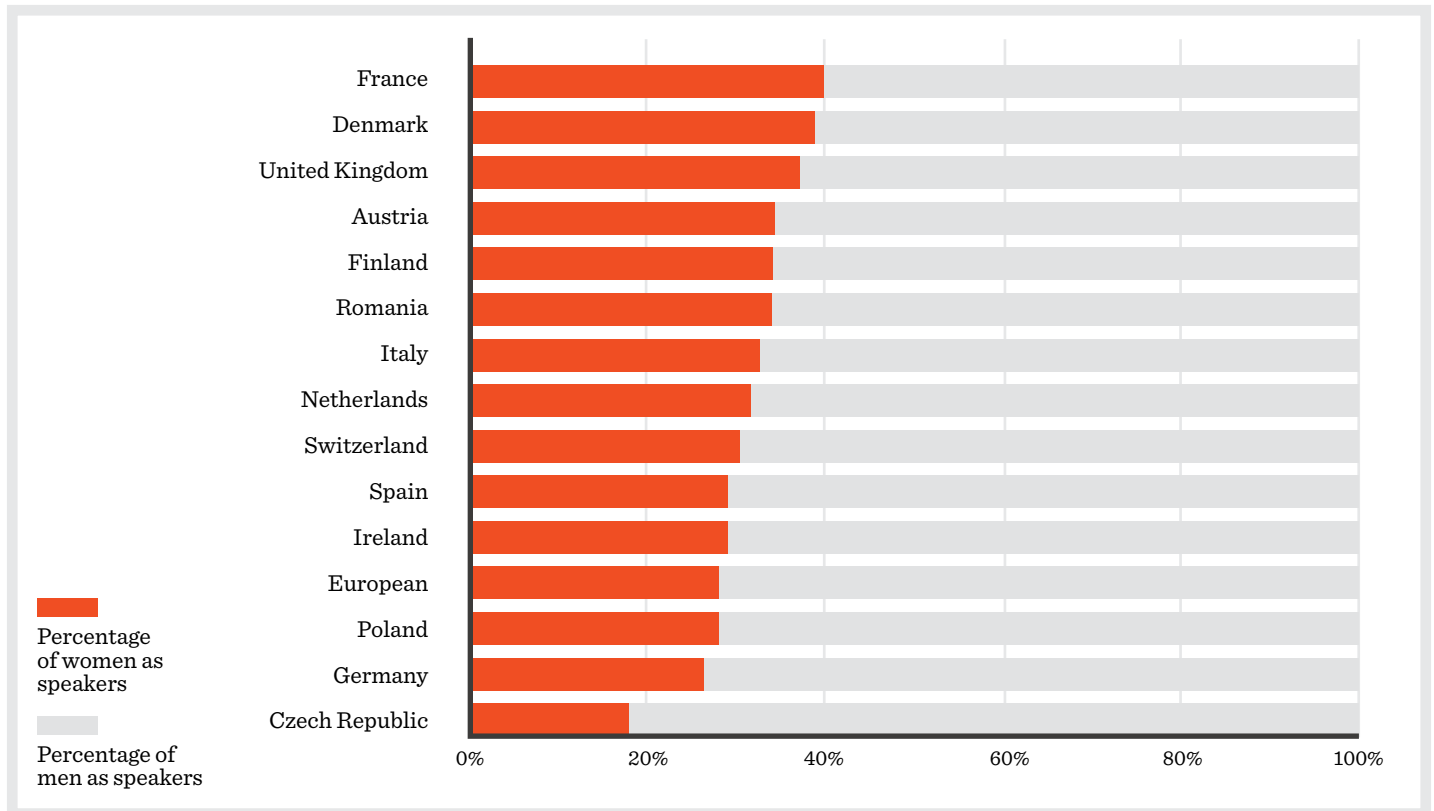
When analyzing more in depth the results by country, the image looks a little bit different. The first thing to be taken into consideration is that the largest number of high-level conferences cannot be targeted as being from a specific country, therefore we called them *European*. To be more specific, European conferences are events that may change location year from year or that are the results of a joint effort between different countries. The large number of such events only shows an appetite for collaboration that goes beyond borders. However, the percentage of

speakers is still disproportionate, 71.99% of speakers being men and only 28.01% being women.

The biggest difference in terms of gender representation was found among speakers in the four Czech conferences analyzed, with 82.18% of speakers being men. On the other hand, France has the smallest gender gap among speakers at the 12 conferences analyzed, with 60.2% men and 39.8% women.

To have a regional apprehension of the phenomenon, we made a

gender gap comparison between Eastern Europe, Western Europe and Northern Europe. Eastern Europe showed the biggest gender gap, having 71,81% men speakers and just 28,19% women speakers. With a better representation, Western Europe had a percentage of 67,70% for men speakers and 32.30% of women speakers, while in Northern Europe 64.43% of speakers are men and 35.57% women. It can be easily observed that there is a small increase of women speakers' number in conferences that are organized in Western and Northern Europe.



## RESULTS BY FIELD

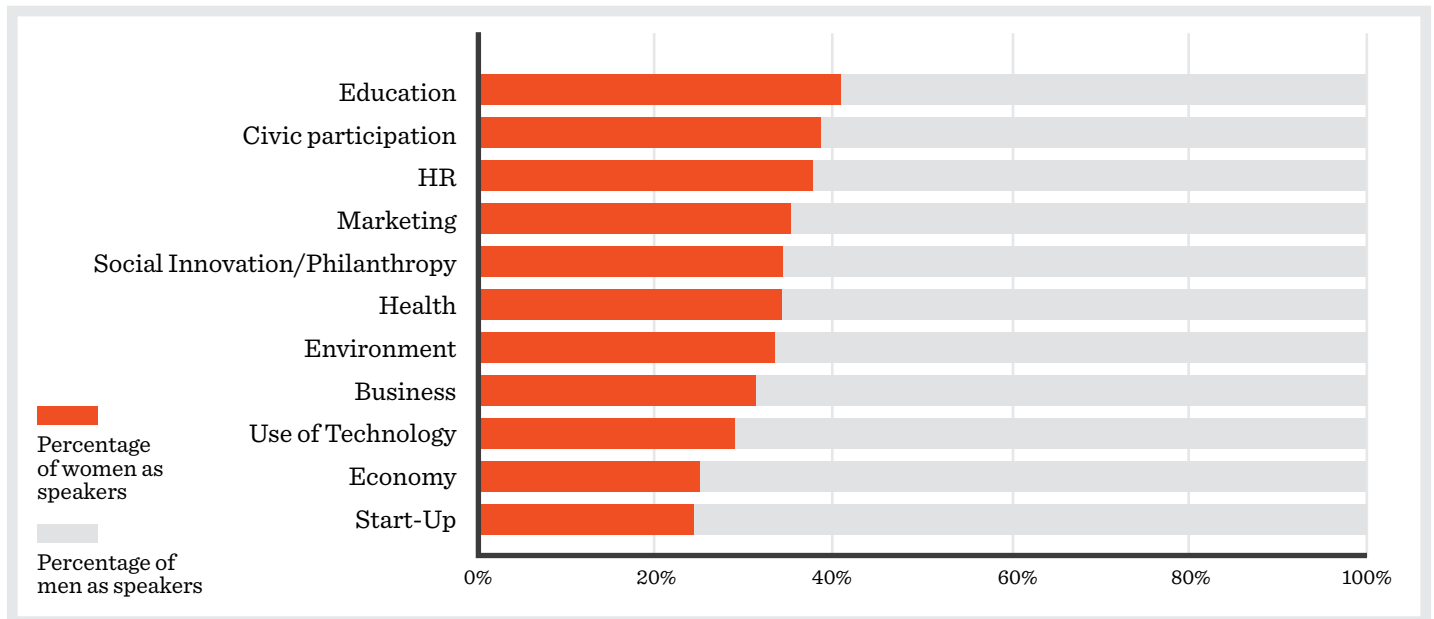
When considering the themes of the conferences, the most striking detail is the large number of conferences in the field of technology. Technology is omnipresent, and this is mirrored in the world of events as well. More striking though, is that according to the latest data from McKinsey, the representation of women in the last three years in the tech field was stagnant.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, according to an estimation only 20% of the tech jobs are held by women.<sup>8</sup> This is why, even though there is a plethora of tech conferences, there is no surprise that men are better represented, counting for 71.12% of speakers.

Moving on to the social innovation field, even though data showed that women are more likely to start a social enterprise than a traditional

enterprise, there are still more men than women leading social enterprises in Europe, except for a few countries.<sup>9</sup> Adding to this, social innovation themed conferences have a higher percentage of men speakers than women speakers. However, a higher percentage of male speakers is a trend that we see across all field as it can be seen in the table below.

These statistics make it clear that women are underrepresented. However, the solution is more complex than simply waiting for conference organizers to change their mindset or behavior. Fostering a more inclusive environment at high-level conferences is a shared responsibility that should fall both upon companies and organizations that attend such events and on the male speakers that

can refuse to attend panels, events, conferences where women are not as represented as they are.







# OUR WOMEN ASHOKA FELLOWS SAID...

During our mapping we also asked our network of women Ashoka Fellows from Europe what was their experience at such events.

Panels at high-level conferences are a prime opportunity to showcase a diverse range of opinions and perspectives on a given topic. However, these sessions can be rather homogenous, and often feature a “lone woman”.

**88% OF FEMALE ASHOKA FELLOWS THAT ANSWERED THE QUESTIONNAIRE SAT ON A PANEL AT A CONFERENCE BEING THE ONLY WOMAN AND 18% OF THEM REPORT HAVING AN EXPERIENCE THAT MADE THEM NOT ATTEND SUCH FUTURE EVENTS.**



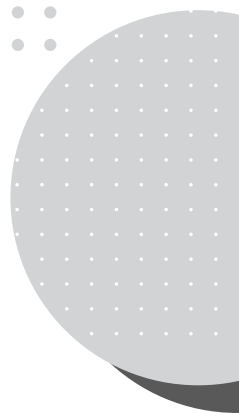
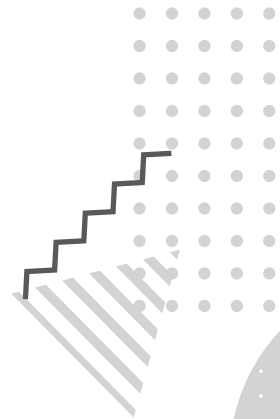
# AND THE BRIGHT SIDE IS...

Although the events scene, is dominated by male speakers, no matter the country or the field, we also must mention the impressive efforts made so that women can be more heard.

For example, the Women’s Forum for the Economy & Society is developing the **Women’s Forum Global Network**, a digital platform and thought-leadership base. At the annual Women’s Forum Global Meeting in Paris, and at several different meetings around the world, they start new conversations and focus on what women can do, together with men, to act for the benefit of all members of

society. The Women’s Forum Global Network is a valuable tool to help amplify these conversations and keep them going throughout the year. Only in 2019 their event reached up to 15 million people through press and 21 million through social media.

Moreover, considering the importance of technology in our society and the low women’s representation in tech events, it is important to mention that there are numerous organizations that increasingly support women in tech. The Women in Tech World Series is a globally spread platform built to empower individuals and drive diversity and inclusion. The



European Women in Technology, part of their movement, is Europe's largest women in tech conference.

Equally important is to mention Ashoka already has amazing initiatives supporting women across the globe. Ashoka Arab World (AAW) created the Women's Initiative for

Social Entrepreneurship (WISE) as a platform for cooperation among women social entrepreneurs at all stages, fostering an environment where Arab women are inspired and empowered to change the world. WISE builds a comprehensive, holistic and inclusive program to address the unique challenges that

women face. The initiative aims to empower and equip Arab women with the necessary tools to become leaders, innovators and changemakers. In addition, WISE takes into account the economic, social, and cultural factors that inhibit women's ability to thrive as social entrepreneurs in the Arab world.



Ashoka also sought to understand how female social entrepreneurs lead and innovate, and how these insights could help more girls and women drive positive social change. Through a mapping of diverse women social entrepreneurs in Ashoka's network—the largest in the world—**“Celebrating ChangemakHERS”** offers an analysis of the barriers and opportunities related to women's leadership in social innovation, and a roadmap for how the social entrepreneur, business, and donor communities can create enabling environments for women and girls to succeed as changemakers: people who take creative action to solve social problems for the benefit of all. Their main findings are:

- Practice inclusive, collective leadership;
- Create new roles for girls and women to accelerate social impact;
- Assert women's life experiences, such as motherhood, as an asset for leadership and entrepreneurship;
- Include men in solutions to problems typically viewed as only affecting women—such as access to reproductive health—so that everyone sees the value of solving these problems together.

The report highlights some of the distinct, solutions-oriented ways female social entrepreneurs lead political, economic and cultural change, with a strong focus on solving challenges that affect women, girls, and low-income communities. The more society celebrates powerful examples of women who are innovating and defining success their way, the more women and girls will be inspired to lead the same way.<sup>10</sup>



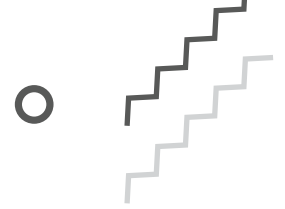
# WHAT'S NEXT?

The next phases of the project will include: creating a pool of female panelists/speakers in the fields where they are underrepresented (we plan to identify at least 50 such high-caliber panelists/ speakers in the most under-represented fields). We will also run needs assessment and barriers identification surveys and in-depth structured interviews in order to better understand the capacity building needs and barriers that we could address.

We will reach out to organizers of conferences that we have mapped encouraging them to involve women speakers from our pool. This process

will be a highly advocacy and reputation management process. We will leverage the reputation that Ashoka has in Europe and together with our Ashoka Support Network members we will create more opportunities for women in under-represented panels to participate and be recognized for their work and impact. Moreover, we will work on building alliances with initiatives for women that already exist. The final outcome is not only to reflect how gender equality is a systemic issue that affects the representation level of women at high-level conferences but is to tackle the problems' root causes together.

It is important to accelerate the work that is done not only for leadership roles to become more open to girls and women but to make sure girls and women can really consider leadership roles as options for their professional path. Once we stop seeing leadership through our unconscious biases as being mostly reserved for men and start inspiring women to step up and take action for social and positive changes, we will be surprised to find ourselves in a striving, problem-solving society capable of better responding to the gender equality issue that is so systematically caught in the way we are living our lives.



# METHODOLOGY

In order to identify the conferences' situation at a European level we have looked in our network (Ashoka Fellows, Ashoka Staff, Partners) and we also used a large amount of desk research hours to consult the "best of", "top" conferences, meaning we looked after already curated information, one of the goals being specifically to include conferences as diverse as possible.

At first, we listed all the conferences we could find and, eventually, based on both qualitative and quantitative criteria/indicators (number of participants >500, seniority of speakers, partners connected to their relevance in the field, visibility indicators, diversity of participants), we decided which conferences can be labeled as high-level. Therefore, an event to be considered high-level should have checked at least 3 of the above criteria.

# LIMITATIONS

The mapping is built upon a non-exhaustive set of data sources and list of conferences in Europe. Moreover, part of the data was gathered from our network, which can explain the large number of Social Innovation conferences and this might lead to a bias, not fully reflecting the reality of how high-level conferences are distributed by the field or even by country. Another limitation stays in the fact that not all conferences showcase on their website all their speakers,

Afterwards, we coded them and clustered them by countries and by fields. We then counted the number of men and women as speakers based on the information from the website and analyzed the data.

The evaluation of women Ashoka Fellows' perspective on such events was conceived using an online targeted survey. Data was collected between October 2019 and November 2019. 25 women Ashoka Fellows from 9 countries (France, United Kingdom, Hungary, Romania, Austria, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Norway) responded.

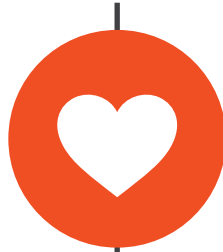
but just the keynote ones. The ration of women/ men speakers might differ. Further research could be conducted into a more in-depth analysis of the women/ men speakers' percentages by measuring the situation on more than just a year and by focusing on more than just Europe.

## SEE OTHER EXAMPLES IN THE LIST BELOW:

Women in the World Summit (U.S.A)  
The Women's Insights on the Art of Negotiation Summit (U.S.A)  
Forbes Women's Summit (U.S.A)  
Summit 21 (U.S.A)  
Bullish Conference (U.S.A)  
Conferences for Women (U.S.A)  
Wonder Women Tech (U.S.A)  
Tech up for Women (U.S.A)  
She Summit (U.S.A)  
Women in Cloud Annual Summit (U.S.A)  
Lesbians who Tech Summit (U.S.A)  
WeCode (U.S.A)  
Global Women in Tech Awards (U.S.A)  
"Hope for Europe – Women in Leadership" Conference (Austria, Europe)  
Global Women's Leadership Summit – Europe (Austria, Europe)  
Women in Games European Conference (U.K., Europe)  
Stand, Speak, Rise Up! (Limbourg, Europe)

Women Act (Women Act Takes the Stage)  
The Brussels Binder  
The Project Syndicate (The XY Exchange)  
Giulia - Giornaliste Unite Libere Autonome (European Network for Women Excellence)  
Instituto De Gestion De La Innovacion Y Del Conocimiento - Ingenio (Universitat Politecnica De Valencia) (MAGGIE - Monitoring and Assessment Gender Gap in Events)  
Centre For Feminist Foreign Policy (Diversity Matters!)  
Associacion Les Expertes ("Les Expertes" - a Database of Female Experts)  
Speakerinnen.org (Database of female experts for conferences in Germany)  
WEstart (Research and informed action on Female Social Entrepreneurship in Europe)

# HOW TO **GET** INVOLVED?



## **BECOME A VOLUNTEER**

Being a volunteer in Ashoka is a journey with one destination: the social innovation world.

## **BECOME A STRATEGIC PARTNER**

Forward thinking organizations  
with whom we can create  
collective impact



## **NOMINATE**

Contact us if you know  
female experts working in the  
underrepresented fields.

## **SHARE**

Share this report!



# ANNEXES

| COUNTRY        | CLASSIFICATION  | NUMBER OF CONFERENCES | PERCENTAGE OF MEN AS SPEAKERS | PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN AS SPEAKERS |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Czech Republic | Eastern Europe  | 4                     | 82.18%                        | 17.82%                          |
| Germany        | Western Europe  | 31                    | 73.73%                        | 26.27%                          |
| Poland         | Eastern Europe  | 14                    | 72.02%                        | 27.98%                          |
| European       | -               | 45                    | 71.99%                        | 28.01%                          |
| Ireland        | Western Europe  | 5                     | 71.07%                        | 28.93%                          |
| Spain          | Western Europe  | 12                    | 71.04%                        | 28.96%                          |
| Switzerland    | Western Europe  | 4                     | 69.63%                        | 30.37%                          |
| Netherlands    | Western Europe  | 14                    | 68.48%                        | 31.52%                          |
| Italy          | Western Europe  | 4                     | 67.44%                        | 32.56%                          |
| Romania        | Eastern Europe  | 11                    | 66.05%                        | 33.95%                          |
| Finland        | Northern Europe | 3                     | 65.98%                        | 34.02%                          |
| Austria        | Western Europe  | 4                     | 65.76%                        | 34.24%                          |
| United Kingdom | United Kingdom  | 31                    | 62.98%                        | 37.02%                          |
| Denmark        | Northern Europe | 4                     | 61.21%                        | 38.79%                          |
| France         | Western Europe  | 12                    | 60.20%                        | 39.80%                          |

| FIELD                          | NUMBER OF CONFERENCES | PERCENTAGE OF MEN AS SPEAKERS | PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN AS SPEAKERS |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Start-Up                       | 8                     | 75.70%                        | 24.30%                          |
| Economy                        | 19                    | 75.07%                        | 24.93%                          |
| Use of Technology              | 81                    | 71.12%                        | 28.88%                          |
| Business                       | 24                    | 68.87%                        | 31.22%                          |
| Environment                    | 5                     | 66.66%                        | 33.34%                          |
| Health                         | 5                     | 65.88%                        | 34.12%                          |
| Social Innovation/Philanthropy | 24                    | 65.73%                        | 34.27%                          |
| Marketing                      | 20                    | 64.83%                        | 35.17%                          |
| HR                             | 19                    | 62.31%                        | 37.69%                          |
| Civic participation            | 4                     | 61.45%                        | 38.55%                          |
| Education                      | 6                     | 59.16%                        | 40.84%                          |

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