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# **The development of gender diversity in French companies**

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**Abstract:**

Society has undergone major social upheavals over the last century: The Second World War, the evolution of women's rights, the 30 glorious years. All these changes have contributed to the evolution of mentalities and have helped to establish more equality between men and women in our societies. However, today there is still a long way to go to achieve professional equality. Women are as active as men but professionally they are not distributed in the same sectors of activity as men. Certain types of jobs or hierarchical positions seem to be more difficult for women to climb.

The aim of this research paper is to identify the causes of these disparities between men and women in terms of sectors, professions and stereotypes. Another objective is to look for tools to help companies develop professional diversity within organisations. Research was carried out beforehand in order to better define the issue, as well as field surveys to understand the issue of professional diversity in different companies.

**Key words:** professional mix, gender inequality, women's emancipation, professional inequality, "masculine" or "feminine" jobs

# I. Introduction

The concept of diversity was born as a result of the American Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibiting racial discrimination and to regulate affirmative action that ultimately led to positive discrimination. As early as 1980, large American companies became aware of professional equality through the term diversity that concerns women but also other forms of "differences": age, race, religion, culture, disability. (Sanders, 2011)

In France, the concept of diversity came later. It has been frequently mentioned both in the press and in conferences and other HR forums since the early 2000s.

The French principle of diversity was initially concerned with gender inequalities before extending to other forms of discrimination, both sociological and political, as well as socio psychological. (Editions Tissot, 2019)

In the 90s the vision of companies evolved, many companies began to take an interest in well-being at work, in the good treatment of their employees, or more broadly in social and environmental responsibility. The aim is both to attract and retain employees who are increasingly attentive to their quality of life and to have a positive, human and welcoming image.

Diversity is also synonymous with efficiency. Indeed, all the indicators prove it: diversity increases commercial performance but also internal performance.

It is a richness to learn to adjust to other cultures, to find a common language, to accept opinions different from one's own. Each culture brings its own richness of reference. (Editions Tissot, 2019)

In addition, the mixing of teams also meets an economic objective. It brings the company's profiles into contact with customer profiles while offering products and services adapted to the diversity of customers.

Valuing the qualities and skills of men and women is essential. Indeed, certain skills are more frequently attributed to women, such as team spirit, listening, the search for

compromise, organisation and dialogue. However, it should be noted that gender diversity is only an additional performance factor if the company fully integrates it into its operating methods. This will not be the case if each recruit has to fit into a training and operational mould. (Editions Tissot, 2019)

**Equality between men and women is therefore a major challenge for companies in terms of image, competitiveness, management and social justice.**

## Issues and objectives:

The main issue that will interest us in this thesis is "**How to develop gender diversity in companies in France?**" The objective of this thesis is to provide recommendations to companies to enable them to develop gender diversity more effectively in the professional sector. This study will focus exclusively on the French labour market. The companies chosen for benchmarking will be companies of all sizes in order to see the differences in practice.

## Outline of the brief:

This dissertation has four parts. We have previously studied the problematic and the thematic of the subject. The other parts are as follows:

- The first part will be the literature review. It will first contain definitions of key terms and concepts. Then an analysis is presented of the current situation of women in terms of employment, education and remuneration. Legislative and human resources practices are also discussed in this section.
- The second part explains the research process to obtain the data necessary for the analysis.
- The third part presents the results of the empirical research: the data obtained from the interviews with the different companies and associations: Banque Populaire du Sud, Lactunion, Start Her, Potentielles.

- The fourth part provides a comparative analysis of the elements found in the bibliographical research and the empirical data, which allows to define possible directions of work for a company to improve gender diversity. Recommendations for a gender strategy to be pursued by a company in to develop it are then proposed.

## II. Literature review

### I. Diversity

#### A. What is diversity?

Diversity is derived from the Latin *diversus*, which means diverse, contradictory, different.

Diversity is a concept that gives rise to different interpretations, even if the general meaning attributed to this concept is similar in all countries that have established diversity policies.

A first definition of diversity is based on the variety of individuals who make up a society: All the people who differ from each other by their geographical, socio-cultural or religious origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, etc., and who constitute the national community to which they belong. (Larousse, 2021)

From the literature review, *diversity* seems to be a complex term that many authors have sought to define in various contexts. We will therefore focus on the definitions that seem to us to be the most relevant to the axis chosen here.

In the book *La charte de la diversité regards sur le discours des entreprises signataires* S Point defines diversity as « all individual differences in a group, whether they are visible (race, ethnicity, gender, disability, etc.) or less perceptible (political affiliation, sexual orientation, etc.)." The notion of diversity is therefore associated with a group of people who have their own differences. Diversity is therefore defined by the personal characteristics of individuals within a population, whether it is a population of 10 individuals or a country. It should be noted that this definition is very close to the definition presented in the dictionary.

Bender and Pigeyre approach the notion of diversity from a different perspective.

Indeed, they link with the notion of equality. They explain the chronological evolution of equality between individuals, which has diversified significantly. We observe here that the equality of persons takes into account the physical, sexual characteristics, age, ... Here the authors include all these characteristics into the notion of diversity "... In France, the concern for equality shifted a few years ago, and was extended to categories other than gender. All discriminated categories have been included in the debate: the disabled, the elderly and visible minorities. So, we moved from the issue of gender equality, to non-discrimination against any stigmatized category and finally to diversity. "

Thus, diversity seems to bring together the concepts of individual difference within a group (ethnic race, gender, disability) and the concept of equality.

## B. Diversity and the business world

In the professional world, the notion of diversity has a different meaning than the one we have just listed.

Indeed, for the IMS Entrepreneurs network, diversity is "an inclusive approach, which goes beyond the management of minorities. It is a question of considering each individual, with what is singular or different, as an added value for the performance of the company. For this network, diversity is also a contribution to society. Thus, the difference in the characteristics of individuals is a contribution of performance.

For Kandolla and Fullerton, the notion of diversity is valued, as it is said that diversity leads to efficient work and an increase in the life span of the work group. "There is an internal need for change to meet the internal economic and commercial needs arising from the representation of different categories in the working population and the need to use all areas of competence in the search for the survival and efficiency of the organization".

However, it is important to remember that in the business world many expressions are used in reference to diversity. There are abuses of language between diversity, mixity, parity or professional equality. In this thesis, the key word/concept that interests us is diversity. In order not to confuse the terms and to have a good understanding of the subject it is important to lay define each term.

- Equality: Equality between women and men means observing the same autonomy, responsibility, participation and visibility of both sexes in all in all areas of public and private life (Council of Europe definition).
- Parity: Ensure equal numerical distribution between women and men in the responsibilities of social life, professional and political life.  
The notion of power sharing was initially reserved for women only (law of 6 June 2000), parity with the law of 23 July 2008. Parity is now an integral part of the French Constitution in a broader field. Article 1 has been modified in this sense: "The law promotes equal access of women and men to electoral mandates and elective functions, as well as to professional and social responsibilities".
- Mixed gender: Introduction of a representation of a gender where it is not yet represented. A group is said to be truly mixed when the under-represented category represents at least 30% of the workforce.
- Professional equality: professional equality means treating each other equally, in law and in reality.

## II. The Evolution of the Labour Situation of Women in France since 1900

## A. The pre-war period

When we look back over human history, we realise that diversity was slow to become a priority in our society. To understand this late emergence of the concept of gender diversity, it is worth looking back at the history of the evolution of women's rights.

The twentieth century marked a turning point in the evolution of women's rights. There were many achievements in terms of emancipation. Two major struggles were waged that bear witness to this progress: in the fields of work and political life, the conquest of new rights guarantees emancipation.

When we look at the place of women in the professional environment, we see that women have long been regarded as mothers, dependent on their husbands. Indeed, the Civil Code of 1804 prohibited a woman from studying, working or taking advantage of her salary without her husband's agreement.

In the twentieth century, the industrial revolution marked a turning point in economic development. Women's jobs were developing in the industrial and tertiary sectors. The role of the legislative framework brings about significant changes in favour of women's rights.

From the beginning of the twentieth century essential laws were passed to facilitate emancipation. From 1907, women were able to freely dispose of their wages and two years later, in 1909, maternity leave was instituted without breach of contract. (Pascal V ,2016)

Moreover, the First World War marked an important stage in the evolution of women's rights. Indeed, as the men left, the women were left alone, and their usefulness was important to feed the economy. During the 30 glorious, many women's jobs were created. Women obtained the right to vote in 1944, and the preamble to the 1946 Constitution finally states that "the law guarantees women equal rights with men in all fields». (Pascal V ,2016)

## B. The post war period

A second period of women's emancipation began after the Second World War. Women gained access to elected assemblies but remained in the minority. (5.6 per cent of deputies)

Very few women were present in the political life of the Fourth Republic, only Germaine Poinso-Chapuis, a deputy from Bouches-du-Rhône, was appointed Minister of Health in the government of Robert Schuman in 1947. The May 1968 revolution brought real changes. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing created the Secretary of State for the Status of Women, which was entrusted to Françoise Giroud, to increase the presence of women.

The evolution of mentalities had also contributed to the emancipation of women. From the 1960s, feminist movements such as the MLF have been working to change the image of mother and wife associated with women. The law seeks above all to establish an equality which culturally is slow to be applied in practice. (Pascal V, 2016)

From 1992, the debate on parity developed and became an important theme in the political world. A law was promulgated on 6 June 2000. It introduced the concept of parity, i.e., it obliged political parties to have half of their candidates be women for municipal, regional, European and senatorial elections.

However, even if legislation and mentalities are changing, inequalities still persist with regard to women. Leadership positions are still predominantly reserved for men. Inequalities appear in the area of salaries. At the beginning of the 20th century, this was explained by the lack of qualifications or the low rate of unionisation, but by the end of the 1990s it was clear that the gaps still persisted. Despite the will of the legislator, who constantly asserts the principle of equality, French society remains slow to reform.

The 20th century was an important stage in the evolution of women's rights and mentalities. Many battles were waged and led to great progress in terms of emancipation: women's right to vote, the May 68 revolution.

### III. The current situation in France

We are now going to look at the place of women in our society today. The aim is to understand if things have changed since the 20th century and see what the place of women is today in our societies.

#### A. Initial and continuing training

In order to better understand the place of women in the company, it is necessary to examine in more detail their training and education. Indeed, training is an important issue to consider when looking at gender equality. Education plays a key role in the desire for gender diversity in the workplace. We can see from the data collected that the orientation of girls and boys in education is different.

- The choice of fields of study is different

Girls do not go into the same fields of study as boys. Indeed, girls are less likely to go into science and mathematics. This is due to the many stereotypes that make girls feel that they are not capable of going into scientific fields.

Christian Baudelot and Roger Establet, in their book "Osez les filles!" set out a theory according to which girls, from their earliest childhood, learn obedience, docility, attention to others, and perseverance in the task, whereas boys learn competition and self-assertion. Girls are thus better adapted to the customs of the school. As a result of this early and differential socialisation, girls are more inclined to underestimate themselves and boys to overestimate themselves.

In terms of orientation at the end of the second year of secondary school, girls are unequally distributed between the different series. This is shown in the table below (DEPP, 2019). Girls are in the majority in the literary and tertiary series (Medical and Social Sciences, Tertiary Sciences and Techniques). They are less likely than boys to go into mathematics or engineering. (DEPP, 2019) This disinvestment in the scientific streams can be explained by the way girls see the scientific world. Indeed, for many of them, science is generally considered to be an unattractive field that is incompatible with femininity and family life. As we can see, gender stereotypes follow us throughout our academic career.

**TABLE 1: The orientation of girls and boys in the first general year of the school year 2019 (Source: DEPP,2019)**

Sectors	Girls	Boys
Mathematics	61,4%	77,8%
Economic and Social Sciences	42,4%	35,1%
Digital and Computer Sciences	2,6%	15,2%
Physics-Chemistry	39,0%	56,5%
Languages, Literature	34,9%	20,1%
Engineering Sciences	1,6%	11,1%

- The baccalaureate:

The baccalaureate is the end of the academic cycle at school. It may be interesting to study it to see if there are real differences between girls and boys.

First of all, girls do better than boys at school. Indeed, if we compare the rate of obtaining the baccalaureate in 2017, girls obtain it at 90% against 86% of boys. (MENESR,2017) As explained earlier, girls were better at mastering the codes of school than boys. Logically, if girls do better than boys, this should also be the case in their future career paths. But the reality is quite different. It turns out that when girls leave secondary school, they have more difficulty than boys entering the labour market. A fact that is quite difficult to understand.

**TABLE 2: Baccalaureate success by gender in 2017**(*Source: MENESR-DEPP, Girls and Boys 2017*)

	General baccalaureate	Technological baccalaureate	Professional baccalaureate	All baccalaureates
Girls	93	92	84	90
Boys	90	90	78	86

- Higher education:

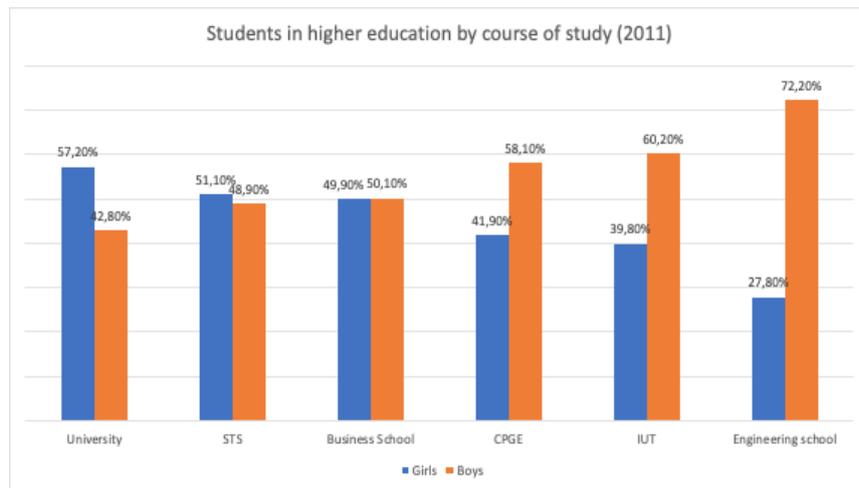
At the level of higher education, girls are in the majority in the fields of literature, languages, political science and economics.

This table below shows the distribution. This table dates from 2011 but today there has been no major change and the percentages remain the same.

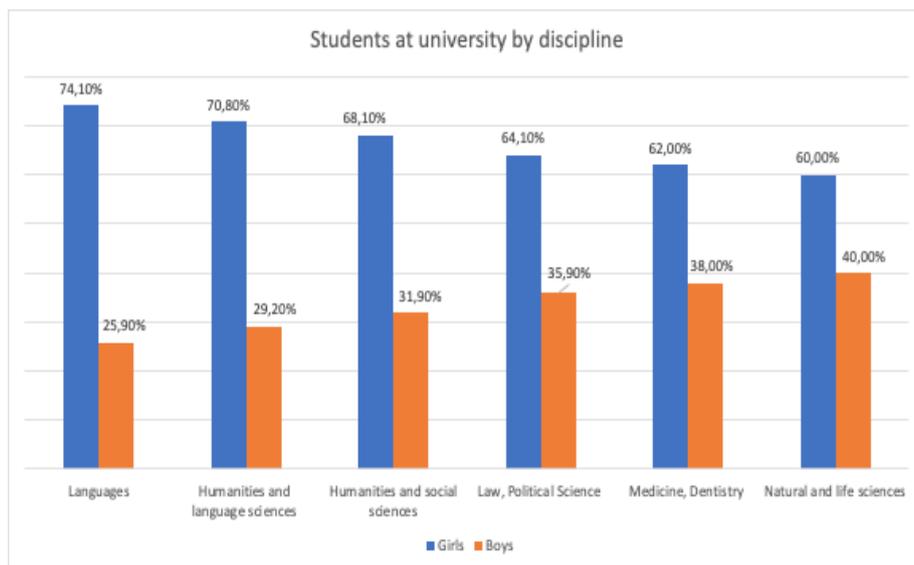
The main difference that appears once again, between girls and boys, is the under-representation of girls in the scientific fields. This fact is even more striking when we see

the very low percentage of girls in engineering schools: 27% of them. In fact, access to engineering schools for girls is fairly recent. The first school to become mixed was the Ponts et Chaussées in 1942. This was followed by the Mines de Paris in 1969 and the École Polytechnique in 1972. The differences between girls and boys are therefore widening throughout their academic career.

**TABLE 3: Students in higher education by course of study 2011**(*Source: MESR DGESIP-DGRI SIES, SISE*)

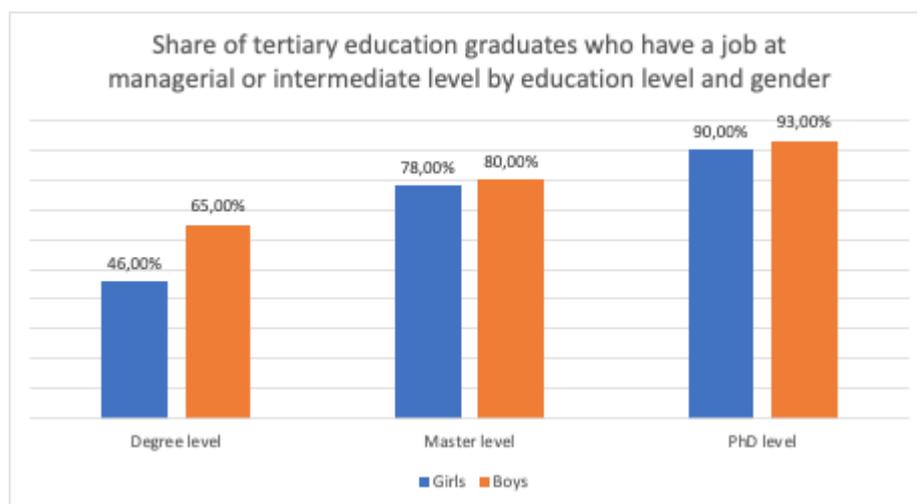


**TABLE 4: Students at university by discipline 2011** (*Source: MESR DGESIP-DGRI SIES, SISE*)



After studying the orientation by field of study in high school, the success rate at the baccalaureate, the choice of studies in higher education, it may be interesting to take a closer look at whether girls and boys obtain the same diplomas in higher education. The table below shows us that women have almost the same equivalences as men. The percentage of women with a master's degree is 78% compared to 80% for men. Furthermore, the percentage of women with a PhD is 90% compared to 93% of men. These figures tell us that women are just as competent as men. This shows that women are doing as well as men in higher education and therefore according to these data they should have the same access to jobs as men.

**TABLE 5: Share of tertiary education graduates who have a job at managerial or intermediate level by education level and gender (Source: CEREQ)**



As a result, women and men are not evenly distributed in the different training courses and jobs. This gender distribution undermines professional equality between women and men, creating disparities and compartmentalisation in the labour market. Providing educational guidance free of gender stereotypes is indeed a challenge to ensure professional equality between women and men. But we have to be sure that stereotypes do not take up too much space in people's minds.

- A history of stereotypes

An important theme in explaining the disparity between girls and boys in education and training is the role of stereotypes, which are built up during our childhood and follow us into the professional world.

A stereotype refers to the image of a subject that is usually accepted and conveyed within a given frame of reference; this image can be negative, positive or otherwise, but it is often caricatured. (Meurs, 2014)

Stereotypes are conveyed by the culture in which we evolve much earlier and much more unconsciously than we want. The family, school, media, the world of work, etc., are all vectors for the emergence and reinforcement of stereotypes. To understand why certain stereotypes are associated with women in the workplace, we need to go back a few years.

From childhood onwards, children generally understand very early on that there are typical girl activities and typical boy activities. Society in general can sometimes influence our orientation choices. Teachers, parents, guidance counsellors, friends and family can also consciously or unconsciously transmit their own beliefs and discourage us when we express a desire to go into areas reserved for the opposite sex (Meurs, 2014)

Everything that has been passed down from the past is embedded in the mindset and we find these elements in the professional world. Women are associated with certain qualities, certain behaviours, just like men. For example, the stereotypes that have been found about the attitudes of men and women in the professional world are:

**TABLE 6: Table representing 'masculine' or 'feminine' skills (Source: Meurs 2014)**

	<b>So-called masculine skills</b>	<b>So-called feminine skills</b>
<b>Knowledge</b>	Logical intelligence Synthesis spirit	Intuitive intelligence Creativity
<b>Know how</b>	Sense of action strategic leadership Authority	Organisation Rigor Attention to detail Teamwork
<b>Know to be</b>	Negotiation Stress gestion Communication	Listening Empathy Diplomacy Sensitivity

This table shows us that we attribute to men all the typical leadership skills: charisma, vision, sense of action and communication, authority, negotiation. (Meurs,2014)

Women, on the other hand, are associated with the important competences of assistance positions: adaptation, organisation, rigour and diplomacy. In order to change stereotypes in the interests of women and men, it is therefore necessary for companies to rethink the value of the skills expected of a manager.

### B. Participation rate and employment

The activity rate of women is also an important data to understand when looking at gender equality. It should be noted that across the ages, women are much more active professionally. In 2018, 76% of women are active compared to 84% of men. Note that in 11 years, the activity rate of women aged 15 to 64 has increased by 12 points while that of men was 9.3 points. (Elisabeth, 2009)

However, the activity rate should be put into perspective by looking more closely at the employment conditions of women. In fact, women and men do not have the same types and characteristics of employment.

49.3% of jobs held by women are centered on very specific occupations. Women are more concentrated in service, education, health and social work. These are saturated areas with few career prospects and high pay. In this type of field, it should be noted that only 11.3% of men are present. (Elisabeth, 2009)

**TABLE 7: Table representing feminisation rate of sectors of activity active persons aged 15 or more, France excluding Mayotte (Source: INSEE, Employment Survey, 2016)**

Sectors of activity	Women	Men
agriculture	1,6%	4,0%
Industry	7,8%	<b>19,1%</b>
construction	1,4%	<b>11,0%</b>
Tertiary	88,0%	64,5%
Trade and repair	12,6 %	<b>13,2%</b>
transport	3,0%	7,8%
Accommodation and catering	3,9%	3,8%
Information and Communication	1,7%	3,8%
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate	5,4%	3,9%
Scientific, technical and administrative services	9,3%	10,0%
Public administration	<b>10,0%</b>	8,3%
Teaching	<b>10,7%</b>	4,6%

Human health	<b>11,1%</b>	3,4%
Medical and social accommodation	<b>13%</b>	2,3%
Other services	7,3%	3,5%
Activity undetermined	1,2%	1,4%
Set	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

This table shows the distribution of women in the service and administrative sectors. Women are predominantly present in the fields of public administration, education, health and medical and social work. Men are more represented in areas such as industry, construction and trade.

The activity rate of women must therefore be taken with some qualification. In fact, when we look at part-time jobs, we see that they are largely represented by women. 30.2% of women work part-time, compared to 5.7% of men. We note that since the 1980s, the number of part-time workers has almost tripled in the fields of retail, hotels, restaurants, etc. (Elisabeth, 2009)

Precariousness also affects women more than men through temporary jobs such as fixed-term contracts, internships and subsidised contracts. (Elisabeth, 2009)

### C. Women in positions of responsibility in France

When we look at the representation of women in decision-making positions in French companies, we see that there is still a long way to go to achieve true equality with men.

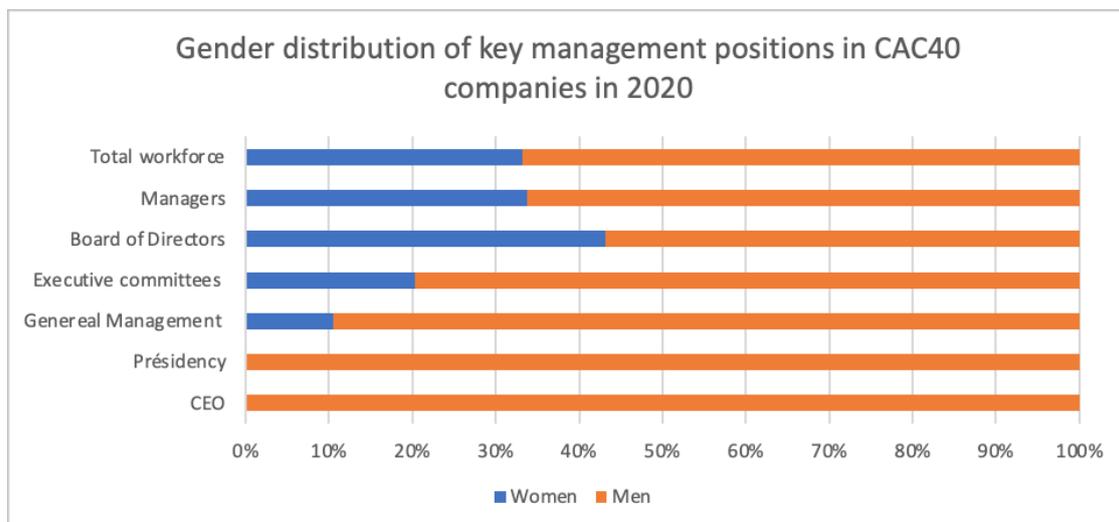
In fact, at present, few women hold positions of high responsibility. The majority of senior positions are still held by men. As the size of the company increases, the number of women in management bodies decreases. If we take the example of management

positions in CAC 40 companies in 2020, we can see that the gap between men and women is widening.

A few figures reflect the general situation: no woman in a CAC 40 company holds the status of CEO. Only 10.53% of women are in the general management. There are more women on boards of directors than in other positions, with 43.21%.

The number of women in management positions is still very low, with only 33.72% of women in this position.

**TABLE 8: Gender distribution of key management positions in CAC40 companies in 2020** (Source: Skema observatory of the feminisation of companies)



This problem, which hinders the progression of women to positions of high responsibility, has been defined by a theory called the glass ceiling. (Elisabeth, 2009)

Glass ceiling:

First coined in 1986 in an article in the Wall Street Journal on 24 March, the glass ceiling is the terminology for the phenomenon that hinders women's careers. The consequence is

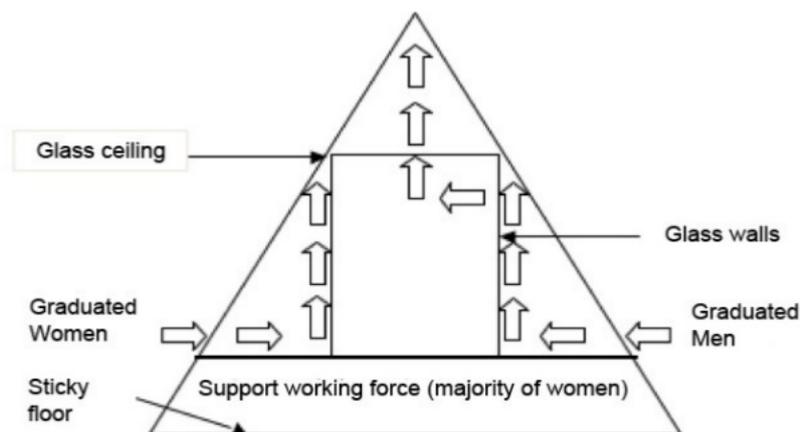
the under-representation of women at the top of companies, organisations and public institutions. It is a set of invisible barriers, created by both prejudices and stereotypes and by the way organisations operate. (Elisabeth, 2009)

The Sticky Floor An idea that originated in Canada, the sticky floor is a force for women's progress in organisations, forcing them to remain at the lowest levels of the organisational pyramid. The pyramid shows that the majority of women remain at the bottom of the pyramid in the 'sticky floor' position.

Glass walls:

When women manage to reach high-level positions, they often end up in departments or services considered less central, less strategic for the organisation (HR, administration, etc.). It becomes very difficult for them to move laterally into strategic areas (product development, finance, etc.) and then up the middle aisle into management positions. (Elisabeth, 2009)

**TABLE 10: The Glass Ceiling** (Source: Elisabeth 2009)

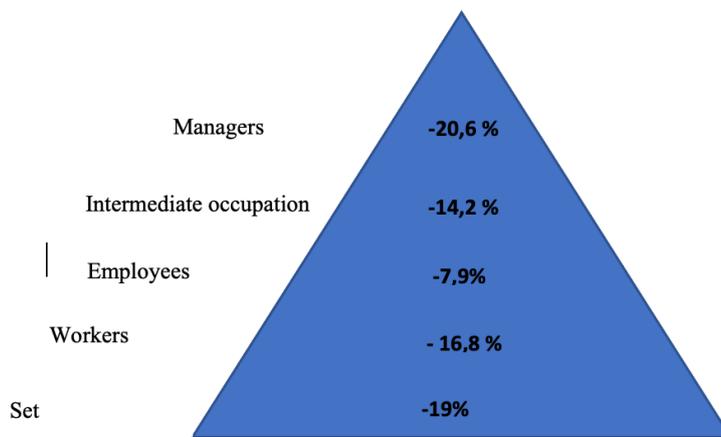


#### D. Remuneration

At the international level, the 1951 ILO Convention provides for equal pay for men and women for work of equal value.

Unfortunately, there seems to be a difference between the law and reality. Indeed, there is a wage difference between women and men. If we compare the average salary between women and men working full time in the local civil service, the salary gap is 11.8%. In the state civil service, it is 13.5% and 19.3% in the private and semi-public sectors. The difference is more pronounced for management positions in all organisations (Elisabeth, 2009)

**TABLE 11: Pay differentials by hierarchical position (Source: Elisabeth 2009)**



Net monthly amounts in current euro. Wage difference (W-M)/H in %.

This graph is quite representative of the situation we have just explained. It shows us that the higher the position of women in the hierarchy, the greater the difference in salary with men. A woman with executive status will earn 20.6% less than a man. A female employee will earn 7.9% less than a male employee. These hierarchical gaps further reinforce the glass ceiling theory that was explained earlier showing that women are not treated equally

to men. Although access to positions of responsibility is more complicated for them, when they reach managerial status, they are not paid the same as men. Inequalities still seem to persist and follow them.

Women are therefore not distributed in the same fields of study as men. Later on, this is confirmed in the professional world. Even though things have changed a lot, women are still in the minority in managerial positions. Moreover, salary inequalities still seem to widen the gap between men and women.

## IV. Implementation of gender diversity

### A. The role of the law in the development of professional diversity

#### 1. The basic texts

Another important lever in the search for greater professional equality between men and women is legislation. Numerous laws have been put in place with the objective of professional equality. The choice has been made to select the most important of them.

#### **-The Rudy Law** (Law No. 83-635 of 13 July 1983)

A law that has been very important in the evolution of equality between men and women is the law of 13 July 1983: the Rudy law. **The law reaffirms the principle of equality in the entire professional field (recruitment, remuneration, promotion, training).** Henceforth, jobs are considered to be of equal value and therefore deserve equal pay "if they require employees to have a comparable set of professional knowledge recognised by a title, diploma or professional practice, abilities resulting from acquired experience, responsibility and physical or nervous load". Thus, the Rudy Law provides for the

possibility of taking specific measures in favour of women with the aim of establishing equal opportunities between men and women by remedying inequalities affecting women's opportunities. This law marks an important turning point in the career development of women. (Vie publique, 2011)

**-The so-called Génisson law** (law n°2001-397 of 9 May 2001) **creates an obligation to negotiate on professional equality at company and branch level.** It requires the comparative situation report to include indicators based on figures set by decree. It also sets a target for reducing the representation gap in industrial tribunal elections and a target for balanced representation in works council and staff representative elections (Senate, 2000)

**- The equal pay law** (law no. 2006-340 of 23 March 2006) **reinforces the obligation to negotiate on professional equality with an obligation to negotiate measures to eliminate pay gaps before 31 December 2010.** The law also deals with the reconciliation of professional, personal and family life and women's access to professional training and apprenticeships (Vie publique, 2011)

**- Act No. 2007-1223 of 21 August 2007 sets out actions to promote access to training for women wishing to resume a professional activity interrupted for family reasons.** (Vie publique, 2011)

## 2. Initiatives

- The label of professional equality between women and men

In 2003, in France, the Ministry of Parity and Professional Equality wanted to help companies and administrations and give them some ideas on how to apply the laws in order to implement the principles of professional equality. (Elisabeth, 2009)

The main motivations for this new action are to promote equality and professional mix. This new action is part of a major European Union project. Lastly, it makes it possible to accompany a successful social dialogue in France between the State and the social partners. (Elisabeth, 2009)

The objectives of this label are numerous. One of the objectives of the label is to move from a policy of professional equality to a culture of professional equality in order to bring about sustainable changes in behaviour and organisational methods in a modern context. It creates a new working environment more respectful of the individual and collective choices of women and men. It aims to encourage organisations to think about equality not only in terms of costs and legal constraints, but also in terms of benefits. In order to obtain the label, companies must commit to complying with existing legislation and regulations on gender equality.

This label has been a real step forward in terms of professional equality. It has been an excellent opportunity for organisations to communicate their practices and to be seen by the outside world. (Pascal V, 2016)

- The comparative status reports

Another body that has been set up by the state is the CSR (Comparative Status Report). It lists the measures that have been taken in the past year to ensure professional equality. It details the objectives for the coming year and defines the qualitative and quantitative actions to be taken and the evolution of their cost. (Elisabeth, 2009)

It is not only a data collection for companies to obtain legal indicators. CSR provides an objective and factual analysis of gender equality. On the basis of the report, management must negotiate the measures to be taken within the organisation to address inequalities. (Elisabeth, 2009)

It is important to know that the violation of this obligation is punishable by imprisonment and a fine of 3750 € (French Labour Code, article L 483-1).

The comparative situation report must be sent to the works council for its opinion, to the union delegates and to the labour inspectorate with the works council's opinion. Similarly, any employee in the company can ask to have it available.

- The Social Inequality Index

In May 2018, the French government presented an action plan to end gender inequality in companies. It introduced an assessment tool to measure and correct pay differences in companies. Each year, every company with at least 50 employees must calculate and publish its "gender equality index" on the Internet. This index takes the form of a score out of 100, calculated on the basis of 4 criteria (for companies with 50 to 250 employees) and 5 criteria (for those with more than 250 employees): (Public Life, 2011)

- Elimination of the wage gap between women and men, by equivalent job category and age group (40 points)
- The same chance of getting a raise for women as for men (20 points)
- The same chance of promotion for women as for men (15 points)
- Guaranteed pay rise on return from maternity leave (15 points)
- Parity among the top 10 earners (10 points)

Companies must achieve a minimum score of 75 out of 100 within 3 years. If they score less than 75, they must implement corrective measures or face financial penalties of up to 1% of turnover (Public Life, 2011)

### 3. Financial incentives

The role of the state is very important for gender equality in the workplace. In order to encourage companies to become more involved in these equality initiatives, it has set up various specific support programmes. They are aimed at companies, professional organisations at local or national level. (Elisabeth, 2009)

Among the different types of aid, we find for example

- Consultancy aid:

This aid allows companies to benefit from an external consultant specialised in professional equality who advises on the actions to be taken within the organisation to develop the recruitment, training, promotion or working conditions of women. This aid consists of covering 70% of the cost of the external consultant's intervention, up to a maximum of €10,700

- The contract for professional equality:

This is an agreement between the State and the company to implement measures to improve professional equality and enable the qualification of women. The State covers part of the costs of this equality plan:

- 50% of the cost of investment in equipment related to the change of organisation
- 30% of the cost of salaries of employees benefiting from training actions
- 50% of other costs

- The mixed employment contract:

With the aim of diversifying and promoting jobs held by women, a contract can be concluded in companies with 600 or more employees between the company, a woman and the state. This contract gives rise to the payment of financial support from the State to the company and enables a woman to access a job in which women are in the minority.

This financial support includes:

50% of the educational costs of the training

30% of the salary of the female beneficiaries during the entire training period

#### 4.State monitoring

The HALDE (High Authority against Discrimination and for Equality) is an important body to ensure the proper functioning and fight against discrimination and for equality. This body plays an important role because it monitors practices in companies. It intervenes in case of a dispute to help and advise the victim. (Elisabeth, 2009)

Its actions are very varied, for example: it carries out tests, it carries out awareness-raising activities, it publicises good practices, it takes legal action. The HALDE has even undertaken a census of concrete actions to prevent discrimination. They are published in a guide and listed on its website. Label holders provide their testimonies (Elisabeth, 2009).

Another body set up by the State is the ORSE (Observatory of Corporate Social Responsibility). Its objective is to collect and disseminate all knowledge on the social responsibility of companies and their socially responsible commitments in France and abroad. On the ORSE website, you will find a directory of gender equality practices in companies.

It can be said that the legislative framework is very complete but when we look more specifically at the details of equality labels or aid contracts this is quite minimal.

To date, only 30% of companies comply with the obligation to produce a comparative situation report and only 3% of companies have opened negotiations on professional or salary equality. (Elisabeth, 2009)

### B. The role of human resources in the development of gender diversity

#### 1.The role of recruitment

An important element in implementing gender diversity in companies is human resource management. Recall that the role of human resources in organisations is to ensure that the organisation has the necessary staff to function and that these employees do their best to improve the organisation's performance, while developing themselves. (Falcoz, 2018)

In order to promote gender diversity in companies, different means will be put in place within organisations. One of the first means implemented by companies to promote professional diversity is the anonymous CV.

The anonymous CV does not specify the sex of the candidate, the aim being to limit the impact of unconscious prejudices and stereotypes that may exclude some women from the recruitment process for a position. The work of the Discrimination Observatory has shown that in the CV selection between the reference candidate and a woman with a comparable CV, the woman obtained 69 positive responses compared to 75 for the man. This difference between the two candidates is simply explained by the fact that one candidate is a woman and the other a man. The anonymous CV can therefore be a good alternative to avoid this kind of situation. (Falcoz, 2018)

After the candidate selection phase, the interview phase follows.

Moreover, the interview stage is also codified by many rules to be respected. For example, questions about the desire to have children or the organisation of one's family life are strictly forbidden. The aim is not to make any distinction on the basis of gender.

The role of the recruiter is rather to specify the constraints of the position (carrying heavy loads, frequent travel, early morning or late evening...) and to ask the person how he or she thinks he or she can comply and organise himself or herself. (Falcoz, 2018)

## 2.Compensation

Remuneration alone sums up all the other inequalities suffered by women: lower salaries at the time of recruitment for the same diploma, less access to training that could lead to higher-paying positions, slower careers leading to lower pay for comparable

seniority, less access to jobs offering the best bonuses and individual increases, the negative effect of motherhood on salaries, etc. (Falcoz, 2018)

Two figures alone sum up the extreme resistance to the decrease in wage gaps to the detriment of women: in 2016, in France, as of 7 November at 4:34 pm, women can consider that they are working voluntarily compared to French men with its 17th place in the 2016 World Economic Forum ranking in terms of overall gender gap, if we consider the wage gap alone. (Falcoz, 2018)

According to data published in November 2016 by INSEE, the full-time equivalent wage gap in the private sector and public enterprises was 18.6% between women and men. This gap is highest for managers and lowest for employees, the most feminised socio-professional category. (Insee, 2016)

Taking action on pay therefore requires action in other areas of Human Resources at the same time and in a coherent manner. Moreover, by not tackling the backbone of pay systems, be it collective agreements, classifications and other job classification methods, actions taken correct the consequences without drying up the causes of inequalities.

### 3. Access to training and career management

In the face of the glass ceiling phenomenon explained above, solutions have been put in place to enable women to be better distributed across the large number of professions, functions and sectors of activity.

### Internal networks:

Within companies, there are women's networks. These networks allow French women to meet, support each other, exchange ideas and give each other advice to succeed in their careers.

There are professional women's networks: "Financiennes" is a network of women specialised in finance and insurance. They regularly conduct surveys on women's and men's perceptions of equality, gender diversity and sexism. Femmes du Numérique is also part of this logic. The particularity of this network is that it allows women to exchange practices. (Gagliardi, 2018)

### Mentoring programs:

Mentoring is also a solution for involving more women in their professional development. Mentoring aims to establish a lasting relationship between a mentor and a mentee. Often these are two employees who belong to the same organisation and have no hierarchical link between them. The mentor's rich and varied experience should shed as much light as possible on possible careers, help the person to step back from the professional situations encountered, draw lessons for the future, give the mentee visibility and confidence in their abilities. It plays a very important role on the person. (Falcoz, 2018)

### Training programmes for women:

There is also a wide range of leadership training for women. There are three main categories of offerings for women which are as follows:

- The family of personal development tailored to women: teaching them to value themselves, build self-confidence, become aware of their values, how to say no and how to say what they want

- The family of behavioural techniques: speaking in public, using your voice to make yourself heard, negotiating to convince, managing your image, communicating effectively, asserting your messages
- The family of management styles and leadership training: working on one's legitimate authority, developing one's influence skills, being an inspiring leader, developing one's personal brand, building one's career strategy

In short, these types of training aim to give women concrete ways to fight stereotypes and self-censorship. The aim is to help them free themselves and make the right career choices. (Falcoz, 2018)

Programme in search of a balance between work and family:

As mentioned earlier, the glass ceiling hinders women in their career advancement. In order to counteract this effect, solutions have been considered for women to achieve a better work-life balance. The measures that have been implemented are varied and are divided into three areas:

- Organisation and working conditions: meeting times that are neither too early nor too late, teleworking, flexible working hours, right to disconnect.
- Reconciliation tools: right to equal leave periods for couples working in the same company, leave for parents at the end of their lives.
- Measures related to parenthood: company crèche, flexible working hours at the beginning of the school year, sick leave for children.

For example, the SNCF has set up Prim'Enfance centres throughout France via its social action departments, in particular to help find childcare and organise forums on parenthood. These numerous measures, which sometimes have the effect of a certain neo-paternalism, are nevertheless eagerly awaited, particularly by the

younger generation, which is sensitive to the challenges of balancing the different stages of life. (Falcoz, 2018)

The HR function has implemented many improvements in its own practices in order to contain discrimination, reduce inequalities and provide greater opportunities for women in their professional development. However, this does not seem to be enough.

The gender pay gap is narrowing very slowly, women's careers are still blocked, their access to training reduced and recruitment practices still seem far from the ethical benchmark of the perfect, non-discriminatory recruiter. (Falcoz, 2018)

Another possible cause would be the lack of linkage between this function and others that nevertheless contribute to strengthening the added value of HRM: communication, information systems, marketing... Finally, these adaptations have not led to questioning the foundations of HR practices inherited from the industrial era of the 1950s-1980s. They repair and correct inequalities more than they cut their deep roots. However, HR professionals have also innovated by developing new tools that seek to address the challenges posed by these persistent inequalities. (Falcoz, 2018)

#### 4.Examples of good companies' practices

Many companies are popular for their exemplary model in terms of gender equality.

They offer fairly standard measures and are very common in companies working on this theme. These include awareness-raising measures for management or employees, internal mentoring or cross-mentoring programmes, specific training or coaching for high potentials, women's networks, diversity groups, support for childcare, family services, flexible working hours, teleworking, awareness-raising at recruitment level, career plans, flexibility at career level. But some companies are more original and offer other, more original actions.

**Randstad:** The Randstad group is an example of good practice in terms of recruiting its employees. Randstad is the only French human resources services company to have obtained both the Professional Equality and Diversity labels. The group's actions include an anti-discrimination committee and a computerised complaints system approved by the CNIL (Commission Nationale Informatique et Libertés), both of which are open to candidates and temporary workers, as well as to permanent staff. Randstad France is the first French company to have obtained CNIL approval to set up such a system. (Randstad, 2016)

**L'Oréal:** The company has established partnerships with universities, associations and recruitment firms involved in diversity. In 1998, the company launched the international programme "For Women in Science" with UNESCO. This programme demonstrates L'Oréal's commitment to promoting the role of women in research and encouraging young women to enter the field. (L'Oréal, 2020)

**Deloitte Touche France:** The company has actions in favour of work/life balance such as the personal project leave. Specifically designed for employees with more than three years' seniority, it allows them to take a leave of absence of between 2 and 18 months, with financial assistance from the company of 20% of gross salary. (Deloitte, 2020)

**Orange:** This year, Orange Business Service initiated the Mixity Challenge: sharing good practices and highlighting the best initiatives of employees of a group present throughout the world. (Orange, 2020)

**Air France:** The French airline company is very committed to the fight against professional inequalities. To combat sexism, an e-learning course entitled "Preventing and combating ordinary sexism in the workplace" was developed. The airline's main objective is to raise awareness among all employees by familiarising them with the legal framework, identifying sexist remarks or behaviour and how to respond appropriately as a victim or witness. (Air France, 2020)

Thus, the role of the law is crucial in developing gender diversity in organisations. Indeed, the basic texts, initiatives, financial incentives and State aid aim to ensure that companies respect and encourage them to commit to professional diversity. Recruitment is also an important factor in implementing concrete actions to achieve professional equality.

# III. Research Methodology

## I. Research question

In order to study diversity in companies, we are going to ask ourselves what measures companies have put in place to promote gender diversity and whether the size of the company can have an impact on the gender diversity policies implemented?

The study of the literature has enabled us to note that companies put in place different actions to promote gender diversity depending on their size, their values and their commitments. We will see whether these measures are present in the companies studied and whether additional measures have been created.

## II. Methodology

The methods we used to conduct this research were participant observation on a single case and data analysis (David, A. 2000).

Data collection was carried out by different means:

- Telephone interviews:
  - With companies
    - Large group
      - Banque Populaire du Sud - Director of Human Resources
      - SNCF- Director of Human Resources
    - SME
      - Lactinov-Director of Human Resources
  - With two associations
    - Start Her- Member of the entrepreneur cluster
    - Potentielles- Member of the association
- Consultation of internal company documents: Banque Populaire du Sud, SNCF, Crédit Agricole BIC

- Participation in online conferences: "Breaking the glass ceiling", "Gender diversity in companies: a vector of performance?"

These data collected over a 3-month period were used to establish the case study presented in the section below.

## IV. Case study

### I. Business strategies

This section presents the content of the interviews with the companies and associations listed above. The discussion focused on the practices put in place to improve gender balance, the results obtained, future actions envisaged and possible recommendations on gender balance.

#### A. Banque Populaire du Sud

The Banque Populaire group is a mutualist banking and financial group, composed of the regional Banques Populaires (including BRED), as well as the Banque Fédérale des Banques Populaires. The Banque Populaire du Sud group has 2,203 employees, 60.3% of whom are women. The group is very committed to the fight against gender inequality in the workplace.

**1) Develop gender diversity in recruitment:** despite an imbalance in the majority of female applicants within Banque Populaire, the objective will be to maintain a balanced representation between men and women in recruitment. The objective that Banque Populaire du Sud has set itself is to progress towards a balanced representation of men and women in the recruitment process, both in recruitment interviews and in permanent hires. In fact, in 2020, the share of women in permanent recruitment was 67.9%.

The group has set itself the following target for 2021:

- Include a balanced proportion of men and women in recruitment interviews, i.e. 50% of women and 50% of men by the end of 2021.
- Increase the proportion of men to 50% in recruitment by the end of 2021.

- Maintain this same balance between men and women in the context of recruitment for work-study contracts under alternance contracts for bachelor's and master's 1 and 2.

**Percentage of men and women enrolled in recruitment students**

Completed in 2020	
men	wives
42 %	58%

In order to achieve its recruitment objectives, the Banque Populaire du Sud group has set itself several action plans.

**-Disseminate job offers that are free of gender stereotypes on the various recruitment communication media** (social networks, websites, branch posters, forums). The aim is for the company to recruit its future candidates on all possible platforms so that no difference in selection is established.

**-Set up mixed recruitment teams**, associating the HRD, an employee working in the field and a manager

**- Raise the awareness of the managers involved with the HRD about recruitment techniques** and, more specifically, about gender stereotypes and equality between women and men.

In order to monitor the objectives, the company focuses on a few indicators such as the evolution over the 3 years of the share of women and men registered in the recruitment interviews for permanent contracts

**2) Enable training for all:** access to professional training is a lever for professional development. Career progression is achieved in particular through enrolment in training courses, which are a necessary condition for access to positions of responsibility and management. The conditions for equal access to training for all, men and women, including part-time employees, must therefore be balanced for training courses, particularly managerial ones.

**-Interview on return from maternity leave:** BPS organises an interview on return from maternity or parental leave. During this interview the employees will be informed by their HR advisors about the interest of following a training course

**-Information on timetables:** trainees and trainers will be informed at the beginning of the session about the timetables to enable participants to meet their family responsibilities

**-Examination of applications:** an equal number of female and male applicants are examined in order to ensure that as many women as men are enrolled in the Group's degree courses.

**-Coverage of expenses:** childcare expenses are covered, subject to proof, when the training location is not the usual place of work.

**3) Ensuring professional promotion:** For BPS, the principle of gender equality implies equal access to professional promotion for women and men. Promotion and access to positions of responsibility must be based solely on performance, experience and recognition of skills. The Banque Populaire has set itself the objective of improving representation over the duration of the agreement in order to achieve a 50% distribution and a rebalancing of the distribution of women in the various classification levels of the collective agreement. Within Banque Populaire du Sud, each year the representation of women in management positions has increased from 37% to 43% over a period of 4 years, from 2014 to 2017.

**TABLE 12: Feminization rate of the executive population in 2018, 2019 and 2020**  
*(Source: social balance sheet)*

Evolution of the feminization rate			
2017	2018	2019*	2020
43 %	44,5 %	41,7%	43,4%

The following actions are being implemented by the company:

- Carry out an inventory of the number of women and men registered in positions that are intended to acquire executive status.
- Evaluate the potential of women managers in the classification level.
- Identify a list of women with potential so that they can be enrolled in leadership training programmes.
- Systematically include at least one female candidate in internal interviews for management positions.
- Continue to organise a specific interview two months before and upon return from full-time parental leave in order to study the conditions of resumption and the training needs necessary for professional development.

**4) Guarantee effective pay:** for the company the principle of equal pay is an important component of professional equality. In 2020, the distribution of promotions was 68.5% in favour of women and 31.5% in favour of men, in line with the share represented by each category.

The objective of the BPS is to eliminate unjustified pay gaps between men and women and to retain measures to remedy them.

**Correction of differences:** as part of the compulsory annual negotiations over the period of the agreement, Banque Populaire du Sud is studying the amount of a budget to correct the differences in average pay.

**Revaluation of remuneration:** systematically implement the measures in the agreement relating to the revaluation of remuneration on return from leave, maternity leave or adoption leave.

**5) Promote a work-life balance:** Banque Populaire du Sud signed a company agreement with the social partners on 30 October 2014 aimed at equipping itself with the means to maintain a climate and work environment that respects diversity, equality and work-life balance.

To this end, the company proposes:

- adjustment of working hours
- support for family solidarity leave
- donations of time off or leave
- additional AJPP (daily parental presence allowance)
- measures in favour of single-parent families

**6) Develop greater awareness:** the BPCE group is very committed to the fight against gender inequality and is implementing awareness and communication actions.

- distribution of the BPCE gender equality guide
- Communicating on the different ways of taking maternity leave, paternity leave and childcare leave without penalising their professional life or development
- disseminate awareness-raising actions on stereotypes
- to take part in communication actions or events on professional equality, such as International Women's Rights Day, portraits of committed women.

## B. Lactinov

Lactinov is a company specialised in the development, formulation and aseptic packaging of liquid milk and milk-based products as well as in the processing of industrial

fats. Lactinov is an SME with a total of 450 employees, 100 of whom are women and 350 men.

**The subject of gender equality in Lactinov is taken very seriously.** The teams in charge of recruitment ensure that no distinction is made between a man and a woman. No difference should be made in terms of recruitment or salary. As applications are open to everyone, the group's HR director believes that it is more likely that women themselves will move on to other types of jobs.

**As for the type of jobs held, there are different positions:** in the factory, in the laboratories, in the offices. Women are more represented in functions such as administration, human resources and accounting. They are more in the minority in production-related positions. The HR manager admits that he does not make any difference between a female and a male application, as the positions are open to both women and men.

However, it should be noted that many of the factory jobs require physical exertion as they involve carrying heavy loads. Naturally, more men apply for this type of job. There is a natural selection process, and women themselves withdraw from applying for jobs where physical demands are made. Factory jobs also require being available to work at weekends. Availability at weekends is a constraint for women. Indeed, it can be difficult for them to **reconcile work and family life.**

The company does not have a defined plan of action and numerical targets to ensure greater gender equality in the workplace.

However, **it can be accommodating in several situations.**

For example, if a woman applies for a job at the weekend, an arrangement of working hours can be discussed with her. Recently, new handling tools have been introduced in factories to relieve the burden on female employees. The aim is to encourage women to take up this type of work.

As far as **career development** is concerned, the possibilities for advancement in the company are the same for men as for women. However, there is only one woman on the management committee and seven men. The human resources person explains this as a coincidence, as there are no obstacles for women to reach positions of responsibility.

At Lactinov, it is felt that a gender equality policy should **not be implemented by means of numerical or written objectives**. The company assumes that women and men are equal. One gender should not be favoured over the other. It is important for the company not to discriminate against any individual.

### C.SNCF

The Société nationale des chemins de fer français (SNCF) is the French public railway company created by agreement between the State and the railway companies. It is active in passenger transport, freight transport and the management, operation and maintenance of the state-owned national railway network.

SNCF President Jean-Pierre Farandou has made gender equality a priority. The gross pay gap between women and men is 2%, compared with an average of 17-18% nationally.

**The gender equality index** is making real progress within the SNCF. This index compares pay levels, pay increase rates and promotion rates between women and men. On average, the five SNCF companies scored between 89 and 94 points, which is higher than the 75-point threshold set by law

The five companies in the group obtained the following scores:

- SNCF Voyageurs: 91 points
- SNCF Réseaux: 89 points
- SNCF: 89 points
- SNCF FRET: 94 points
- SNCF Gares & Connexions: 89 points

To obtain these scores, a number of indicators are taken into account, including: the difference in the rate of individual increases, the difference in the rate of promotion between women and men, the percentage of female employees who received an increase in the year of their maternity leave, and the presence of women among the highest salaries in the company.

**The improvement of working conditions within the SNCF is one of its strengths.**

The SNCF was the first employer to offer a range of work clothes specifically adapted for women. In addition, SNCF Réseau has launched an initial experiment with vans equipped with men's and women's toilets on worksites. The aim of this experiment is to gradually extend this system to encourage the feminisation of site personnel. The group is also going to launch diagnostics on the reception and working conditions of women in several establishments.

**Employees are being made aware of this and trained.** The SNCF runs awareness-raising workshops to understand the challenges of gender equality and combat inequality. One of the topics covered is sexism. The aim is to decipher good and bad behaviour.

**The SNCF has been recognised as a "Diversity Leader 2021"** by the Financial Times. The survey was carried out by the Statista Institute, which contacted the group's 100,000 employees. Questions were asked about the company's commitments to gender diversity as well as personal questions about the employees. Human resources experts also gave their opinions. This award recognises the group's commitment to promoting diversity and inclusion among its employees through its actions.

The group also obtained the "**Gender Equality & Diversity for European & International Standard**" label. This European certification recognises the actions implemented by the group to promote equality between women and men and diversity in the workplace.

**The SNCF women's network** is now one of the very first women's corporate networks. It is open to all male and female employees who want to get involved in promoting gender

equality. It deploys numerous tools (training, mentoring, workshops, etc.) to develop a culture of equality and combat stereotypes.

## II. Associations and networks

### A. Start Her

Start Her is the merger of two associations. Firstly, it includes Sista, an association founded in June 2017 that aims to strengthen the self-confidence and empowerment of people subject to systemic discrimination. The second association is Start Her, which aims to give visibility and inspire tech and entrepreneurial vocations among young girls and women, through events, content, education, networking and an international community.

The association was born from the observation that **women are less entrepreneurial than men**. First of all, women have fewer female role models. This is why the association wants to help women by providing them with all the keys to become real entrepreneurs.

Each division of the association carries out committed actions to help women in the ecosystem. The slogan of the association is « **to bring out a generation of diversified leaders** ». The association's mission is to help women and to train true female entrepreneurs. The association is convinced that there is a link between diversity and investment funds. Indeed, many studies have shown that the performance of investment funds was better when there was a diversified team.

To become a member of the Sista association, you have to pay an annual membership fee and then be selected through interviews by a panel of experts. Once they have passed the recruitment stages, women join the association and receive real support. Indeed, **they have access to interventions from entrepreneurs or qualified experts to help them**

**on specific subjects.** The association offers them different workshops: access to conferences, personal development workshops, specialised coaching, advice from investors. In the association, they are accompanied and advised.

For example, they can benefit from the advice of a business management coach. Last year, the women in the association benefited from personal coaching from a high-potential manager who came to teach them how to structure their company and find their project. They can also be entrepreneurs who come to share their professional experience, explain their fund raising, the organisation of their balance between family and professional life. The experts are also there to advise women on raising funds, to get contacts.

The association's main objective is to give women confidence in order **to prepare them for fundraising.**

### **Start Her Awards:**

In 2017 the association is organising a high-profile event: **the Start Her Awards.**

The Start Her Awards is one of the biggest competitions for start-ups (co)founded by women in Europe, with the support of renowned companies such as Mastercard, Microsoft, Stripe, Airbnb. This event aims to give more visibility to women founders and to encourage gender diversity in the tech sector. During this evening, women from all over Europe came to present their projects in front of an exceptional jury composed of the most renowned entrepreneurs.

During the event, media, key players, partners and influencers were present. The winner of the competition received a prize of €10,000 from StartHer.

This competition helped to increase the awareness of the association worldwide through the press and the media.

## B. Potentielles

Potentielles is Crédit Agricole CIB's gender diversity network launched in 2010 with the support of the General Management and the Head of Human Resources.

Faced with the gap in women's representation in the company's management bodies, Crédit Agricole's Potentielles network proposes a proactive approach to promote a constructive dialogue on gender diversity within the bank.

The association has several objectives. The first **mission is to connect women internally so that they can build a real professional network of mutual support. This also allows them to benefit from visibility within the company.**

The objective is to promote gender diversity by raising managers' awareness of the importance of diversity in work teams for a successful and innovative company.

The association offers various events to promote gender diversity.

- Les Matins des PotentiElles" breakfasts are organised with members of the Comex and managers.
- Meetings are organised with women managers of the Group or Crédit Agricole BIC customers. In this context, Isabelle Job-Bazille, Head of Economic Research at Crédit Agricole S.A., Fabienne Lecorvaisier, Head of Finance and Management Control and member of Air Liquide's executive committee, and Virginie Morgon, Chief Executive Officer of Eurazeo, came to Crédit Agricole CIB to talk about their professional careers and the way they combine their professional and personal lives.
- Mixed networking lunches are held to allow members to discuss various themes related to gender equality: norms, values, stereotypes, parenting
- Talk'n Act" workshops are run by a specialist coach

The Potential network has inspired many around it. Indeed, Potentielles networks have been created in other entities of the Crédit Agricole Group: Potentielles New York, CWEEN in India, SPRING in London.

## V. Results and recommendations

*In this section, the empirical data collected in Part 2 will be analyzed and compared with the data from the literature search presented in Part 2. We shall begin with the legislative framework, then with the comparative analysis of employment and finally with the more global measures for the development of gender diversity. The comparison of these data will make it possible to define recommendations for developing gender diversity in companies in France.*

### I - Results of the case study

#### The legislative framework

The legislative framework concerning **professional equality between men and women is, on the whole, very complete**. Indeed, many texts and laws are derived from French texts. The basic national texts are supplemented by initiatives, financial incentives and State monitoring. Furthermore, very few companies have opened negotiations on professional or salary equality. Among the companies surveyed, only the large companies have negotiated company agreements on professional equality with the social partners. Only the legislative framework seems insufficient to motivate companies to work on gender equality.

However, if companies put financial sanctions in place in case of non-compliance with professional equality the situation could be different.

The existence of women's networks, such as the one at Crédit Agricole BIC, can serve as a relay for the implementation of gender equality actions and can mobilise players at all levels of the company.

#### Horizontal gender segregation in employment

The section on gender analysis at job level showed that there is a difference between the two sexes. **Men and women are not found in the same fields of activity.** Previously it was explained that women's schooling is more literary, economic and less scientific than that of boys. In the professional world this segregation is very present. Indeed, women are in the majority in fields of activity such as administration, human resources and social work. To combat this phenomenon, many associations such as "Women Engineers" aim to introduce young girls to the engineering profession, to promote women engineers and to deconstruct the stereotypes that put pressure on women. The SNCF, for example, is improving the working conditions of its teams to encourage the feminisation of the construction sector. It offers a range of work clothes specially adapted for women as well as sanitary facilities for women on building sites.

Sometimes it is the job itself that excludes women. **Some jobs have physical expectations and naturally this tends to exclude women in recruitment.** Women who do not feel able to do a specific job do not apply for jobs. The company Lact'union has understood this problem. It offers various handling tools for load-carrying jobs in order to relieve the employees. The aim of this tool is also to enable women to join this type of job by relieving them of their working conditions.

In addition, **fewer women than men take on projects such as entrepreneurship.** The association Start Her supports and helps women to develop their entrepreneurial projects. It accompanies women wishing to start their own business through participation in conferences, coaching, expert advice and round tables. The association gives women confidence and gives them all the keys to become real entrepreneurs.

**Another phenomenon that creates inequalities between men and women in the world of work is time management.** Indeed, it is often difficult for a woman to reconcile work and family life. Certain jobs that require weekend or evening work are often more complicated for women. The Lactunion company therefore offers women the opportunity to discuss flexible working hours during the recruitment interview.

**The companies working on gender equality have also often reviewed their recruitment procedures to create real conditions for gender equality and not to make any difference** (identification of the skills of the position, drafting of the offer, criteria and methods of selecting candidates, etc.). The company Banque Populaire du Sud disseminates its banking offers on different communication media (LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook). During the recruitment process, the teams formed are mixed and include the human resources director, an employee and a manager.

#### Vertical segregation: glass ceiling

The glass ceiling is a phenomenon that affects all the companies studied here. For Banque Populaire du Sud, promotion and access to positions of responsibility must be based solely on performance, experience and recognition of skills. This should not be a gender issue.

One of the actions implemented consists **of taking stock of the situation and career development prospects**. The company takes stock of the number of women and men who have the potential to become managers and identifies women with the potential to enrol them in a leadership training programme for women.

In the large companies and associations interviewed, special follow-up is generally put in place for women with potential, with specific measures to help their development. Studies have revealed the need to take into account different career cycles.

**Coaching, mentoring or specific training are practices that are mentioned very frequently.**

The Sista association offers women coaching and mentoring throughout their membership of the association. Fundraising experts, lawyers, entrepreneurs who have succeeded in their projects come to them and share their advice or experiences.

Companies also deploy internal networks. Crédit Agricole's PotentiElles network offers a proactive approach to promote a constructive dialogue on gender equality within the bank. The network connects women internally to form a professional network for sharing

and mutual support, offering them increased visibility within the company, but also enabling them to discover the bank and its businesses.

### Pay gap

With regard to pay gaps, the actions implemented by the companies **are based on the annual report on the comparative situation of men and women**. In this context, we can note the initiative taken at the level of the national agreement of the companies to establish a diagnosis of the established m/f pay gaps and to correct them. The actions taken by the companies are generally part of a more general policy of equal status for men and women.

The large companies surveyed carry out a comparative m/f analysis of pay, but also of evaluations, increases, promotions, classifications and training. Following this type of analysis, two companies have drawn up an action plan to reduce the pay gap by defining a specific budget for closing the gap: BPS and SNCF. Some companies allocate salary increases and promotions in proportion to the number of men and women in the budget, such as BPS. In order not to establish a pay gap during maternity leave, several companies have introduced a pay rise equal to the average of the previous three years, for example Natixis.

### Difference between medium and large companies:

The management of gender diversity in **a large or medium-sized company is not the same**.

Large companies are obliged to respect the laws: Rudy law, Génisson law, equal pay law. They implement defined action plans to promote diversity within the organisation: recruitment, training, professional promotion, effective remuneration, work-life balance, awareness raising policies.

Small and medium-sized companies are involved in gender equality policies but sometimes have more difficulty in implementing actions. Indeed, the lack of financial resources and the lesser supervision of the state with regard to this type of company mean that **they are less involved in the management of professional diversity.**

Important themes that medium-sized companies could put in place to become more involved in gender equality would be to engage company leaders on the subject of gender equality, to set quantified objectives, to optimise HR processes so that they neutralise bias and "handicaps" (professional mobility, recruitment, etc.), to raise awareness among employees and managers on the subject of gender equality in order to promote a culture of inclusion.

The weight of women's associations and networks is therefore very important. In fact, they raise awareness of gender issues among the entrepreneurs of tomorrow, both male and female, and encourage them to become truly involved in this struggle.

## II. Recommendations

A strategy for developing gender diversity in a French company can be based on five main points:

**- Involvement of senior management:** the role of senior management is essential for the gender equality project to succeed in the organisation. They must monitor the progress of the project, check the results obtained and approve the resources and means to be used. He or she must be present and communicate on the subject. This makes the programme visible at all levels of the company and gives it importance. It also allows the project to be long-term. Many of the actions put in place can call for changes in mentality and behaviour. The involvement of senior management will enable the programme to be maintained even if certain results are not immediately visible.

**-Organisation of the project:** a mixed team should be set up to work on the theme of gender equality in the company. It should be made up of various people working in the organisation: a person from human resources, women and men with recognised high hierarchical levels in the company. The members of the team will share their experiences in order to establish a diagnosis and define the objectives and actions to be implemented in line with a given budget. It is then important to analyse the results obtained in relation to the desired objectives and to implement corrective actions to improve the process.

**-Employees buy-in:** A gender project affects all members of the company at all levels. It is important that the majority of employees feel concerned by the issue and are committed to it. It is essential that men are involved in the project as much as women. Management awareness of all employees must be increased. For example, gender management objectives can be included in the performance evaluation. The establishment of diversity groups or a diversity network can help to roll out the programme. It is important to ensure that stakeholders participate at different levels of the company depending on the types of issues addressed by the project team. For example, they may participate on issues related to the reconciliation of professional and personal life, at the management level for issues related to the development of women's careers.

**- Adaptation of human resources processes:** To fully integrate the objective of developing gender diversity, human resources processes must be adapted. In the context of recruitment, the criteria and methods for selecting candidates must avoid favouring one sex over another. It is therefore necessary to clearly define the skills required for the position and to draft the offer (women from the company participating in recruitment interviews, diversity recruitment guide, etc.). To enable women to develop professionally, special monitoring must be put in place for women with potential, for promotions and salary increases for women. There are means such as coaching, mentoring or training to help women express a career plan and put themselves forward. In order to enable women to reconcile a better work-life balance, measures on flexible working hours, teleworking, part-time work, help with childcare and services of daily life are important. It is also important to consider the specific management of maternity and

parental leave (discussions with management, possibility of keeping in touch during the absence, etc.)

**-Attractiveness of the company:** The image of the company to the outside world is very important. Indeed, if the company gives a favourable image to gender diversity, it can attract new female talent. It is important that the company promotes and recognises gender equality: prizes, awards, labels.

Relationships with schools or universities, for example, to publicise the careers of women engineers, also contribute to this image: conferences, career forums, exhibitions featuring women from the company. Women's networks or associations help to informally propagate an image of the company among working women. The presence of women from the company in these networks will also contribute to the development of an image favourable to gender diversity.

## VI. Conclusion

Gender mainstreaming has been taken very seriously in organisations since the 1990s. There are several reasons why companies are developing gender equality in the workplace. First of all, developing a gender equality strategy allows them to comply with the legislative framework. In addition, ensuring greater professional equality also allows for: the search for a diversified management, improved performance, the search for a new workforce, and the improvement of the company's social image.

Women arrived on the labour market less than a century ago and had to prove their abilities. Today they are moving into medical, administrative and social professions. They are abandoning scientific or entrepreneurial fields.

Companies committed to a policy of gender equality are taking part in awareness-raising campaigns on the careers of women scientists and engineers in secondary schools and colleges. Companies have adapted their recruitment procedures and pay particular attention to external communication about women.

In order to counter the glass ceiling effect, companies very often use techniques such as coaching, mentoring or develop women's networks. All large companies also carry out actions to develop work-life balance. In parallel to all these actions, it should be emphasised that the commitment of top management is essential to the development of gender diversity.

A strategy for developing gender diversity in a French company can be based on five main areas: commitment from senior management, project management, employee support, adaptation of HR processes and the attractiveness of the company.

In this way, women would find themselves more equal to men and this could counteract the disparities in the professional environment.

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