

## Promoting gender equality in the public and private sectors : what works ?

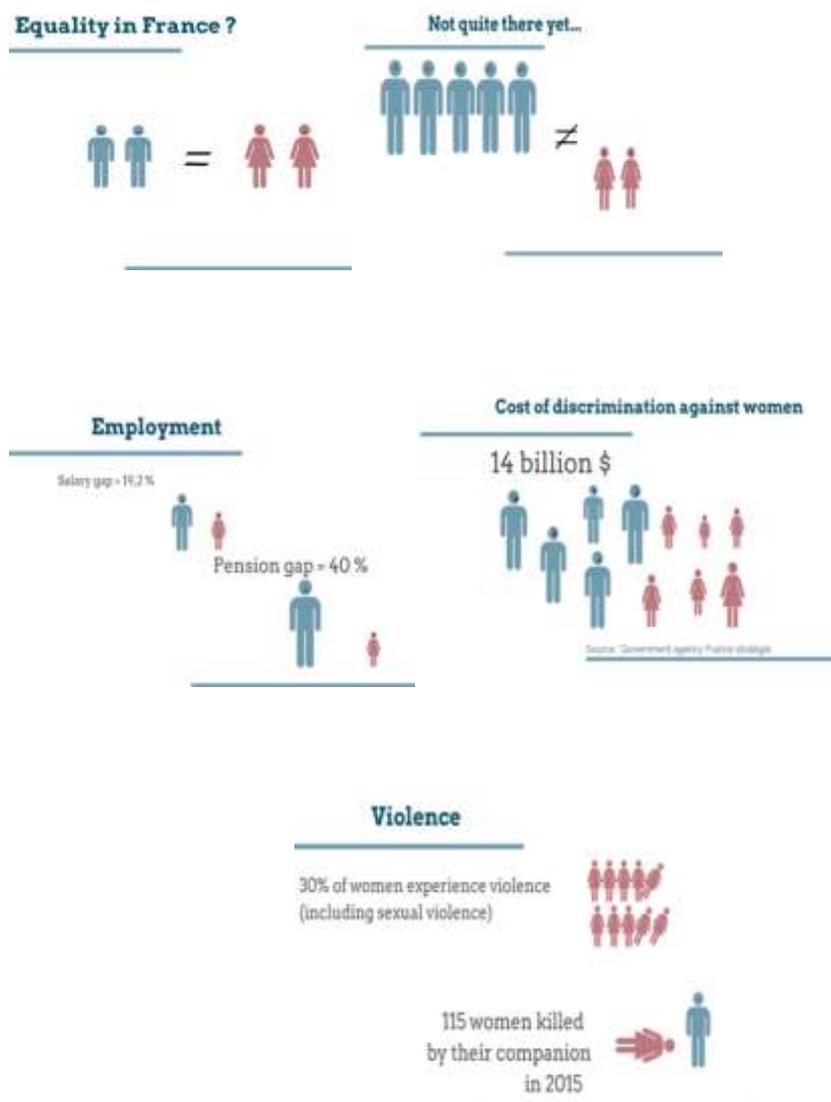
Good morning to you all,

It is a great pleasure and an honor to be part of this wonderful event.

I will give my feedback about what public policies can achieve, and in which conditions, based on my experience as Head of the Women's rights and Equality Department of France, over the past three years. I worked under the authority of Najat Vallaud Belkacem, who you heard speak so inspiringly about her own experience as Minister for Women's rights, then Education.

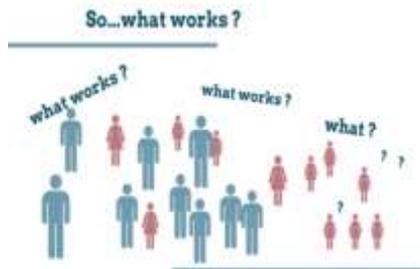
**Policies are a necessity because :**

1. **Equality is still an issue** as shown by the figures in France :



2. **No positive “natural” evolution can be expected**, rather the opposite :

We cannot count on the younger generations being “naturally” more gender conductive or gender friendly (surge in “hypersexualized” behavior amongst young; cyber violence). The segregation of the future is on its way, as the high tech sector is loosing women (“leaking pipe”), and we know it is a sector with very high growth potential that will provide many opportunities.



The good news is : we know what works, and when we manage to carry out those actions, we get results (ie change). The bad news : it is very hard work as issues remain considerable; and challenges keep changing. Relentless and sustained efforts are needed. Which is why sharing our experiences is so useful.



I suggest to give a concrete illustration of this through 4 specific examples + 1 prerequisite :

- 1. Quota policies
- 2. Government plans against gender violence
- 3. Narrowing the salary gap : labour obligations + incentives;
- 4. Providing strong social services and strong social protection
- + one general condition determines all the others : sustained and ever improving access to sexual and reproductive rights

### 1. **Quotas work, let us use them**

➔ **This is the policy which got us the most spectacular results, in limited time.** We have had a quota law since 1999, with a mechanism of sanctions (penalties will be enforced this year). As a result, we now have 40% women on management boards (France = second only to Norway). A similar obligation applies to public service (also with penalties), and to all

governing bodies : government commissions, chambers of commerce, sport federation... Those that do not have a 50/50 composition run the risk of having their decisions invalidated.

- ➔ **Was very hotly debated at the time**, many women were against them
- ➔ Today, the issue is no more one of legitimacy, it has become a technical one : how do we “feed the pipeline “ in order to get quality women profiles to the top ? When organisations deal with this issue, they begin to set a “virtuous circle” in place : they take steps to nurture their women potential as soon as they enter the workforce, and ensure they do not lose them along the way.
- ➔ More importantly : we are approaching a systemic change, as a result of this obligation. Those firms which are indeed reaching the 40% threshold are willing to give very positive feedback about the experience, in terms of broadening their base (younger professionals, from more varied backgrounds, some foreign !).
- ➔ There are remaining “black spots” in France : Parliament (the quota law applies since 1999 but financial sanctions were not effective enough) only 29% in the Senate, up from an embarrassing 26%, better at the National Assembly from 26,9% to 38,8 % today. The French Government has also had 50/50 representation of men and women since 2012. Another issue is that quotas apply only to MB, not executive posts, where the glass ceiling is still very stiff. Finally our trade unions and employers’associations are not performing well, and have remained out of the reach of legal obligation.

Quotas have indeed accelerated a change in the system, making women more visible, and contributing to a general lowering of the threshold of tolerance to sexual and sexist violence, sexual harassment or mere “ordinary sexism”, this experienced by women themselves, but shared by men as well.

## ***2. Government plans to fight gender violence : determined public action works, but it is very hard work, and it is difficult to show progress***

France started out later than many European countries : we were able to benefit from their experiences. Our first Government plans started in the early 2000, 10 years after Spain and Portugal for instance, and after Scandinavian countries.

Gender violence is an unaddressed issue most of the time, the whole point is to make it visible and make the system (judiciary, police, health professionals, social services, schools, employers...) take charge of it, instead of ignoring or minimizing it.

Our plans are not original in this respect : they address the issue globally, give it major political drive, and enough resources. For the past 10 years, laws were changed to be more efficient and address legal obstacles (for instance a judge may now rule that the violent companion be evicted from the family home); all relevant professions have been given specific training (gender violence demands a specific approach as many of you know), one after the other, to help them understand gender

violence and change their practices. It is a massive effort, to be started again constantly; a national helpline as well as help centers have been deployed in all regions of the country ; public communications campaigns were conducted. The resource for this have been maintained (are they sufficient ?) . Always vulnerable to the next budget cut, it is massive invisible work and small unseen victories, that do not make headlines as easily than advertising a new law for instance. Hopefully, recent events will help in the aftermath of the Weinstein and “Balance ton porc” (Expose your pig) mobilisations.

My main point is : none of what I have described is original, but what is required is a sustained and substantial effort, which has been the case in France, not easily.

What results ? There lies the difficulty : we do not have the right indicator to show results. Or rather, there has to be an agreement at political level to target a rise in indicators (number of charges pressed, cases of violence reported) as an indicator of *progress* meaning that the issues are coming forth. This is an issue we ought to address collectively, for instance at European level, in the framework of the follow up of the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention against gender violence.

### **3. Addressing the salary gap : legal obligations, incentives**

Anti discrimination and equality laws have been in place since the 70's, under the European Union influence (liberalization of the labor market). Essentially, the law makes it compulsory for all firms (apart from the smallest ones) to reach an agreement with their employees (as represented by the unions) on all issues of professional equality, including salary.

Progress is slow. For a start, as with quotas, and violence : enforcement is faulty (43,6% firms had signed such a mandatory agreement in 2017, but only 38% amongst SME's) slowly going up from 39,5% in 2016

How can we make this tool more efficient ? 1. More constraint : since 2014, only firms that comply with the law are eligible to public procurement (the remaining problem being enforcement of this provision, which we are working on 2. Incentives : voluntary quality procedures such as ISO norms, labels are powerful tools as they stem from a voluntary commitment. A growing number of firms are applying to a State sponsored Equality Label.

What results ? They are slow, but steady. The salary gap is shocking, but the tendency is steadily going down : from 21% in 2008 to 18,6% in 2014. The issues are identified and require long standing policies for evolutions to take place : women work part-time ; tend to have less qualified jobs, or are segregated into less well paid ones; or they encounter the glass ceiling. The answers to all these obstacles are not easy to put in place as they require a determined commitment at micro and macro economic levels, and most crucially from top management : improve work life balance for all employees, desegregate, quotas against glass ceiling...

The answer is in relentlessly promoting these good practices, under the watchful eye of the law.

#### **4. Providing strong social services and strong social protection**

Strong social services help in taking over part of the “free work” that women still end up doing, as a result of the patriarchal gender division of tasks.

Naturally, providing good conditions for maternity leave is key : 16 weeks paid maternity leave (slightly above European regulations) are guaranteed in France at Federal level ; all medical costs are taken over by the health care system. After the child is born, robust family benefits (including tax cuts) are provided, including a 3 year parental leave, recently transformed to 18 months for each parent.

A few thousand childcare slots were created over the past few years.

This comprehensive system allows for a high rate of 81% women returning to work at the end of their 1st maternity leaves, and accounts for the “French miracle” : a fertility rate of 2 children/woman (highest amongst western countries) ...although we have seen that the cost remains that of enduring professional inequalities which the salary gap reveals.

#### **5. Reminder : full access to sexual and reproductive rights are a prerequisite**

Continuous improvement in access to sexual and reproductive rights remains a primordial pillar of French equality policies, since they are a condition to access to all other rights, and to a condition for equality. Abortion has been legal in France since 1974, but the law keeps improving. For instance, last year, a special penalty was created to target groups that spread false information under the guise of official websites); social security was given extra funding to improve its services across France (underage teenagers can now access contraception without their parents’ authorization).

#### **As a conclusion : what are the conditions of success ? one last point**

So all of that works and yields results : good laws, compulsory measures where needed, determined government action (strong political drive, and a solid implementation by the administration with sufficient resource, guaranteed on a mid to long term basis), incentives for private actors, maintaining a strong social security system.

That is nothing new : all these directions were advocated by the international Beijing Declaration for the rights of Women in 1996.

In my experience, things really took off in France in the past 5 years when the Government decided to apply the prescription : a dedicated minister was appointed who gave political credit to the issue, and extra resource was put in place to strengthen the machinery, reinforcing the Women’s rights Department at central and local level, and giving determined Government support to the interministerial policies put in place. As a result, there is such a thing as a feminist bureaucracy in France. The equality index established by the European institute for gender equality (EIGE) released earlier this month shows that France is now 5<sup>th</sup> amongst European countries, up two places from its position in 2015 from a score of 52,5 in 2015 to 72,6.

2 concluding remarks :

- We need to celebrate what works – without minimizing the issues, and be very clear also about what it takes to get things done
- We need to keep advocating the good prescriptions and strengthen the consensus in their favor, at global level

I believe this symposium has greatly contributed to this demonstration.

PPT

Women's rights in France in 2017: still an issue

- Salary gap : 19,2% and pension gap : 40% [higher than EU average]
- 46,9% women employed vs 55% men
- About 30% of women experience violence (including sexual violence)
- 118 women killed by their companion (25 men)

12 billion € = economic cost of discrimination against women in 2016 according to France Stratégie (Government think tank )