

Commitment to gender equality companies operating internationally

SUMMARY

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On 31 October 2018, Jean-Yves Le Drian, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, requested the CSR Platform to make a diagnosis, identifying in particular good practices, and propose recommendations to mobilise French companies operating internationally in favour of equality between women and men, as part of their social responsibility initiatives.

Located within France Stratégie, the CSR Platform has been bringing together CSR stakeholders in France since 2013: companies, social partners, civil society organisations, stakeholder networks, researchers and public institutions.

To develop its recommendations, it set up a working group, drew up an inventory, met with some 30 stakeholders and organised 19 hearings.

While the statistics show a slow but definite increase in women's rights and gender equality since the middle of the 20th century, inequalities still exist. Inequalities are particularly significant in the professional context but vary according to the country and the sector of activity. Worldwide, women earn, on average, 20% less than men.

Many legislative, social, cultural, economic and legislative obstacles to gender equality persist in the world. The existence of restrictive legislation, the inequitable distribution of unpaid activities, insufficient support for parenting, difficulties of access to education, energy, sexual and reproductive health are all obstacles to gender equality and women's empowerment.

Mobilization is all the more important as gender equality and women's empowerment are one of the fundamental pillars of sustainable development.

The rights of women and girls are one of the key themes of the United Nations Programme for Sustainable Development, both as an autonomous objective and as a transverse issue integrated into the targets and indicators of Agenda 2030.

As actors in a globalised world, and given the number of people or entities with which they interact, in their own subsidiaries and in their area of influence, French companies can act to promote responsible practices and a culture of equality between women and men.

The challenge for companies is to contribute to advancing gender equality, while taking into account the local specificities of the countries where they operate. Today, French multinational companies employ 5.5 million people abroad, working in 37,000 subsidiaries in more than 190 countries. The gender mix and professional equality of women and men are also challenges for economic actors in terms of their economic and social performance, their reputation and the loyalty of their employees, their suppliers and the confidence of their investors.

The CSR Platform has identified the responsible practices implemented by French companies in the countries in which they are active.

These practices aim to reduce the wage gap, facilitate and support women's careers, promote gender diversity and female entrepreneurship, and combat gender-based violence, harassment and prejudice.

Beyond specific initiatives and projects, it emerges that a company's commitment to gender equality must lead to a change in the company's culture, driven by all stakeholders.

The effectiveness of these responsible practices depends, beyond the mere allocation of financial resources to reduce the wage gap, on multiple factors:

- Challenges taken to the highest level of the company and relayed at the local level by a diversity / equality network;
- The mobilization of all internal and external stakeholders;
- Action at the supply chain level;
- The creation of an environment conducive to the employment of women;
- The fight against stereotypes.

These measures to promote gender diversity and equality benefit everyone. They contribute to promoting the richness of a plural, diverse world, and to building more inclusive enterprises and societies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The CSR Platform makes 40 recommendations to government, companies, trade unions, professional federations and researchers:

The CSR Platform recommends in particular that the French government:

- **to act to set an example for the State** as an employer, and in appointing its representatives to international bodies; to systematically take into account the impact of its policies on gender, drawing on the United Nations Agenda 2030 and mobilising the French diplomatic network to support French companies abroad;
- **encourage the targeting of investment** towards gender equality policies and mobilise public enterprises and development aid;
- **support** several international initiatives in favour of gender equality and ratify the ILO Convention on the Elimination of Violence and Harassment in the World of Work adopted in June 2019.

The CSR Platform recommends that companies share best practices and disseminate them to their subsidiaries:

- **to include gender equality in their strategy** and on the agenda of their governing bodies by allocating sufficient resources;

- **to act for a sustainable change in corporate culture**, by facilitating the reporting of gender and sexual violence and abuse, and by creating a healthy working environment;
- **to act against gender pay inequalities throughout their supply chain**, to encourage gender diversity, women's hierarchical progression, their access to research and development, technical, scientific and digital functions;
- **to promote the reconciliation of women's professional and personal lives** by combating discrimination, encouraging a balanced use of family leave, and taking ambitious and exemplary measures in the field of social protection in the absence of a sufficient national legislative framework.

The CSR Platform also recommends that companies, in order to disseminate responsible practices within their sphere of influence:

- **promote the negotiation of global framework agreements including gender equality**, gender equality and parenthood and insert specific clauses related to gender equality in procurement contracts with their suppliers and subcontractors;
- **foster partnerships** with international organizations and facilitate dialogue with local authorities and civil society organizations in the countries in which they operate;
- **support actions in favour of women's entrepreneurship** as well as sponsorship projects in favour of gender equality;
- **to comply with the recommendations of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) to combat stereotypes and prejudices in advertising.**

The CSR Platform recommends that trade union organisations encourage gender diversity within their organisations, in all functions and at all levels, and promote the establishment of global framework agreements including gender equality, warning mechanisms and training.

The CSR Platform recommends that professional federations integrate gender equality into their sectoral reference frameworks and disseminate tools and good practices to their international relays.

The CSR Platform recommends that researchers develop and promote research programmes on the management of professional equality, and on the impact measures of actions carried out in the field of gender equality.

THE CSR PLATFORM

Established in 2013 at France Stratégie at the request of stakeholders, the National Global Action Platform for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a consultative body placed under the Prime Minister.

The CSR Platform is a multi-stakeholder body with a mission to consult and promote good CSR practices. It "issues opinions on the issues submitted to it and makes recommendations on social, environmental and governance issues raised by corporate social responsibility" (Article 5 of Decree No. 2013-333 of 22 April 2013 as amended).

It defines its work programme and responds to government referrals. Since its creation, the CSR Platform has worked on many themes, offering a rich and comprehensive vision of CSR.