

Recap of the #StOpE webinar
**“Taking action against everyday sexism
in an international setting”**

Wednesday October 11th | 2pm - 4pm

Introduction

Every year, the AFMD co-organises the SERI (Responsible and Inclusive Employers Week) with the MEDEF. This event, free and accessible to all, is aimed at employers, employees, stakeholders who make up the CSR, diversity & inclusion ecosystem as well as the general public. For more information, [visit the SERI's website](#).

This edition of the #SERI brought together over **6,500 professionals** from private and public companies, associations, institutions, schools and professional federations. 231 partners organised more than 100 events throughout France to raise awareness on D&I and CSR issues.

As part of the SERI, the **StOpE initiative**, coordinated by the AFMD, held a webinar aimed at an international audience with three main objectives:

- Explore the different issues related to everyday sexism in France and abroad
- Identify the levers and obstacles to the deployment of policies to fight against everyday sexism in an international setting
- Share best practices put in place by the #StOpE signatories in order to fight against everyday sexism

This webinar started by an overview on everyday sexism in France and was then followed by a roundtable with different speakers from the signatory organisations of #StOpE.

Speakers:

AFMD

- Chloé TORCOL: Project Manager French Association for diversity Managers (AFMD)
- Hadja-Mantou DRAME: Project Coordinator French Association for diversity Managers (AFMD)

RoundTable

- Anne-Sophie Béraud: SVP Group Diversity Equity Inclusion & Social Care - **Accor**
- Hélène Cambournac: CSR Leader Excom Member - **Wavestone**
- Sandrine Flimon: D&I Deputy Director - **Bouygues Group**
- Soraya Khadir: French & International Content Director - **Me&YouToo**

An overview of everyday sexism in France

Everyday sexism, a definition

Everyday sexism encompasses all the actions, remarks or behaviours ingrained in gender stereotypes that insidiously or sometimes even “benevolently” degrade or humiliates someone because of their gender. Everyday sexism is based on gender bias and gender stereotypes that are already present in society.

There are different ways of naming the phenomenon: everyday sexism or ordinary sexism, day to day sexism but it all points to the same thing.

Everyday sexism creates an environment that favours other kinds of gender violence like sexual harassment or sexual aggressions. That also applies to the work environment. Not only that, but the Harvard Business review states that: “constant exposure to everyday sexism can be just as damaging to women as the most egregious forms of sexual harassment”

As for the legal framework, in France it is quite repressive specifically on sexual harassment/aggression, income inequality and parity. However interpersonal relationships are harder to characterize and proving acts of everyday sexism in the court of law is more difficult than for other forms of gender violence. It is now mandatory to have a sexist acts and sexual harassment point of contact within the organization, for companies of more than 250 employees.

The manifestations of everyday sexism at work

There are various ways everyday sexism manifests itself in the work environment:

- Jokes
- Sexist comments
- Comments on pregnancy
- Unsolicited compliments or critics on one’s physical appearance.
- Marks of disrespect, for example constantly interrupting someone when they’re speaking
- Calling someone using pet names: kid, dear, sweetheart, honey etc.

These acts of everyday sexism do have a direct impact on one’s physical & psychological well-being and on one’s career. This why it is so important that companies implement policies to tackle this issue.

Le sexisme à la française, une exception dans le paysage international ?

Like every other country, France has been shaken by the metoo movement in 2017. The hashtag used in France to denunciate sexual violence was #BalancetonPorc or “denounce your pig” in English. It was created by a French journalist just one day before the hashtag #metoo.

The objective of these movements was to denounce the status quo around gender violence and the silence of professionals, directions and management in industries as a whole. Five years later we can say with certainty, that #MeToo and #BalanceTonPorc have incurred strong repercussions in the French society. Those movements have put gender violence related issues on the table in politics, the media and at work.

In 2018, as a reaction to these movements, 100 very influent French women (psychologists, doctors, journalists etc.) signed a tribune which was pleading for a "right to bother". They believe that the me too gave an important platform to women to be able to speak openly about gender violence, but they criticize three main points:

- The fact that women were obliged to speak out only via social media and not through the judicial system
- Those movements are based on an imported American puritanism that is not adapted to the French culture which is thought to be "freer" in terms of sexuality
- From their perspective, the #Metoo movement assigns women to stay eternal victims only defined by the gender violence they endured

The specificity of French sexism is apparent in these critics: in France there is a strong confusion between sexual freedom and sexual violence. This confusion makes the understanding of everyday sexism more difficult as this type of sexism manifests itself through acts that are even more insidious than sexual harassment.

For example, in France, acts of "galanterie" or chivalry in English are very common between men and women. Galanterie was initially created as a mean of seducing women through seemingly polite practices, such as pulling the chair before a woman sits down, holding the door, etc. Today, some researchers consider those acts and gestures as benevolent sexism, because they invite women to sit tight, keep their mouth shut and let men act for them. Benevolent sexism is a type of ordinary sexism that is, in the case of galanterie completely banalised in the daily between men and women in France.

Actually, gender stereotypes are at the heart of these issues linked to sexism and gender violence as a whole. They are conveyed everywhere in society (media, classes, organization) and they hurt boys too. Researchers found that French men have a "duty" to show their sexual dominance. If they don't abide by this rule, they can in turn become victims of harassment.

[The impact of French cultural context on organizations](#)

Analyzing the French cultural context is very important to understand gender violence in the work environment in France. As a matter of fact, a study made by the HCE which is a French organization that studies inequalities between men and

women in France concluded this year, in 2023 that “violence and harassment” have reached “alarming proportions”.

We also found concurring results in [the #StOpE Barometer](#). This study is conducted once every two years on a pool of employees in different kinds of organizations. In the barometer we found out that in France for **8 women out of 10** sexist attitudes and decisions are recurrent in the workplace. Moreover, the feeling that "one can't say/do anything anymore" remains widely present. Nearly **7 women out of 10 and 6 men out of 10** have already heard this type of recrimination.

In a society where there is a strong confusion between gender violence and sexual liberty, it is no surprise that when sexism is identified and sanctioned, some everyday acts, remarks and gestures ingrained in the daily lives of French people have to change.

There are, however, ways of fighting everyday sexism in the workplace, and the signatories of the #StOpE initiative are living proof of this fact.

Indeed, #StOpE signatories fight against sexism in various ways:

- Training teams within companies
- Raising awareness on this issue, and dissociating seduction, flirtation, from everyday sexism
- Putting in place a solid way to alert and sanction sexism in the workplace
- Giving tools to witnesses and allies in order to respond to sexism when needed
- Strong commitment of directions and management on those issues

The #StOpE barometer confirms that these efforts have a very strong impact in the signatory organizations as **82% of employees in signatory organizations consider their companies as actively engaged against sexism** vs 65% in the national poll.

The best practices of #StOpE signatories

The first best practice recommended by #StOpE signatories is to have local representatives dedicated to the fight against sexism in the countries where the organization is present.

This allows the organization to:

- Spread the right messages to the employees through the representatives
- Be aware of the situation and of the potential cases of sexism on the ground
- Set up exchanges of the tools used in different cultural contexts and countries and potentially change some aspects from the lessons learned by others

As an example, Sandrine Flimon, Deputy D&I Director in the Bouygues Group, shared with us the creation of employee networks named Btogether. Their mission is to tackle the issues of equality between men and women. 3000 employees across the world are working on 8 subjects related to equality and sexism, they also discuss regularly about the different practices implemented in the Bouygues Group.

At Wavestone, H  l  ne Cambournac explains, the process is slightly different as they have two levels of local representatives:

- A first level made of the local HR team. They set up the frame of the policy against sexism within the branch which acts as common ground for all employees.
- A second level made of employees specifically trained to these issues. They have several missions within the branch: raising awareness, organizing events, explaining their roles to other employees and collaborating with local NGOs.

Another practice given by the signatories is to train the employees to everyday sexism and more generally to all the types of gender violence. In this regard Wavestone and Bouygues use the #StOpE e-learning, a training course available for all the signatories of the initiative. This training course goes over the definition and manifestations of everyday sexism at work and some tools to react to these situations.

Our speakers also talked about creating key indicators in order to measure everyday sexism in their different branches across the world. There are two types:

- Indicators based on the statements of sexist acts observed or experienced. Those testimonies are collected through polls or dedicated online platforms.
- The second category of indicators consists in aggregating the results of actions implemented in the companies (the number of trained employees for example)

Once the company has collected these indicators it is essential to communicate about them. Not only it gives an assessment of all the progress made to the direction which allows to reiterate the necessity to tackle those issues and to verify the efficacy of the organization's actions. But those indicators also constitute a pool of very important tools to raise awareness using figures and sexist acts that actually happened within the company itself in order to raise awareness on this issue.

More information

For more information on the AFMD and on the initiative, please visit [the AFMD website](#).

The inscriptions are open to join the initiative in 2024, contact the #StOpE team if you want to join the collective. The deadline to apply is December 10, 2023.

Contact:

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Bibliography

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