

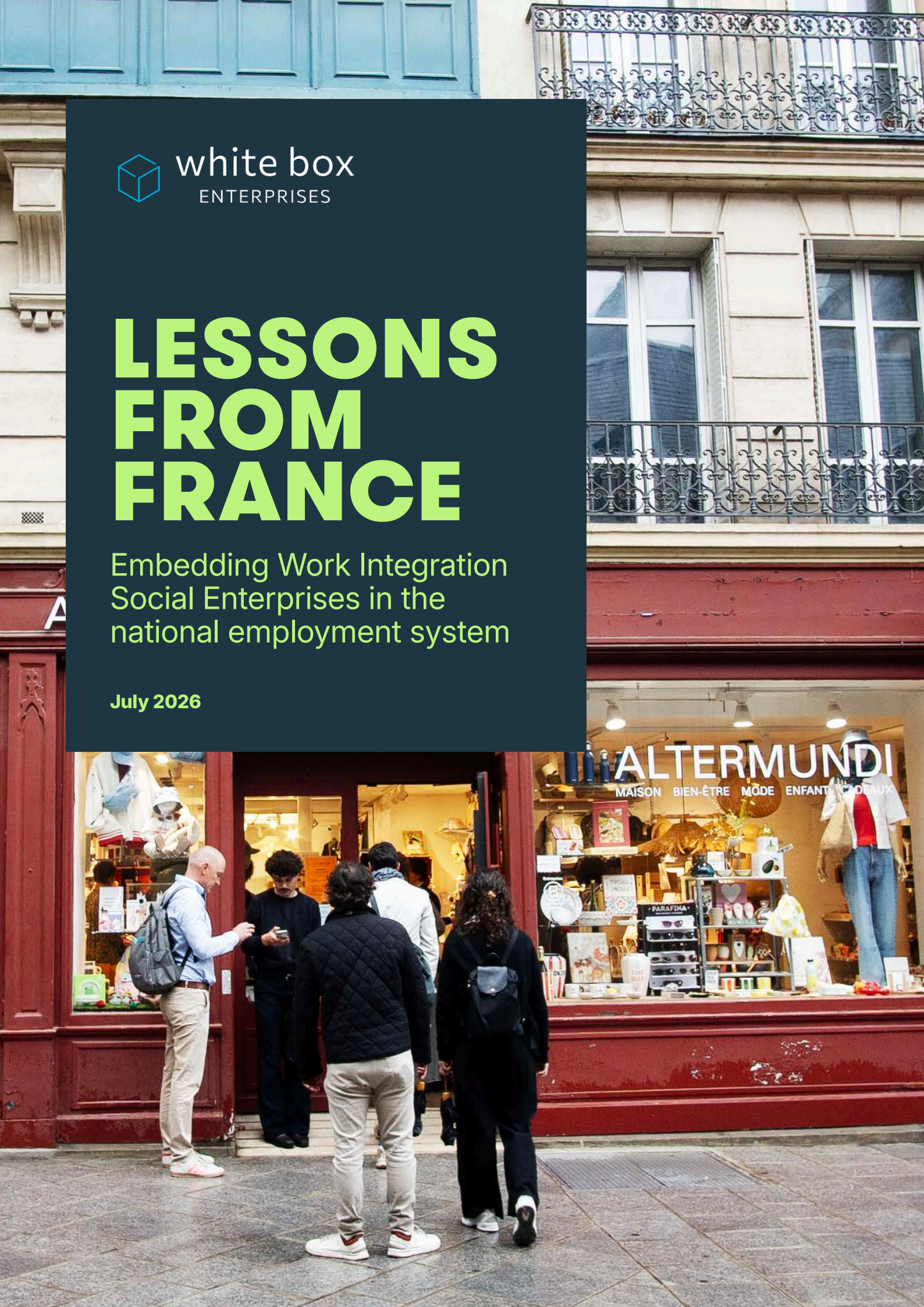


white box
ENTERPRISES

LESSONS FROM FRANCE

Embedding Work Integration
Social Enterprises in the
national employment system

July 2026



About this report

This report draws on a range of official and sector sources, including legislative material, government guidance and public budget documents (see [sources](#)).

It is also informed by a series of site visits and field conversations undertaken by White Box in France in October 2024, February 2025 and May 2026. These visits provided an opportunity to meet directly with social enterprise leaders, peak body representatives and government stakeholders, and to observe how the French system operates in practice. And visits from our French partners to Australia as part of the Jobs Summit in June (Groupe SOS) and Good Supply launch (Yunus Sports hub) in September 2025.

Acknowledgments

We thank the many French organisations and social enterprise leaders who have welcomed us and dedicated their time to help us understand the unique features of the French model, in particular:

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- Ash Dorman of Bloom Cycle
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Notes on terminology

This paper uses the French acronym IAE (Insertion par l'Activité Économique) to refer to the national employment stream supporting people with significant barriers to employment through work integration. SIAE (Structures d'Insertion par l'Activité Économique) refers to the organisations that deliver IAE (i.e. Work Integration Social Enterprises).

ESS refers to Économie Sociale et Solidaire (Social and Solidarity Economy), the legislated and regulated economic system in which French social enterprises operate.

EA (Entreprises Adaptées) and ESAT (Établissements et Services d'Accompagnement par le Travail) refer to French disability enterprises providing work integration pathways.

France Travail is the equivalent of Workforce Australia. It is the official government agency responsible for registering job seekers, assisting them with employment and providing unemployment financial aid.

RQTH refers to the "Reconnaissance de la Qualité de Travailleur Handicapé" (recognition of disabled worker status).



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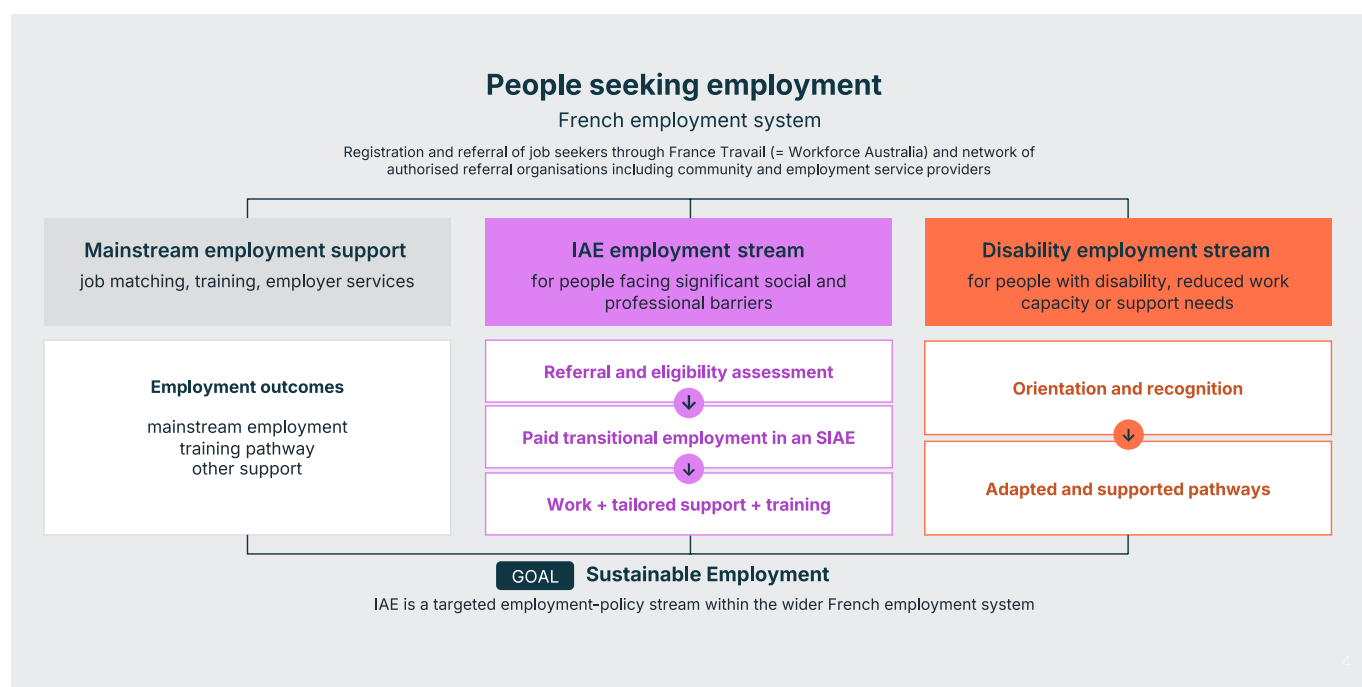
Executive summary

The Australian Government is currently undertaking a comprehensive review of the national employment services system, including consideration of a new service stream for people who are furthest removed from the labour market and require specific supports. Given this context, international examples can provide valuable insights into tested approaches and models.

This report showcases the way France offers one of the most mature and comprehensive dedicated employment service streams supporting people who are long-term unemployed and/or face entrenched labour market disadvantage:

- Since the 1990s, France has developed and refined a national work integration system that uses social enterprises as a core component of its access to employment. Known as Insertion par l'Activité Économique (IAE), the system provides employment opportunities and pathways into mainstream work for people experiencing long-term unemployment and a range of social barriers. IAE is embedded within the French employment system as a specialist work integration stream sitting alongside mainstream employment services.

- The IAE sector operates at significant scale with around 4,500 Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs) providing supported employment and transition pathways to approximately 168,000 people (2025 figures). French WISEs (known as SIAE – Structures d'Insertion par l'Activité Économique) are formally integrated into the national employment system through contractual arrangements with the French Ministry of Employment and work alongside France Travail (the French equivalent of Workforce Australia) and other authorised referral agencies to support job seekers who require intensive employment and social support.





- A defining feature of IAE is the coverage of WISEs' impact costs by a funding mechanism called the "aide au poste" ("employment support payment") provided by the French Government. Rather than subsidising wages alone, the aide au poste recognises the additional costs associated with employing people who face significant barriers to work. It helps fund the intensive supervision, coaching, training and wrap-around support of participating employees and compensate employers for lower productivity levels. Aide au poste effectively acknowledges that WISEs deliver both economic and social outcomes, and that supporting people furthest from the labour market requires investment beyond the cost of employment itself.
- IAE is not designed as a permanent employment destination but a transitional employment model; WISEs provide participants with paid work, skills development, vocational experience and tailored support with the objective of helping them move into sustainable employment in the open labour market.
- IAE also recognises that people who are furthest removed from employment are not a homogeneous group. Different levels of disadvantage, work readiness and support needs require different forms of intervention. As a result, IAE is delivered through four categories of approved WISE, each providing a distinct pathway into employment based on how far removed from mainstream employment their employees are. Together, these pathways create a continuum of support capable of responding to varying levels of employment disadvantage.
- IAE has demonstrated significant positive outcomes with over 50% of participants still in employment or training six months after exiting their employment with a WISE. The public investment for the aide au poste has increased substantially over time. IAE funding rose from around €800 million in 2018 to approximately €1.25 billion in 2023, before reaching close to €1.5 billion in 2024. This upward trajectory occurred across successive governments and within a broader context of pressure on public expenditure, showing that the French Government regards IAE as a credible, efficient and scalable response to long-term unemployment and entrenched labour market disadvantage.

While providing a practical examination of the French IAE model and its impact, this report aims to highlight elements that may be relevant to Australia's ongoing employment services reform.

In particular:

- the subsidy mechanism (aide au poste) used by the French Government to compensate organisations for the additional costs associated with employing and supporting people with complex barriers
- how WISEs are formally integrated into the national employment system
- the way individuals experiencing long-term unemployment and significant social barriers are assessed and referred into the IAE system
- the governance, accountability and performance expectations underpinning the IAE
- the rationale for distinct work integration pathways to address varying levels of disadvantage and support needs

The report also provides insights into some aspects of the French system of work integration for people with disability with a focus on the way French disability enterprises are designed to support transitional employment.

While France and Australia operate within different institutional and labour market contexts, the French experience demonstrates how social enterprises can be practically embedded within a national employment system to provide structured employment pathways for people who are furthest from the labour market. As Australia considers reforms to better support job seekers facing complex and persistent barriers to employment, the French model offers practical lessons regarding referral mechanisms, service integration, funding structures, transitional employment pathways and the role of social enterprise in achieving sustainable employment outcomes.



ABOUT WHITE BOX ENTERPRISES

White Box Enterprises was established in 2019 with a mission to create an Australia where everyone who wants a job can access one. We operate as a field-building intermediary that works to strengthen the role of jobs-focused social enterprises in creating employment opportunities for people facing entrenched disadvantage.

Our practical approach, through direct business creation, funding, advisory support and project delivery, provides us with first-hand insight into the opportunities and challenges facing the sector and informs our work with governments, investors, philanthropists and practitioners.

Since 2019, White Box has raised more than \$60 million in blended finance, including philanthropy, government funding, investment and sponsorship, to support social enterprise initiatives.

Image: White Box Enterprises CEO Luke Terry with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Federal MP Justine Elliot at the opening of Beacon Laundry.

Our work spans three complementary areas:

Build

We build and operate jobs-focused social enterprises and support existing enterprises to grow their impact and sustainability. Through White Box, we have established Beacon Laundry, Australian Spatial Analytics, Civik Construction and Civik People.

Amplify

We bring together practitioners, policymakers, investors, researchers and funders to strengthen the broader ecosystem for jobs-focused social enterprises. This includes convening major sector events such as the Social Enterprise World Forum in Brisbane in 2022 and the inaugural Social Enterprise Jobs Summit in 2025, publishing research and practical insights, and advocating for policy and system reforms that enable social enterprises to create more jobs and greater social impact.

Innovate

We lead innovation projects that test ideas, deliver programs and generate evidence about what works. Working with governments, philanthropy and industry, we help inform the systems change needed for social enterprise to thrive in Australia.

We have partnered with the Department of Social Services, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and major Australian philanthropic foundations to co-design and deliver projects that strengthen the sustainability and impact of work integration social enterprises and disability enterprises. These include initiatives like the Payment By Outcomes (PBO) Trial, the Social Enterprise Loan Fund (SELF) and the Evolve Program.

White Box is governed by an independent Board with expertise across social impact, employment, finance, governance and business. Our work is independently evaluated by research partners, including the Centre for Social Impact at Swinburne University and the Melbourne Business School at the University of Melbourne.



SOCIAL ENTERPRISES IN FRANCE

French WISEs delivering the Insertion par l'Activité Économique (IAE) system operate within France's broader social enterprise framework, known as the Économie Sociale et Solidaire (ESS): the Social and Solidarity Economy.

Understanding the structure, scale and legal foundations of the ESS is therefore an important starting point. This broader framework explains how social enterprises are formally recognised as part of the mainstream economy in France, rather than being treated primarily as charitable or peripheral organisations.

Image: Marseille's city centre and the Vieux-Port, viewed from Fort Saint-Nicolas. Completed in 1664, the fortress is currently being restored by WISEs Acta Vista and BAO Formation, which specialise in the restoration of heritage-listed buildings.



The French social enterprise sector

Unlike many Western economies, where social enterprise is a loosely defined hybrid between charity and business, the French model positions the ESS as a distinct and equal pillar of the economy alongside the public and private sectors. A defining feature of the French model is its explicit recognition of a three-pillar economy:

1. Public sector (state)

2. Private sector (market)

3. Social and Solidarity Economy (ESS)

Rather than positioning the ESS as a corrective response to market failure, France recognises it as an equal in the economic system. This conceptual framing is critical because it legitimises scale, institutional investment, and long-term policy integration. The ESS is viewed not as a niche or charitable sector, but as a permanent and essential component of the French national economy.

The French social enterprise sector has been significantly structured by the July 2014 ESS Law. This law defines core ESS criteria (including purpose beyond profit distribution and democratic governance). It has shifted the ESS from a fragmented collection of associations and cooperatives into a coherent economic framework with access to public funding, procurement systems, and investment mechanisms. The July 2014 Law effectively reframed social enterprise as a regulated form of economic activity rather than a voluntary or philanthropic endeavour.

Within this legal framework, social enterprises in France typically:

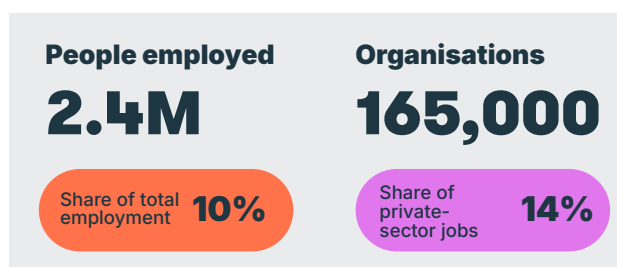
- Reinvest the majority of surpluses into their social mission.
- Operate in sectors such as social housing, healthcare, disability services, aged care, work integration, refugee support, environmental sustainability, and the circular economy.
- Adopt legal forms including associations, cooperatives, mutual societies, foundations, and socially useful commercial companies.
- Balance commercial activity with legally embedded social objectives.

The inclusion of for-purpose commercial companies following the 2014 reforms was particularly significant, as it enabled commercially active organisations to be recognised within the ESS, provided they meet strict governance and reinvestment criteria.

Size of the sector

The ESS represents a substantial part of the French economy:

- It employs around 2.4 million people, accounting for approximately 10% of total employment and about 14% of private-sector jobs.



- The sector comprises around 165,000 for-purpose organisations, including associations, cooperatives, mutual organisations, foundations, and commercial enterprises that meet ESS criteria.
- These organisations play a critical role in local and regional economies, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas, where they often account for a higher share of employment than the national average.

Snapshot on key legislation: the 2014 ESS Law

The French Law regulating the ESS was adopted in 2014 to formally recognise and support the Social and Solidarity Economy as a distinct part of the national economic system. The law was designed to respond to the long-standing aspirations of traditional ESS actors by acknowledging their contribution to economic and social cohesion. It is described as the first “inclusive” law in France to establish a common legal framework covering a wide range of organisations with different legal forms that operate according to ESS principles.

The law introduces a set of coordinated measures aimed at structuring, recognising, and enabling the ESS:

- Structuring and recognising representative institutions: the law strengthens and grants legal recognition to ESS representative bodies, including the Higher Council for the Social and Solidarity Economy, the French Chamber of ESS, and regional ESS chambers, helping to structure the sector at national and regional levels.
- Recognising ESS as a specific entrepreneurship model: it provides a clear definition of the organisations included in the ESS, establishes criteria for social innovation, and introduces the “Entreprise Solidaire d’Utilité Sociale” (ESUS) accreditation. This accreditation is available to ESS enterprises that meet additional criteria and allows them to benefit from fiscal incentives for investors.
- Facilitating access to finance and public procurement: the law creates tailored financing tools, such as solidarity-based participatory loans and dedicated equity investments. It also clarifies the legal distinction between subsidies and public procurement and enables the inclusion of social clauses in public procurement processes.
- Strengthening territorial development and cooperation: it establishes regional ESS conferences, involves regional ESS chambers in the design of regional sustainable development and territorial equality plans, and allows ESS enterprises to form regional economic cooperation hubs in collaboration with other economic and institutional stakeholders.
- Supporting employee takeovers and cooperative models: the law facilitates employee takeovers of businesses through seed cooperative and participative companies (SCOP) by creating a transitional legal status and introducing mechanisms to inform employees in advance of ownership transfers, with the aim of preserving or restoring jobs.
- Modernising cooperative structures: it modernises the cooperative framework by authorising the creation of groups of SCOPs, enabling stronger cooperation and consolidation within the cooperative sector.



The Australian delegation with Groupe SOS founder Jean-Marc Borello during the France study tour.

Groupe SOS

White Box has engaged extensively with Groupe SOS, including meeting with founding CEO Jean-Marc Borello in Paris during our French study tour in May 2026, and welcoming Executive Director Frédéric Bailly to the 2025 Social Enterprises Job Summit, co-hosted by White Box and Social Enterprise Australia.

Groupe SOS is a leading example of an ESS organisation working at a remarkable scale. Founded in Marseille in 1984 as an HIV/AIDS community organisation, Groupe SOS has grown into the largest social enterprise group in Europe. It now employs over 25,000 employees, generates over €2.5 billion of annual revenue and supports approximately 2 million beneficiaries each year. Groupe SOS operates across health, aged care, youth services, disability, housing, ecological transition, hospitality, culture and employment. Its model brings together non-profit organisations, social enterprises and mission-led commercial activities under a shared social purpose.

Groupe SOS carries out two types of activities: 1) Activities managed under the control of local governing public authorities

(e.g judicial supervision of young people); and 2) self-managed activities, including nursing homes, non-profit hospitals, etc. The Groupe SOS model is supported by a centralised administrative function.

What distinguishes Groupe SOS is not only its breadth but its operating logic. It functions similarly to a diversified corporate group while remaining non-profit. Surpluses are reinvested into expanding services and acquiring or stabilising underperforming organisations and public services, effectively acting as a system stabiliser within the French welfare state.

Because of its size and noting that Groupe SOS has no shareholders (no dividends are paid out: each year, all earnings are reinvested or saved). Groupe SOS can also implement, in full transparency, financial solidarity schemes between its entities to compensate the economic difficulties they may encounter from time to time. This ensures the group's independence.

The growth of Groupe SOS demonstrates how the ESS framework enables large-scale social enterprises to operate nationally while maintaining a strong commitment to social purpose and public benefit.

INTÉGRATION PAR L'ACTIVITÉ ÉCONOMIQUE (IAE)

Insertion par l'Activité Économique, or IAE, is France's national employment stream for people facing significant barriers to employment. Through an ecosystem of 4,500 WISEs (known as Structures d'Insertion par l'Activité Économique – SIAE), it supports over 165,000 people each year who are unlikely to move directly into mainstream work through standard employment services, including people experiencing long-term unemployment, low qualifications, housing insecurity, disability, health issues or other forms of entrenched disadvantage.

The IAE is based on a simple principle: paid work can be a pathway back to employment when combined with structured support. Participants are employed by a WISE while receiving socio-professional support to rebuild confidence, skills, work habits and stability.

The system has developed over several decades from local social economy initiatives into a formal part of France's employment framework. It now includes several recognised models of work integration responding to different levels of distance from the labour market.

IAE provides a transitional employment pathway, supported by public funding that recognises the additional costs of work integration.

WISEs

4,500

People supported each year

165,000+

Examples of barriers to mainstream employment

LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT

LOW-QUALIFICATIONS

HOUSING INSECURITY

DISABILITY

HEALTH ISSUES

OTHER ENTRENCHED DISADVANTAGE



An efficient response to long-term unemployment and compounding barriers

Long-term unemployment (>12 months unemployed) in France rose from a marginal phenomenon in the 1970s to a structurally significant labour market issue from the mid-1980s onwards. It peaked around the mid-1990s and again in the aftermath of the 2008 Global Financial crisis, then declined substantially between 2017 and 2023. Since 2024 it has been relatively low by historical standards with 566,000 long-term job seekers according to the International Labour Organisation (which defines unemployment as not having worked at all during the period).

Note that France Travail uses an administrative definition of unemployment which includes people who are registered with the agency, required to actively seek employment and may be underemployed. Using that definition brings the number of long-term job seekers to 2.4 million people in 2025.

The table below provides some insights into the way unemployment (including long-term – more than 12 months) is measured in France by France Travail and the National Statistics Agency (INSEE).

Source	Duration of unemployment	Description	Latest figure
INSEE (National French Statistics Agency)	All duration	People unemployed under the ILO/BIT definition: not employed, available to work, and actively seeking work	2.4m people in 2025, or 7.7% of the labour force; 8.1% in Q1 2026
France Travail (=Workforce Australia)	All duration	People registered with France Travail and required to look for work in categories A, B and C. Category A are people with no work; categories B and C include people doing some reduced activity	5.7m people in Q1 2026 in categories A, B and C, including 3.3m with no work (category A) and 2.4m with reduced activity (categories B and C)
INSEE	More than 12 months unemployed	Unemployed people, under the ILO/BIT definition, who have been looking for work for 12 months or more	566,000 people in 2025, or 1.8% of the labour force
France Travail	More than 12 months unemployed	People registered with France Travail in categories A, B and C for one year or more	2.4m people in 2025 representing 43.6% of A, B and C registered job seekers

To respond to the structural issues driving long-term unemployment, France has developed the IAE system as a central pillar of the French employment system focusing on long-term unemployment compounded by social barriers.

IAE has been defined in the French Labour Code, with a first iteration dating back to 1998, as a mechanism allowing people without employment and facing specific barriers to benefit from employment contracts specifically designed to facilitate work integration. These contracts are delivered through SIAE, dedicated organisations that provide different work integration pathways. These pathways generally last up to two years, with the objective of achieving a positive exit (e.g. transition to mainstream employment or education/ training).

The system is underpinned by:

- A clear legislative framework defining eligible organisations and participants
- A diversified ecosystem of WISEs adapted to different levels of disadvantage and providing suitable work integration pathways
- A structural subsidy mechanism (aide au poste) that funds the real cost of inclusive employment
- Strong integration with the mainstream employment system (public and private sectors)

The model operates at scale, supporting over 168,000 individuals annually across approximately 4,500 organisations (2024 numbers).

IAE is linked to France Travail as a recognised pathway for job seekers who face significant social and professional barriers to employment. France Travail acts as the public employment service and is the main authorised referral body able to assess, validate and refer eligible candidates into IAE pathways. This means IAE is not treated as a parallel or informal social enterprise sector, but as a formal component of France's employment and inclusion system.

The referral and eligibility process is managed through a national digital platform that connects candidates, authorised referral bodies and WISE employers ("Les Emplois de l'Inclusion: <https://emplois.inclusion.beta.gouv.fr/search/employers>). Once a candidate is assessed as eligible and hired by a WISE, their entry into an IAE pathway is validated, enabling the WISE to access the relevant public employment subsidies. Through this architecture, France Travail helps integrate IAE into the mainstream employment system while preserving the specialist role of WISE in providing paid work, individualised support and progression pathways for people furthest from the labour market.

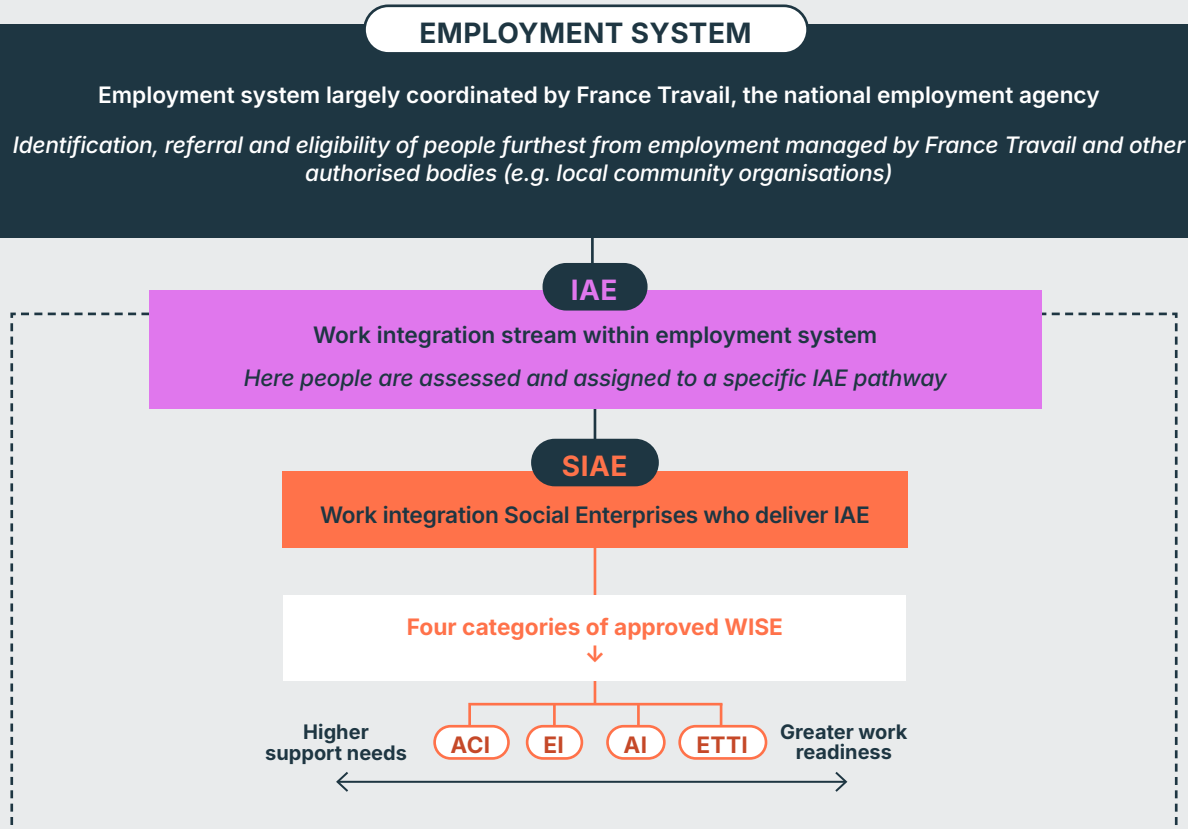
IAE structures and work integration pathways

A SIAE is not just any social enterprise employing disadvantaged people, it is an organisation formally recognised by the French state to deliver work integration pathways within a transitional model: paid work plus structured social and professional support for people who are far from the labour market so that they develop their employability within a mainstream setting.

An organisation becomes a SIAE by being approved through a state convention to operate one of the recognised IAE categories. This convention allows it to recruit eligible workers into an IAE pathway, provide structured employment and support, and receive public funding (i.e. the aide au poste subsidy). The convention also establishes the number of supported workers an SIAE can employ, thus setting the maximum aide au poste subsidy the SIAE can receive.

The IAE system is delivered through four categories of approved WISE: ACI, EI, AI and ETTI. Each provides a distinct work integration pathway designed for people with different levels of work readiness and support need (see table below). Together, these WISE categories create a continuum of employment support, ranging from highly supported and developmental environments to market-facing enterprises. This enables the system to match people with the pathway best suited to their circumstances and support their progression towards sustainable participation in the open labour market.

How France's work integration approach is structured



Categories of WISE	Australian equivalent	Business models	Level of aide au poste
ACI (ateliers et Chantiers d'Insertion)	Closest to a high support transitional jobs program	Low level of commercial sustainability (commercial activities are capped to avoid distorting competition) with strong social support supported by high subsidy level (>50-70% of expenses)	Very high Circa AUD \$40,000 per year per FTE (in 2026) For people furthest from the labour market
EI (Entreprises d'Insertion)	Closest to a traditional market-oriented WISE	Trading as a business with up to 20% of expenses dedicated to social support	High Circa AUD \$22,000 per year per FTE (in 2026) For people facing barriers and lower productivity levels
AI (Associations Intermediaires)	Community employment social enterprise (placement programs)	Flexible, local intermediary model rather than a full trading enterprise	Very low Circa AUD \$2,700 per year per FTE (in 2026) Designed to cover reduced productivity and employment readiness support on short work assignments in community employment setting
ETTI (Entreprises de Travail Temporaire d'Insertion)	Labour hire WISE	Functions as a work integration temp agency	Low Circa AUD \$8,000 per year per FTE (in 2026) Designed to cover reduced productivity and employment readiness support on long-term placement within mainstream setting



Participants eligibility and referral pathways

A candidate's eligibility for an IAE pathway is assessed in relation to two elements:

- a diagnosis of the person's social barriers to employment carried out by an SIAE
- the official administrative eligibility criteria

In practice, anyone meeting at least one level 1 administrative criterion or three level 2 administrative criteria is eligible for an IAE pathway.

Level 1 criteria include being a recipient of a minimum income benefit and/or a minimum jobseeker payment and/or a disability support pension and/or being registered with France Travail for at least 24 months over the previous 27 months.

Level 2 criteria cover a broader set of barriers to employment. These include:

- low qualification level
- being aged over 50 or under 26
- having recently left child protection services

- being a long-term jobseeker (registered with France Travail for at least 12 months over the previous 15 months)
- being a recognised worker with disability
- being a single parent
- being homeless, in temporary accommodation, or having experienced street homelessness
- being a refugee or asylum seeker with relevant work authorisation
- living in low SES community or in a disadvantaged rural or remote area
- having recently left incarceration or being under judicial supervision
- having very limited French language proficiency
- facing identified transport barriers.

How IAE eligibility is assessed

Social barrier diagnosis
Carried out by an SIAE

AND

Administrative eligibility
Meets a national criteria threshold

Administrative Threshold - meets either of the following

① x Level 1 Criteria

- Minimum income benefit
- Minimum jobseeker payment
- Disability support pension
- Registered with France Travail for a minimum of 24 months

OR

③ x Level 2 Criteria

- Low qualification level
- Aged over 50 or under 26
- Recently left child protection
- Long-term jobseeker (12+ of last 15 months)
- Recognised worker with disability
- Single parent
- Homeless or in temporary accommodation
- Refugee or asylum seeker, work authorised
- Low SES, disadvantaged or remote area
- Recently incarcerated or under supervision
- Very limited French proficiency
- Identified transport barriers

In addition to these criteria, a diagnostic is performed to further assess the candidate and match them to a suitable IAE pathway:

Diagnostic area	Highly vulnerable	Intermediate vulnerability 1	Intermediate vulnerability 2	Available / work-ready
French language proficiency	Unable to read/write or illiterate	Requires French as a foreign language training and/or basic skills training	Basic or limited proficiency	Good to perfect proficiency
Capacity to occupy a job	Immediately unable to occupy a job	Needs support before being able to occupy a job	Can occupy a job with adjusted conditions	Can occupy a job under ordinary conditions
Housing	Homeless	Collective accommodation such as emergency refugee housing, shelters, social housing, etc	Accommodation outside social housing structures, substandard housing, or at risk of losing housing	Stable housing
Access to rights	Does not know their rights; not accessing available rights	Has given up on rights, has lost rights, or has difficulty renewing rights	Knows their rights and has processes underway	Receives the rights and benefits corresponding to their situation
Mobility	Cannot travel alone to the workplace	Can organise carpooling and/or has a vehicle but with compliance issues, such as insurance or roadworthiness	Can use public transport and/or has a two-wheeled vehicle	Has a compliant vehicle and driver's licence; can potentially carpool
Financial resources	Over-indebted, with no debt file lodged and/or no income	Over-indebted, with a debt file lodged and being followed up	Primary needs met day to day and/or under protective measures such as curatorship	Can manage their budget, with capacity to finance needs such as obtaining a driver's licence
Justice	Sentence currently being served	Followed by judicial services after sentence completion	No current supervision	No current supervision
Availability	Low or difficult availability, for example due to childcare, care for an older relative, or family responsibilities	Availability to be organised	Immediate availability with time constraints	Immediate availability with no time constraints



Eligibility of SIAE and access to subsidies

The aide au poste is the core public subsidy that underpins France's IAE system. It was introduced through the 2014 reform of IAE financing, which sought to simplify a previously fragmented funding architecture and create a more transparent, common framework for supporting SIAE. Rather than funding each structure through a mix of separate mechanisms, the reform established a per-position subsidy linked to the number of authorised full-time equivalent roles in work integration. The rationale was to recognise that SIAE carry additional costs compared with ordinary businesses, including lower productivity during the early stages of employment, dedicated supervision, training, and socio-professional support.

The aide au poste amount differs across the four categories of approved WISE (SIAE) because each model works people who have different levels of employment readiness, commercial exposure and support needs:

- ACI receive the highest support because they usually work with people furthest from the labour market in highly supervised, developmental worksites.
- EI receive a significant subsidy because they directly employ people in trading businesses while carrying both commercial and social support costs.
- ETTI and AI receive lower subsidies because they operate more as labour market intermediaries, placing people into assignments with external users or employers.
- There is also a modulated component allowing the State to adjust support according to the characteristics of the people employed, the quality and intensity of the support provided, and the outcomes achieved.

In 2025, the State allocated +/- € 1.5 billion to the aide au poste, up from € 800 million a decade earlier.

SIZE AND IMPACT OF IAE

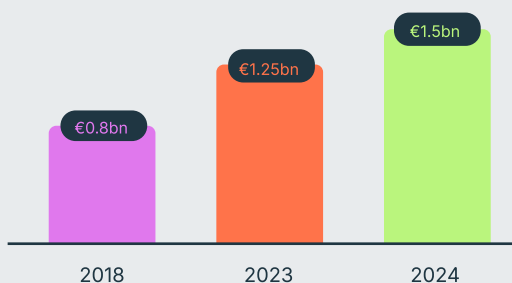
The evolution of French Government funding for IAE provides a strong indication of the value placed on the model as a specific employment stream.

Since the reform of IAE financing in 2014, the aide au poste has become the central public funding mechanism for SIAE, compensating them for the additional costs of employing and supporting people who are furthest from the labour market. Rather than treating these costs as incidental, the French State has progressively embedded them into the employment system through a dedicated, recurring budget line.

This public investment has increased substantially over time. IAE funding rose from around €800 million in 2018 to approximately €1.25 billion in 2023, before reaching close to €1.5 billion in 2024.

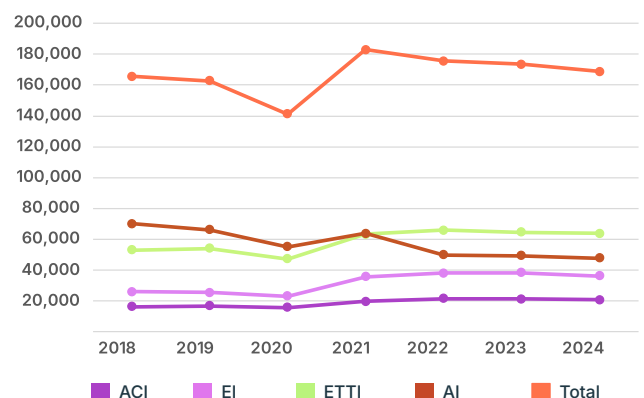
This upward trajectory is significant because it occurred across successive governments and within a broader context of pressure on public expenditure. It shows that the French Government regards IAE as a credible, efficient and scalable response to long-term unemployment and entrenched labour market disadvantage. The sustained expansion of aide au poste funding reflects a policy judgement that SIAE are not simply subsidised employers, but part of the public infrastructure needed to reconnect people facing complex barriers with paid work, training and mainstream employment pathways.

IAE funding has nearly doubled since 2018



Funding grew across successive governments, despite pressure on public expenditure, signalling durable political confidence in IAE as a credible, efficient, scalable response.

Number of IAE supported employees by SIAE



Evolution of the number of approved SIAE per year:

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
AI	667	656	644	643	631	626	608
ACI	1,905	1,923	1,956	2,084	2,185	2,232	2,182
ETTI	292	318	364	428	457	470	474
EI	973	994	1,031	1,140	1,193	1,195	1,173
Total	3,837	3,891	3,995	4,295	4,466	4,523	4,437

2024 snapshot of new IAE supported employees:

%	2024
Gender	
Women	36
Men	64
Age	
Less than 26	27
26 to 49	54
50 or more	20
Education	
No degree	40
Vocational degree	39
HSC or equivalent	15
University degree or equivalent	6
Non French	32
Time registered at France Travail	
Not registered	24
Less than 6 months	24
6 to 16 months	14
12 to 24 months	15
24 months or more	23
Recipient of Disability Support Pension	8
Location	
Rural/ remote	21
Regional	36
Metro	42
Total	100

Assessing a transitional model

The impact of IAE is partly assessed through the concept of “sorties dynamiques”, or “dynamic exits”. The framework below classifies what happens to participants when they leave an IAE pathway (that is at the end of their contract with a WISE), distinguishing between sustainable employment, transitional employment, other positive exits such as further education or training, and negative outcomes such as unemployment or inactivity. It standardises a way to measure whether IAE has helped people move closer to sustainable employment, while also recognising that progress can include intermediate steps such as training, another supported employment pathway, or retirement.

End of IAE pathway

Classifying participant employment exits

SUSTAINABLE
Stable jobs

TRANSITIONAL
Temporary Work

POSITIVE EXITS
Training, Study

OTHER (NEGATIVE)
Unemployment, etc

Situation at the end of the IAE contract	Classified as	
Hired on an unsubsidised permanent contract by another employer	Sustainable employment	
Hired on a subsidised permanent contract by another employer	Sustainable employment	
Hired on a permanent contract within the structure or its subsidiary	Sustainable employment	
Hired on a fixed-term contract, without public employment subsidy, for more than six months	Sustainable employment	
Creation or takeover of a business as a self-employed person	Sustainable employment	
Integration into the public service	Sustainable employment	
Hired on a fixed-term contract, without public employment subsidy, for less than six months by another employer	Transitional employment	
Hired on a subsidised contract for a fixed period by another employer, outside IAE	Transitional employment	
Hired for a fixed period in another IAE structure	Positive exit	
Entry into qualifying training or continuation of qualifying training	Positive exit	
Retirement	Positive exit	
Unemployment/ inactive/ no contact	Other (negative exit)	
Long-term leave, death, judicial decision	Removed from recorded exits	

Duration of IAE contracts before transition

While the IAE contracts can last up to 2 years, supported employees exit the system, on average, after a bit less than 1 year in work integration employment.

	2024			
	ACI	EI	AI	ETTI
Average contract duration (in months)	11.8	10.7	10.9	5.9
Transition (%) based on contract duration				
3 months or less	14	22	44	53
From 3 to 6 months	21	19	15	16
From 6 to 12 months	28	24	15	15
12 to 24 months	31	29	13	13
More than 24 months	7	6	13	4
Total	100	100	100	100



A 2024 DARES study (DARES is the evaluation and statistics directorate of the French Ministry of Labour) examined the employment situation of people six months after leaving an IAE pathway (2021 data). The study covered approximately 170,000 people exiting one of the four categories of approved SIAE: ACI, EI, AI and ETTI. DARES found that 45% of participants were in employment six months after leaving IAE, including 26% in durable employment, defined as a permanent contract (CDI) or a fixed-term contract of at least six months. A further 7% were undertaking training, 40% were seeking employment and 8% were inactive.

Outcomes varied significantly by type of SIAE. Participants leaving AI and ETTI achieved the strongest employment outcomes, with 53% in employment six months after exit. This compares with 41% for EI and 33% for ACI. DARES notes that these differences partly reflect the profile of participants entering each model. ACI generally support people facing the greatest barriers to employment, including lower qualifications, longer periods of unemployment and greater social disadvantage.

The study also found that employment outcomes were strongly influenced by participant characteristics. People receiving minimum

income support payments, those with very low levels of education, and those who had been unemployed for extended periods before entering IAE experienced lower employment rates after exit.

Importantly, DARES highlights that IAE serves a population significantly more disadvantaged than the general labour force. Among people leaving IAE in 2021, 38% were receiving social benefits and many had experienced long-term unemployment before entering the program. Against this backdrop, the employment outcomes achieved by the sector demonstrate the capacity of IAE to support people with complex barriers into employment, while also providing pathways into training and further workforce participation.

The quality of employment outcomes is also notable. Among those who were employed six months after exit, approximately three-quarters were working as employees outside temporary agency work, and at least one-quarter had secured permanent employment. However, part-time work remained common, particularly among people leaving AI, where flexible and part-time assignments are a core feature of the model.

Situation 6 months after exiting IAE contracts:

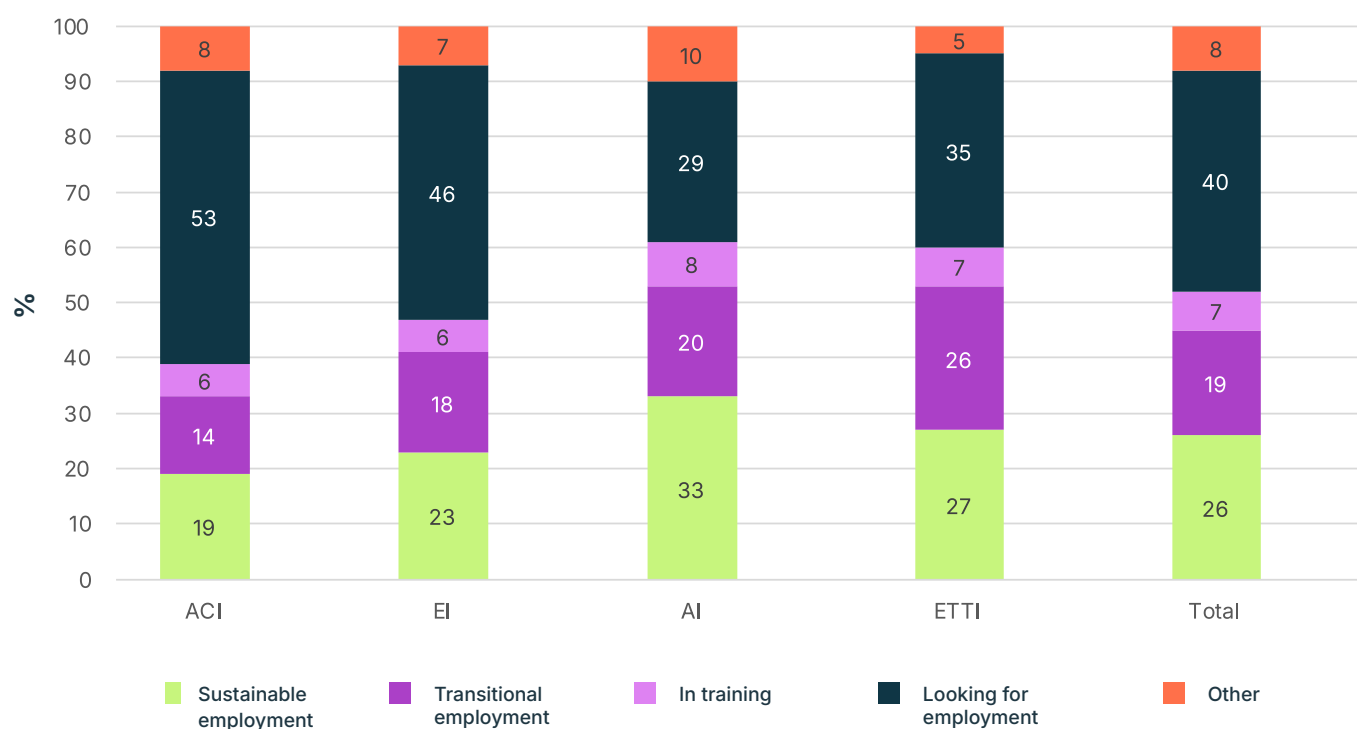




Image: White Box Enterprises' Luke Terry and Nico Deloux with Mathieu Lagache at Groupe Vitamine T during a visit to France in 2025.

Groupe Vitamine T

In February 2025, the White Box team visited Groupe Vitamine T in Northern France. Vitamine T is one of France's leading WISE groups and a major example of how IAE can be delivered at scale. Founded in 1978, the group emerged in response to deindustrialisation, long-term unemployment and social exclusion. Its original focus was on young people leaving the child protection system, but it has progressively expanded to support a much broader range of people excluded from employment, including long-term unemployed people, migrants, women facing complex barriers, people with disability and people affected by rural and territorial disadvantage. Vitamine T has been a pioneer of IAE, working closely with the public employment service on work integration and employment pathways.

Vitamine T's model combines commercial activity with intensive social and professional support. The group operates through a portfolio of social enterprises that trade in real market conditions while employing, training and supporting people in insertion pathways. Its activities are organised across four main

areas: services; recycling and industry; sustainable food; and human resources solutions. These sectors are deliberately chosen because they respond to growing market needs while creating accessible jobs for people who are distant from the labour market.

A distinctive feature of Vitamine T is that it has developed almost the full range of French work integration pathways through the four categories of approved WISE (SIAE), including EI, ETTI, ACI and AI. It also operates related inclusion models such as entreprises adaptées (EA) for people with disability. This portfolio allows Vitamine T to offer different pathways depending on a person's distance from employment, support needs and readiness to work in ordinary market conditions.

The scale of the group is significant. In 2025, Vitamine T reported 7,140 employees, including 5,380 employees in work integration pathways, across 34 social enterprises. It also reported a 64% rate of exits into employment or training.



WORK INTEGRATION FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

Alongside IAE, France has a dedicated employment stream for people with disability. This stream includes two employment models: Entreprises Adaptées (EA) and Établissements et services d'accompagnement par le travail (ESAT). While both support people with disability, they serve different cohorts and operate under different funding and employment arrangements.

EA are market-oriented enterprises that employ people with a recognised disability in ordinary employment conditions, with public support to compensate for additional support needs or reduced productivity. ESAT operate as medico-social work settings for people whose disability makes ordinary employment difficult, combining adapted professional activity with social, educational and health-related support. Together, these models recognise that people living with disability may require distinct employment pathways, ranging from supported participation in protected work environments through to paid employment in mainstream market conditions.

Disability employment in France

In France, the employment of people with disability remains significantly lower than for the general population. In 2024, 3.32 million people

aged 15–64 had an administrative recognition of disability, representing 8.1% of the working age population. Of these, 1.35 million people with disability were in employment, equivalent to 4.8% of all people in work. However, the employment gap remains large: people with disability had an employment rate of 41%, compared with 69% for the general population. Their unemployment rate was 12%, compared with 7% for the general population.

Workers with disability are more likely to face structural barriers in the labour market; they tend to be older than the general working age population, have lower levels of qualification, receive minimum social benefits, and face additional barriers such as poorer health or limited geographic mobility. At the end of 2025, 519,181 disabled job seekers were registered with France Travail in categories A, B and C, representing 8.9% of all registered job seekers.

History of support and current legislation

French public policies supporting the employment of people living with disability have gradually evolved from a logic of compensation and protection to one of rights, inclusion, and participation in the labour market.

1924-1950s

Early foundations: from war injury to employment quotas

The legislative history begins in 1924, with the first law promoting the employment of war veterans injured during the First World War. This pioneering law introduced the principle of mandatory employment quotas, initially limited to certain sectors, and marked the first recognition by the State that access to work was a key component of social reintegration for people with disabilities.

Disability policy was primarily framed as a response to war-related impairment rather than as a universal social issue. Over the following decades, this approach progressively broadened beyond war injuries, laying the groundwork for a more general recognition of disabled workers within the labour market. However, the system remained fragmented and largely focused on obligation rather than inclusion.

1957-1975

Structuring disability policy: recognition and solidarity

In 1957, French law formally introduced the notion of a “disabled worker” and created mechanisms for vocational rehabilitation. This period marked the emergence of disability as a public policy issue rather than a purely charitable or compensatory concern. The 1975 framework law established disability policy as a national obligation. Employment, training, and social integration were explicitly recognised as fundamental rights, and the State assumed responsibility for ensuring equal access to work and social life for people with disabilities.

1987-2000s

The quota system and institutionalisation of employment policy

The Law of 10 July 1987 marked another turning point by introducing the Obligation to Employ Disabled Workers (OETH). Employers with at least 20 employees were required to ensure that 6% of their workforce consisted of workers with disabilities or, failing that, to contribute financially to a dedicated fund. This law led to the creation of Agefiph (www.agefiph.fr), responsible for supporting employment in the private sector. This period saw the consolidation of disability employment policy around financial incentives, employer obligations, and specialised support structures.

2005 onwards

The 2005 Disability Law: equality, participation and citizenship

The Law of 11 February 2005 on equal rights, participation and citizenship provided a legal definition of disability and affirmed the principle of equal rights in all areas of life. It created the RQTH status (Recognition of Disabled Worker status) as the key gateway to access employment related rights and supports.

Key pillars of the French employment system for people with a disability

RQTH

The RQTH is an administrative decision that gives rights to every person with a disability. It can be requested by everyone who has a disability in the context of work or studies, from 16 years old. The RQTH is the gateway to tailored employment assistance; it gives access to specific employment supports, workplace adjustments, training measures and specialist employment services.

Obligation to employ

Employers with 20 or more employees are required to ensure that at least 6% of their workforce is made up of workers recognised as having a disability (this is known as the obligation d'emploi des travailleurs handicapés – OETH). Employers that do not meet the quota must make a financial contribution, which helps fund disability employment supports. This obligation applies in both the private and public sectors. Procuring goods or services from a disability employer does not count as direct employment towards the quota, but it can reduce the amount of the contribution payable. The supplier provides an annual certificate identifying the eligible labour-cost component of the contract, and the employer can deduct 30% of that labour-cost amount from its gross OETH contribution.

Employment structures

Similarly to the different IAE pathways described in the first part of the report, France has several models of disability employment structures designed to provide wrap-around support to employees with a disability and facilitate their transition to mainstream employment:

- EA are market oriented social enterprises or businesses that employ a high proportion of workers with disability in ordinary employment conditions, with public support to compensate for lower productivity or additional support needs.
- ESAT are medico-social organisations for people whose disability makes ordinary employment difficult; they provide professional activity combined with social, educational and medico-social support.



Image: The Paris 2024 Olympic Aquatics Centre in Saint-Denis, built as part of the Paris 2024 Games.



Image: The Australian delegation at Les Ailes Déployées, a disability enterprise that operates several social enterprises employing people with mental health support needs.

Enterprises Adaptées (EA)

EA size and impact

EA operate in mainstream markets with the specific mission to employ people with disability who face significant barriers to work. They are subject to the French Labour Code and compete commercially like other businesses, but their workforce model is distinctive: at least 55% of their production workforce must be recognised workers with disability (RQTH). EA provide award wage employment in adapted working conditions, enabling people with disability to obtain or retain employment, develop skills and, where possible, progress towards other employers in the public or private sectors.

The EA model sits between mainstream employment and more protected forms of work such as ESAT. Workers employed in EA have standard employment contracts and rights under the Labour Code, including paid leave, social protection, retirement rights and trade union rights. They must be paid at least the statutory minimum wage, according to their role and qualifications, without reference to productivity. In 2024, France launched a new sub-model of EA focusing on temporary labour hire, enabling employees with disability to undertake temporary assignments with mainstream employers while receiving tailored support and training.

France has over 1,000 EA employing 58,000 people in 2023 (71% with a recognised disability). The employment model is a mix of destination/retention (with long-term employment contracts) and transition (with specific contracts designed to facilitate transition to mainstream employment within 2 years):

	2023
Number of EA	1,090
Total number of employees	58,100
Including RQTH employees	41,100
Share of RQTH employees	71%
Gender	
Male	64%
Female	36%
Age	
Less than 30	10%
30 to 49	42%
50 to 55	22%
56 and more	26%
Employment types	
Standard "Destination" EA - permanent employment	57%
Standard "Destination" EA - Long-term contract (>6 months)	5%
Standard "Destination" EA - Short-term contract (< 6 months)	25%
Transition contracts (CDD Tremplin and disability labour hire)	13%

A CDD Tremplin is a fixed-term transition contract (4 to 24 months) used to support workers with disability towards employment with another employer. Unlike the standard EA model, which can provide long-term employment, the CDD Tremplin is explicitly designed as a springboard into another job in the public or private sector. The model was trialled from 2019 to 2023 and made permanent from 1 January 2024.

National data suggest that transition from EA into sustainable employment remains relatively limited, although it is improving in some pathways. In 2025, 4.2% of workers with disability by standard destination contracts exited into sustainable employment, compared with 2.2% in 2024. Transition-focused contracts performed better with 17% of employees exiting into sustainable employment.



	2023 actuals	2024 actuals	2025 actuals	2026 target
Share of RQTH employees with EA permanent and/or contract employment who have transitioned to mainstream, sustainable employment	2.4%	2.2%	4.2%	2.4%
Share of RQTH employees with EA transitional employment who have transitioned to mainstream, sustainable employment	13.8%	13.7%	17.1%	20.0%

Public subsidy

The French disability enterprise sector has a similar subsidy model as the IAE sector, the aide au poste, designed to compensate for the additional costs of employing and supporting workers with disability. The subsidy is paid directly to the enterprise as a fixed amount based on the number of eligible full-time workers (prorated for part time work).

The amount is based on:

- the age of the employee
- the nature of the employment contract (destination for permanent employment and long-term/ short-term contracts, and transition for Tremplin contracts and temporary labour hire)

Type of support	2026 annual amounts
Standard EA – worker under 50	EUR € 18,445 per FTE (ca AUD \$30k)
Standard EA – worker aged 50 to 55	EUR € 18,683 per FTE (ca AUD \$30.5k)
Standard EA – worker aged 56 and over	EUR € 19,164 per FTE (ca AUD \$31.5k)
Contract Tremplin	EUR € 12,600 per FTE (ca AUD \$20.5k)
Support to temporary labour hire	EUR € 5,355 per FTE (ca AUD \$8.8k)

Etablissements et services d'accompagnement par le travail (ESAT)

ESAT are medico-social organisations that enable people with disability to undertake professional activity in a protected work environment while receiving social, educational and medico-social support. They are designed for people whose disability means they cannot currently work in an ordinary workplace, or in an EA, even with support. Unlike workers in EA, people working in ESAT do not have ordinary employee status; they are users of a medico-social service who undertake paid work activity under adapted conditions.

ESAT workers receive a guaranteed remuneration rather than an ordinary wage. This is made up of a portion paid by the ESAT and, where relevant, public support from the State. They may also be able to combine this remuneration with a disability support pension,

depending on their circumstances. The model is therefore different from EA, where workers are employees and must be paid at least the minimum wage.

ESAT workers have a range of rights that have been strengthened in recent reforms. They are entitled to paid annual leave, health-related leave and maternity, paternity and adoption leave. Since recent reforms, their rights have moved closer to those of ordinary employees in some areas, while preserving their medico-social protection. From 1 July 2024, supplementary health insurance became compulsory for ESAT workers, reflecting this broader move to strengthen their social rights.

The sector is large with around 1,500 ESAT supporting approximately 120,000 workers with disability.

KEY LEARNINGS FOR EMBEDDING WISES IN THE AUSTRALIAN EMPLOYMENT SYSTEM

The French model demonstrates that the success of WISEs is not explained by any single policy measure. Rather, it reflects an employment system intentionally designed to recognise, fund and integrate them as part of the national response to long-term unemployment and labour market disadvantage. The following lessons are particularly relevant to Australia's current employment services reform.

LESSONS





LESSON 1 →

Formal integration of WISEs into the employment system

The defining feature of the French model is not the existence of WISEs, but their formal integration into the employment system through the IAE framework. They are not treated as marginal community initiatives or short-term pilots, but as approved delivery partners with a defined role in supporting people furthest from the labour market.

This formal role gives WISEs a clear position alongside France Travail, local employment actors, social services and employers. It also provides a policy basis for public funding, referral pathways, eligibility rules and performance expectations. For Australia, this is relevant because it shows how social enterprises can be embedded within the employment system as a distinct pathway for people with barriers to employment.

LESSON 2 →

A dedicated subsidy mechanism: the aide au poste

France demonstrates that work integration requires dedicated funding that recognises the additional costs of supporting people facing significant barriers to employment. These costs include closer supervision, workplace adaptation, lower initial productivity, higher support needs, coordination with social services, and the time required to help participants stabilise their personal and professional situation.

Aide au poste is not simply a wage subsidy but rather a structural contribution to the work integration function performed by the social enterprise.

The different amounts of aide au poste paid to French WISEs reflect the different work integration pathways and the fact that job seekers with entrenched disadvantage have varying support needs and work readiness levels.

LESSON 3 →

Assessment and referral of people facing long-term unemployment and social barriers

The IAE system includes structured mechanisms to assess whether a person is eligible and suitable for a work integration pathway. Eligibility is based not only on unemployment status, but also on the broader social and professional barriers that prevent a person from accessing mainstream work. These can include long-term unemployment, low qualifications, disability, housing insecurity,

justice system involvement, health issues, social isolation or other forms of disadvantage.

Referrals can be made by authorised organisations, including employment services, social services and other recognised bodies that understand the person's circumstances. The system therefore recognises that people with complex barriers often need a guided pathway into employment, rather than being left to navigate the labour market alone. It also helps ensure that work integration places are targeted to those who need them most.

LESSON 4



Governance, accountability and performance expectations

The French model is underpinned by a governance framework that sets expectations for both the organisation and the participant pathway. Organisations must be approved to operate as SIAE and are expected to deliver both economic activity and social outcomes. This includes employing eligible participants, providing socio-professional support, reporting on activity and outcomes, and

supporting progression towards employment, training or another suitable pathway.

This creates a clearer accountability relationship between government and providers. Public funding is linked to the organisation's role in supporting disadvantaged workers, and their capacity to transition their employees into mainstream employment, not simply to service activity or job placement. The model therefore balances flexibility in delivery with expectations around quality, targeting and progression.

LESSON 5



Distinct pathways for different levels of disadvantage

A key strength of the IAE system is that it does not assume a single employment pathway will work for all disadvantaged job seekers. France has developed several work integration models, each designed for different levels of distance from the labour market and different support needs. Some models provide highly supported work environments for people with more complex barriers, while others operate closer to mainstream employment or temporary work. This allows the system to match the intensity of support and the type of work experience to the person's circumstances. This is particularly relevant because many people experiencing entrenched disadvantage need a staged pathway into work, rather than immediate placement into mainstream employment with limited support.

LESSON 6



Dedicated employment pathways for people with disability

In addition to the IAE system, France has a complementary model specifically designed for people with disability: Entreprises Adaptées (EA). These are businesses operating in the open labour market that employ a majority of workers with recognised disabilities, under standard employment contracts, while providing tailored workplace adjustments and support.

EA differ from traditional disability enterprises in that they are fully integrated into the competitive economy and aim to provide sustainable, paid employment rather than segregated or purely therapeutic activity. They receive targeted public funding to compensate for productivity gaps and to support workplace adaptation, enabling them to offer stable jobs to people who may not yet be able to access or retain employment in mainstream firms.

Importantly, EA can also act as a stepping stone to mainstream employment, while recognising that for some individuals, long-term supported employment may be the most appropriate outcome.



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