

FEMALE VITAL FORCES

With the first almost-egalitarian term of the ESEC, which, thanks to the law, has become the constitutional assembly with the highest level of female representation (44% of women holding positions within the organisation) coming to an end next November, the DDFE ("Delegation for Women's Rights and Equality") has decided to look at female vital forces by offering an unprecedented overview of the place of women within civil society organisations, as represented within the ESEC.

The findings are definitive: despite the favourable legislative developments and a constantly increasing number of campaigners and volunteers, **the proportion of women holding executive positions within organisations continues to progress very slowly and the gender employment gap remains.**

Organisations are not, of course, neutral since they foster values that stem from society. In the absence of any active measures to promote equality, they are naturally inclined to reproduce gender inequalities internally. **Working to achieve neutrality therefore calls for action.**

There is a shortage of female models, with campaigners still very widely and traditionally thought of as being male figures. Thanks to the effects of education and social standards, this is now combined with a tendency for women to under-estimate their abilities and to feel guilty when their commitments start to affect their family lives, resulting in an element of self-censorship and even a feeling of illegitimacy that are reinforced by male enclaves and the still all-too-frequent circumvention of the rules put in place to encourage equality. Furthermore, equality alone is not enough, since it all too often ends where power begins (the most senior of positions, the executive, etc.). This has to be developed into the concept of equal participation to break the momentum of the gender division in the workplace that reserves the most "prestigious" of fields for men and leaves women with those that are considered not to require any specific skills but rather "natural" qualities based on stereotypes. Women still lack visibility, both in positions of power within organisations and outside, with regard to representing the latter.

It is not so much on the part of individuals but rather on the part of organisations themselves (structure, functioning and even spirit of dissension) that we find the causes of and indeed the solutions

to the under-representation and invisibilisation of women. It is still all too often the case that, despite a gradual increase in awareness of this state of affairs, organisations fail to give enough consideration to the issues that more specifically affect women, whether in professional (professional equality, the work-life balance, etc.), economic ("pink tax") or social terms (reimbursement of the cost of certain contraceptive pills, etc.).

The study seeks to analyse the difficulties and the cultural and structural obstacles that women encounter when it comes to accessing positions of responsibility and outlines a series of practical tools for overcoming them. These must be appropriate to the organisation and also simultaneously taken into consideration if they are to be effective.

First and foremost, promoting the militant involvement of women is central to democratic equality, as well as being a means of increasing the representativeness of organised civil society. Ultimately, on a broader scale, it is a way of working to promote the place of women in society, since militant involvement is often a stepping stone to a position of greater responsibility in other fields, and in the political and economic spheres in particular.



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Women account for nearly 45% of members of employee union organisations and 30% of business creators. They account for only 15% of the executive boards of the main organisations that represent them.

RAISING AWARENESS OF INEQUALITIES WITHIN ORGANISATIONS

In order to overcome gender inequalities it is important that we collectively acknowledge their existence and the need to take action to eradicate them. The ESEC believes the following to be necessary:

- to update gender-related statistics on a regular basis to help highlight the actual inequalities that exist, notably with regard to responsibilities held, and for the purposes of evaluating the strategies put in place;
- to identify the obstacles specific to each organisation;
- to question campaigners themselves by means of surveys in the form of anonymous questionnaires or interviews carried out by researchers from outside of the organisation;
- to organise single-sex meetings to enable women to freely and collectively discuss the difficulties encountered over the course of their appointment;
- to educate campaigners in gender equalities and make them understand that a more equal organisation is a more representative organisation that will appear more dynamic and more modern;
- to involve the territorial echelons, not through force but by leading by example.

POSITIONING THE ORGANISATION AS A RELAXED AND LIBERATING ENVIRONMENT

Women should see the organisation as a relaxed and liberating place to work. In order to achieve this, organisations must work on both their external image and their militant culture. The ESEC would suggest that organisations take the following steps:

- exploiting the communications tools available to them to project a welcoming and inspiring image that is devoid of any stereotypes;
- encouraging the consideration of issues that are more specific to women (reproductive health, professional sectors that are becoming increasingly dominated by women, female entrepreneurship, professional equality, "pink tax", etc.). The organisation will then naturally appear to be more inclusive;
- better incorporating new members (briefings, welcome handbooks, etc.) and making their management practices more transparent by outlining pathways to achieving greater responsibility, which limits the exclusive phenomena that encourage inequalities;
- striving to achieve equality with regard to both internal and external operations by prohibiting any sexist behaviour.

DIVERSIFYING MILITANT INVESTMENT MODELS

Whilst the long-standing tradition of the public sphere being occupied by men has created, in the collective imagination, a majority model of militant commitment that promotes over-investment, this image is off-putting for women who still perform the majority of family-related and household tasks. Whilst the notion of holding several offices is encouraging the emergence of leader figures who would appear to be irreplaceable, the ESEC would suggest the following:

- working on the issue of sharing responsibility and the pathways taken by campaigners;
- considering establishing a greater sense of collegiality within organisations in order to involve more campaigners and better distribute both workload and the number of mandates performed;
- promoting reasonable standards of appointment.

REINFORCING PRO-ACTIVE FEMINISATION POLICIES

The study emphasises the need to fight so-called self-censorship phenomena and the invisibilisation of women, which result in a lack of female role-models in certain positions. The delegation has identified the following objectives with regard to achieving this:

- objectifying the notion of skill and promoting recruitment pools, primarily female-dominated networks and even sponsorship, as catalysts of confidence and empowerment;
- supporting specific strategies to ensure that women are correctly represented within organisations and on the executive boards thereof in particular;
- formalising skill by producing a series of job sheets outlining the responsibilities to be fulfilled and the skills that are considered central to the role to be performed;
- making women more visible and giving them more opportunity to speak out, supporting and informing them by formalising the rules that break up male enclaves and prevent sexism.