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## P R E S S   R E L E A S E

**The International structural transformation project SWOPS of BPW Club Berlin e.V. shows: Higher interest in technology careers among students and young professional. Especially in France, female professionals and managers are still missing.**

**Preliminary results from the survey of French companies show: Even though French SMEs are leading in equal opportunities in European comparison, the demand for well-trained female professionals and executives is still great in France. Two examples from practice.**

SWOPS conducted qualitative interviews in two French SMEs with a female share of around 30 percent. Conclusion: Both companies - classic medium-sized with a comparatively small number of employees - are willing to hire more female employees. Is there really something happening for women? At least, the standard criteria for promotion or the development of employees are fully complied with. That is, career advancements are negotiated individually, as joint target agreements. The management level is regularly analyzed and measured. In addition, the two companies account for the legal conditions applicable in France with regard to gender equality. However, it appears that none of the SMEs surveyed offers its employees targeted work-life balance deals. Nevertheless, the two companies have installed a fixed point of contact for the case that it is necessary to solve gender-related issues or problems.

The working hours in the surveyed companies fulfill the normal office hours between 8am and 5pm. Common coffee breaks totaling half an hour in the morning ensure that employees can exchange amongst each other. Sessions after 5pm do no longer occur. Potential conflicts are being resolved at the personal level. With regard to the manageable size of the workforce, the companies are open to flexible working hours, but there are no specific re-entry and re-exit models for employees before and after maternity leave. Instead, the small size of the company enables individual decisions on a case by case basis.

The respective position determines what trainings are being proposed to the employees. Employees in the technology sector benefit from technology-oriented qualification programs, while employees from the sales area are more likely to choose language courses. No differences between men and women can be observed in course selection, rather, the decisions as to who benefits from the services offered are made on the basis of their respective areas of work and the specialties. In the two French SMEs, there is no difference in pay between men and women –salaries are solely set by the hierarchy level and field of activity.

The women in the companies surveyed take parental leave. An internal childcare does not exist. Instead, both companies offer a flexible working time arrangement. As in Germany, the French company is composed almost equally of men and women. The slight imbalance in favour of men in the surveyed companies are said to be due to differences in competence profiles. In chemical companies

and foundries fewer women than men are present. Nonetheless, a slight increase of qualified female junior professionals can be recorded. Both companies are willing to hire more women. This often fails on limited applications by suitably qualified women on the labour market. Equality measures thus have no priority or can be set only to a limited extent.

From the perspective of the companies surveyed, it is important to significantly improve appropriate training offers at vocational schools and universities in the form of "training on the job". Cornelia F. Krämer, 1st Chairman of the BPW Club Berlin e.V. emphasizes the importance, especially at an early stage, to inspire young women for new professions in the MINT disciplines: "According to the findings from Sweden, that see new forms of recruiting as one of the greatest challenges in international competition, is now also confirmed by the results from France. It is therefore very important to provide an early awareness among girls and female students for possible careers in the STEM field. Here our society is called upon to rethink role models - men and women together at a table, in companies and best already in the family at the kitchen table. Role models are coined unconsciously at a very early age. SWOPS develops a consulting tool as a handout for the corporate management to resolve structural barriers in the minds and in the medium term to increase its attractiveness as an employer for potential female employees. Companies who (unconsciously) would prefer to hire in the target group of male candidates, in fact halve the applicant pool and waste their chance of advancement."

Mixed teams have proven to gain more innovative results and creativity in the company, which returns a positive effect on employee satisfaction. As an employer branding tool, SWOPS is for staff development. The results of the consultancies and evaluations with the CEOs in the four countries are compacted to a comparative country analysis. This is available for interested SMEs after project completion across the EU as a Best Practice Study and as recommendation for action in print and online format.

In addition to the BPW Club Berlin as a project coordinator and the Berlin RKW GmbH, which is responsible for the content control, other partner organizations from France, Sweden and Austria participate in the development of SWOPS: The European Employers Association *Centre Européen de Ressources de Groupements d'Employeurs* (CERGE), Poitiers, and at the regional level, the *Centre de Ressources de Groupements d'Employeurs* (CRGE), Poitou-Charentes, France. In Austria, comprehensive cluster for sustainable waste management in Styria ARGE.at – comprised of the 130 enterprises – as well as in Sweden the SME network of innovative location-developer Tillväxt Motala.

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