

## The European Observatory for Inclusive Employment and the SDGs

### Case study for APF France Handicap & APF Entreprises/ France

#### Gender equality in the disability movement: the APF France Handicap commitment to access to work and employment for women with disabilities

##### Introduction

Figures are striking: at European level, the employment rate of persons with disabilities is roughly 20 to 30 percentage point lower than those of workers with disabilities (Labour Force Survey, 2011; European Union (EU) Statistics on Income and Living Conditions, 2016). Gender is an additional bias with 45,9% of women with disabilities being employed as compared to 67,7% for women without disabilities (Academic Network of European Disability Experts, 2019). France is no exception to the rule: the overall employment rate is at 65%, but only at 37% for workers with disabilities, and at 61% for women compared to 45% for working women with disabilities. Also, as for the whole of population, underemployment (part-time, technical or partial unemployment) of persons is more common among women with disabilities than men with disabilities (INSEE DARES- 2013). Acknowledging these significant challenges in accessing employment faced by women with disabilities, APF France Handicap has engaged into a process aiming to ensure equal opportunities to working women with disabilities.

##### The APF France Handicap company agreement on professional and wage equality between women and men: enacting equality and non-discrimination values for all

<b>Name</b>	APF France Handicap company agreement on professional and wage equality between women and men
<b>Objectives</b>	Fight discrimination, and offer men and women the same career opportunities and professional development according to their skills and wishes
<b>Activities</b>	Awareness raising, trainings, communication, collection of data disaggregated by sex, mainstream of gender equality in all activities
<b>Target groups</b>	The 14,600 paid employees working for APF France Handicap
<b>Timeline</b>	2018 - 2022
<b>Location</b>	France – All structures of APF France Handicap
<b>Stakeholders</b>	Main implementing organisation: APF France Handicap Other organisations involved: 2 trade unions – namely the CFDT and CGT

APF France Handicap is a large association that aims to represent and defend persons with disabilities in France, and to accompany them in their daily lives. Created in 1933, it is divided into over 530 structures present across the entire French mainland territory. The number of people involved in any capacity with APF France handicap is of around 100,000, divided into 30,000 users, 23,000 members, 14,600 paid employees, and 25,000 volunteers. APF Entreprises is the association’s business division, comprising a vast network of 50 companies: 25 customised work companies (“Adapted companies or EA”) and 25 sheltered workshops (medico-social establishments called “establishments for help and service through work” or ESAT). The proportion of persons with disabilities among APF Entreprises total workforce equates to roughly 90,5%.

*"Let's not discriminate in anti-discrimination associations!"*

Farid Marouani, Chief Operating Officer of APF Entreprises

APF France Handicap is an activist organisation acting upon its values: non-discrimination and equality are at the core of the association's identity. APF France Handicap fights against discrimination on the basis of disability in all aspects of life, so providing equal opportunities for men and women came in as quite a natural reflection in 2011 already. Initial activities were implemented and a reporting point took place in 2015. This enabled the association to mature the subject internally and has been formalised with the signature of a company agreement on gender equality in 2018. It reasserts the equality of women to men on the basis of hiring, wages, parental leave, treatment within the workplace, and representation in associative elections, staff representative bodies and instances of decision. Another cross-cutting scope of application specifically targets combatting all forms of sexism and prevent sexual harassment. Each line of action is measured by pre-identified indicators disaggregated by sex to measure progress. An internal monitoring committee has been created and is composed of the management team, human resources staffs and trade union delegations. It meets once year to assess the situation and presents a report to the Board (Comité Central d'Entreprise).

Gender-disaggregated indicators relating to equal pay for women and men:

- Average or median monthly remuneration by gender and category
- Average or median monthly remuneration by gender and age group
- Number of women in the 10 highest paid positions

APF Entreprises has declined the agreement into actions corresponding to its primary mission - providing work opportunities to men and women with disabilities. Historically engaged into more industrial and masculine-associated sectors of activities, APF Entreprises took the strategic decision to switch to tertiary services. Engaging into areas in which women are traditionally more present was considered as a realistic step forward to immediately offer work opportunities to women with disabilities. Once recruited, they are offered career development pathways across a wide variety of jobs and sectors. Also, APF Entreprises is eager to offer working conditions carefully taking into account the constraints that women may encounter. This starts with granting parental leaves matching various family situation: leave for the mothers and fathers having a baby or adopting a child, as well as parental education or family support leave. This continues with measures aiming to neutralise the impact of parent-related leave on career development. For this, professional interviews are scheduled in after any long absence leave to discuss professional carrier projects and development. Leave for sick children do not impact wages or holidays, while parental leaves are fully taken into account to calculate training time allocation and rights.

In addition, careful attention is given to promoting women in leadership roles with the intention of providing women with inspirational role models. This mostly takes place at the recruitment phase and is about wording gender-neutral job offers, at equal skill level choosing women over men to reach gender-balance in director and management positions, or intentionally seeking for female candidates in industrial-oriented companies. But this is not only about promoting women, it is also about making them visible to others. A good example is the "women in customised work company's trophy", an annual competition among the French customised work sector sponsored by French top leading companies. Since 2015 women working for the customised companies of APF Entreprises have won trophies every year in various categories. For instance, [Sandra Hadangue](#), employed by the customised company of Saint-Julien-lès-Metz, has won the 2017 "Coup de Coeur" Trophy: she is a deafblind graphic designer and has also won the Bronze medallist of the French roller figure skating championship, dancing on a music she cannot hear.



**Progressively turning into a culture of equality between men and women**

*"At APF everything is negotiable but our values"*  
 Farid Marouani, Chief Operating Officer of APF Entreprises

While APF France Handicap is conscious of the still long way to go, initial changes are nonetheless visible. Its employees report an overall feeling of peaceful and secure working conditions. As for any organisations APF France Handicap has also been confronted with sexual harassment cases. In line with legal obligations, human resources have pro-actively investigated: authors of violence were sanctioned, and even dismissed when necessary. Another unexpected change was noticed: while gender equality was initiated with the needs of working mothers in mind, fathers and any other employee having a family actually benefit from these work life balance measures.



As for APF Entreprises, it has now reached a respectively 45%- and 55%-share of operations in the tertiary and industrial sectors. This has de facto increased the number of women employed in its companies: they now account for about one third of the total workforce and the curve keeps rising. It has also almost reached parity at director-level positions. However more women head socio-medical sheltered workshops (ESAT), while men are directors of customised work companies (EA), the reason being the industrial oriented activities of the latter. This is slowly changing as well.

APF France Handicap has identified drivers and success factors leading to sustainable change, while challenges and learning points have also been met on the way to becoming a fully gender and disability inclusive Association:

Drivers and success factors	Challenges and learning points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Top management decision to prioritise equality between men and women</li> <li>- Signature of a written agreement to which all parties committed</li> <li>- Equality and non-discrimination as part of APF France Handicap core identity</li> <li>- Grounded APF France Handicap history in the concept of "care" - a rather female oriented social norm</li> <li>- A protection-oriented mindset in addressing situation of violence faced by persons with disabilities has been fertile grounds to engage into fighting sexist and sexual violence against women</li> <li>- Staff habits in adapting the work environment of workers with disabilities paved the way to adjust to the needs and constraints of women</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attracting women candidates in male-dominated sector of activities</li> <li>- APF France Handicap has addressed men-women equality, but has not necessarily engaged into challenging social gender norms</li> <li>- Women with disabilities tend to have lower education level and low-paying jobs, while sometimes heading household on their own, making it difficult to find balanced and suitable responses for every woman's situation</li> <li>- Lack of financial means</li> <li>- Staff in management positions were trained but this should be enlarged to any staff members</li> </ul>

**Recommendations to other organisations willing to engage in a similar process:**

- Follow the 7 steps of change management theories to challenge disability- and/or gender-based stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes prioritising the "quick-wins", communicating about successes and measuring change
- Start from the known -fighting discrimination based on disability- and expand it to new scopes of application -promoting equality between men and women

- Ensure prioritisation by top management while establishing a coordination and monitoring working group in charge of following up on implementation, acting as an internal watchdog and bringing on new ideas to keep up with developments

## Conclusion

The APF France Handicap company agreement shows how articulating prioritisation by senior management and progressive implementation brings tangible results to tackle multiple grounds of discrimination at once. It also paves the way to recognise the specificities of each one's social identities and personal life pathways - being it men or women, a person with or without a disability.

## About the Observatory

Created in 2018, the European Observatory for Inclusive Employment and Sustainable Development Goals aims to build an EU partnership dealing with the challenges faced by social economy organisations and companies employing a significant percentage of persons with disabilities in Europe, while seizing the opportunities stemming from these. Members include:

<b>National member organisations from Spain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden and Slovenia</b>	
<b>European network partners</b>	
<b>Observer organisations</b>	

In its first phase of actions over 2018-20, the Observatory aims to analyse how these organisations and companies provide work and employment opportunities to men and women with disabilities and effectively include them into the labour market and society in Europe.

## Case study methodology

This case study is part of a series of six - one for each national member organisations of the Observatory. The overall objective is to contribute to better understand how persons with disabilities actually access economic opportunities, while recognising the diverse legal forms and adopted approach towards employment of workers with disabilities taken throughout Europe. The data collection process was qualitative in nature and conducted by Weber Shandwick, acting as the Observatory Secretariat. It consisted of a brief document review and semi-structured interviews with the key contact persons involved. Each case study was drafted by Weber Shandwick and approved by the respective national member organisation before being publicly released.

## Contact

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