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WOMEN AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Entrepreneurship enjoys strong momentum (with 815,300 businesses created in 2019) and an increasingly positive image. However, it is no stranger to inequality, stereotypes or sexism. Combating the under-representation of women in entrepreneurship is an economic as well as a societal issue. It is not only about equality, but also expanding our talent pool and promoting diversity in economic decision-making.

Persistent imbalances that work against women

After increasing in the 2000s, the proportion of women involved in business creation has stagnated at around 30% since 2010. This proportion varies according to sector, with women accounting for two thirds of business creations in the "education, health, social action" sector, but around 13% of those in the "information and communication" sector (INSEE, 2018). They accounted for only 6% of tech startups registered in 2018 (Sista BCG Barometer 2019).

Several studies suggest that this low share is not due to a lack of motivation or a lack of success. Women's enterprises are on average smaller than men's, but there are no significant differences in terms of sustainability and economic performance.

Growing political awareness

Women in entrepreneurship became a public issue at the turn of the century. Several initiatives to encourage their involvement in entrepreneurship have been taken by public officials, associations and the relevant professional organisations.

The "Women's Equality" guarantee fund for women entrepreneurs was created in 2006. An inter-ministerial

plan was launched in 2013, comprising several measures to increase visibility, funding and support for women entrepreneurs, implemented through a vibrant web of women's associations and professional networks.

These steps have strengthened support for female entrepreneurs. Their sluggish improvement shows that an approach centred on women entrepreneurs needs to be complemented with a more systemic component.

Structural inequalities

The low proportion of female entrepreneurs is the result of a number of factors. The persistence of gender stereotypes plays a major role, especially when choosing a career, as entrepreneurship is still mainly associated with male role models. Women entrepreneurs sometimes incorporate these stereotypes into their own behaviour (lower self-confidence, risk aversion, etc.). They also grapple more than their male counterparts with work-life difficulties and the conflict between the demands of their work and the social representations of women's parental and domestic roles.

The entrepreneurial environment itself contains gender stereotypes. Business financiers, for example,



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are predominantly male, and their professional culture is imbued with gender biases that hamper businesswomen. More broadly, our idea of entrepreneurship, which is imbued with stereotypical "male" values (ambition, conquest, performance, risk-taking, etc.), needs to be revisited in order to take into account the variety of entrepreneurial styles. This is why the entire entrepreneurial ecosystem needs to be thoroughly re-examined.

THE ESEC'S POINTS OF CONSIDERATION

MEASURING WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP MORE EFFECTIVELY

- ➔ Increase statistical monitoring of the proportion of women in entrepreneurship by developing an annual barometer at the national and regional level and measuring changes in the proportion of women involved in all business start-ups and in company management;
- ➔ Require banking institutions, as well as Bpifrance Investissement, to provide information on the distribution of funding granted to male and female entrepreneurs (number of applications received and analysed, number of loans granted).

PURSUING AND EXPANDING ACTION TO ADDRESS GENDER REPRESENTATIONS

- ➔ Train and educate teaching staff on equality and gender diversity;
- ➔ Deconstruct gender stereotypes linked to these professions by strengthening ties between the educational community and the actors (professional organisations and consular actors, in particular) involved in combating gendered representations of these professions, and by raising awareness of corporate culture in all teacher training;
- ➔ Support initiatives to educate secondary school students on entrepreneurship;
- ➔ Consider making public funding of higher education schools conditional on gender diversity action, especially in the field of entrepreneurship;
- ➔ Propose a voluntary pledge to the media and the business press to raise the visibility of women entrepreneurs.

PROVIDING BETTER SUPPORT AND PROTECTION TO WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

- ➔ Raise the visibility of measures promoting women's entrepreneurship at the local level and on the main information portals related to entrepreneurship;
- ➔ Make support more inclusive by identifying the specific needs of people excluded from entrepreneurship;
- ➔ Incorporate aspects related to gender equality and work-life balance into the French Tech strategy;
- ➔ Harmonise upward the various statuses of female entrepreneur eligible for social welfare protections (compensation for loss of income, maternity leave);
- ➔ Promote group entrepreneurship schemes more effectively, including the Business and Employment Cooperatives.

TAKING SUBSTANTIVE ACTION TO REFORM THE ENTREPRENEURIAL ENVIRONMENT

- ➔ Within banking institutions that offer business financing: promote a better gender balance among the teams responsible for financing decisions and train them on the biases that may affect them (gender, ethnic, inner-city stereotypes, etc.);
- ➔ Apply to professional organisations representing entrepreneurs the same gender parity principles now applied in other arenas, with an initial minimum threshold of 30%;
- ➔ Apply the principle of equal treatment to public aid: make entrepreneurship and innovation funding conditional on equal treatment in the governance of beneficiary companies, and work to improve the balance between male and female beneficiaries;
- ➔ Apply the principle of equal treatment to the emergency aid mobilised by French and European public officials during the Covid-19 crisis;
- ➔ Study the introduction of tax incentives for investing in innovative women-led businesses, created in certain areas (rural areas, urban policy districts), or businesses that meet certain equality criteria (in terms of shareholding, composition of management bodies);
- ➔ Implement the provisions of the "Copé-Zimmermann" law on executive committees and management boards.