



x



Press release

"What if we asked men and women... the same questions?"

SISTA and Mirova Forward launch campaign to challenge media treatment of women leaders and entrepreneurs

Paris, March 24, 2022. In the aftermath of International Women's Day, SISTA and Mirova Forward are proud to present "What if we asked men and women the same questions?" a campaign to highlight bias in the treatment of women leaders and entrepreneurs by the media, and its role in maintaining gender inequalities in the workplace.

Calling out the stereotypes that hinder the careers of women leaders, starting with a background study.

SISTA, the collective that works to reduce funding inequalities between women and men entrepreneurs, and Mirova Forward, the endowment fund from sustainable finance pioneer Mirova, commissioned the editorial communication agency Mots Clés to document media treatment biases affecting women and men who lead companies. The agency compiled and analysed a total corpus of 118 articles (interviews and executive profiles) in the French media, from 19 titles from mainstream, economic and financial, and women's periodicals. The point was not to point out "good" or "bad" behavior among media outlets, but to denounce stereotypes that may have questionable social effects.

Women leaders in the press: caught between professional adolescence and perpetual "exception".

The study reveals several persistent media treatment biases between women and men business leaders. There appear to be five recurring themes:

- The **"exceptional"** nature of women being in such professional positions or the presence of a woman leader in a "masculine" environment is systematically mentioned.
- **"Action"** is reserved for men: the three verbs most strongly associated with profiles of men are action verbs, while those most strongly associated with women are "mediation" verbs.
- Men are **"experts"**, women are... women. A full 80% of profile interviews focused on expertise have men as their subjects. The speeches of women leaders are often relegated to "soft" themes (that is to say, not related to core business).

- **Eternal youth:** the expression "young woman" appears 5 times more often than the expression "young man", thus reducing women's professional achievement to exceptionality in a male environment. The media's treatment of women's professional careers highlights and praises expressions of doubt and feelings of illegitimacy, especially during their early careers.
- **Actual or alleged feminism?** In a full third of all articles, journalists ask women about their commitment to feminism, which has become a leitmotif for media outlets in their questions for women.

An offbeat and humorous video to point out the biases: "*Congratulations on your journey. It's very rare for a man of your age to hold such a position, we're not used to it.*"

To illustrate the study's findings in an offbeat way, SISTA and Mirova Forward carried out a video campaign with the activist production company Malmö Productions, in which eight male executives, who are Heads of Global corporations, answered questions usually asked to women. In a 3-minute montage, **Xavier Niel (Iliad-Free), Thierry Déau (Méridiam), Nicolas Hiéronimus (L'Oréal), Frédéric Mazzella (BlaBlaCar), Cédric O' (French Secretary of State), François-Henri Pinault (Kering), Jean-Marie Tritant (Unibail-Rodamco-Westfield) and Philippe Zaouati (Mirova)** are questioned by Allison Chassagne (creator of the YouTube channel *Glamouze*) about their doubts, their work/life balance and the challenges they faced returning to work after paternity leave. The comedy of the situation underlines the unequal treatment of women in positions of economic power. It also points out how much harmonized and equal treatment are needed in order to make progress towards genuine equality of opportunity.

"As the Copé-Zimmermann¹ law celebrates its tenth anniversary and despite progress bringing women onto corporate boards of directors, increasing the number women in management positions struggles to gain traction: to date, France's CAC 40 stock index boasts only two women general managers, and only 2 of the last 15 unicorns were founded by co-ed teams. Through this campaign, we wanted to highlight just how stereotypes find expression in the media, and their impact on gender equality in the economic world," explains **Tatiana Jama**, co-founder of SISTA.

"Unconscious bias is very difficult to defuse and is a formidable obstacle to the advancement of women in the workplace. We fervently believe that the press can play a major role in correcting these biases, which is why we wanted to support awareness and encourage journalists to move towards less stereotypical questions or, conversely, ask them equally to everyone" explains **Anne-Claire Roux**, Executive Director of Mirova Forward.

¹ The Copé-Zimmermann French law imposes quotas for women on boards of directors and supervisory boards. It has enabled a decisive step to be taken in the fight for gender equality and has broken down cultural and ideological barriers.

LAST

About Sista:

SISTA is a collective of women entrepreneurs and investors that promotes greater diversity in the digital economy by encouraging more investment in women-led businesses. SISTA's approach is unprecedented in France. In partnership with all stakeholders in the ecosystem, the collective co-constructs good practices to bring out a diverse generation of leaders.

Created in December 2018 by Céline Lazorthes, Tatiana Jama and Valentine de Lasteyrie, its board is composed of Nathalie Balla (La Redoute & Relais Colis), Mercedes Erra (BETC - Havas Worldwide), Anne Lalou (La Web School Factory - Innovation Factory), Françoise Mercadal-Delasalles (CEO Crédit du Nord) and Stéphane Pallez — (Française des Jeux).

[Website](#)

Mirova Forward

Launched in December 2020, Mirova Forward is the endowment fund of Mirova, an asset management company that has pioneered sustainable finance and a company with a mission. With Mirova Forward, philanthropy provides an additional lever for action to broaden Mirova's impact beyond the economic and financial sphere.

By serving as a laboratory for ideas and experimentation for projects in the service of the general interest, Mirova Forward aims to support the development of projects with a positive impact on society and the planet, more particularly in sectors in which Mirova is a recognized investor - such as ecological transition, energy poverty, gender equality, forest and ocean conservation, agroecology and the social and solidarity economy – as well as equal opportunities and inclusion.

[Website](#)

Mirova is a portfolio management company – (AMF approval no. GP 02-014).

Keywords

Mots-Clés is a fast-growing communication agency, with a resolutely editorial anchoring. Independent and committed, Mots-Clés promotes gender equality through inclusive writing, contributes to the development of the notion of the company's raison d'être and explores the possibilities opened up by data-semantics and UX Writing with its R&D Lab'.

[Website](#)

Malmö Productions

Founded in 2020 by Shirley Kohn and Camille Cottin, Malmö Productions develops documentaries and films that address major societal issues – women's rights, equal opportunities, migration – from a feminist perspective.

[Website](#)

Press Contacts

Contact SISTA

Tatiana Jama

+33 6 12 43 90 12

tatianajama@gmail.com

Contact Mirova Forward

Servane Taslé

+33 6 66 58 84 28

servane@steeleandholt.com

mirova@steeleandholt.com

Contact Keywords

Raphaël Haddad

+33 1 44 07 97 80

+33 6 82 05 06 98

raphael@motsclés.net

Resources

- Video of the campaign "What if we asked men and women the same questions?"
- (in French) Full study: "The media treatment of women entrepreneurs and women leaders", February 2022
- (in French) Summary of the study
- (in French) Teasers from the campaign "What if we asked men?" #TheSameQuestions