

## Gender equality at AFP: We deserve better!

**When announcing its near-perfect score (98/100) in the gender equality index for 2024, management emphasized that its progress since the indicator's introduction "is the result of a proactive approach taken by AFP over the years to promote gender equality." In France, this index is already widely criticized for its overly broad criteria, which mask specific cases of pay discrimination between women and men in the same position. But at AFP, a huge blind spot makes our score almost misleading: AFP only measures equality among French employees, even though it is a global agency that employs staff abroad. Indeed, a recent incident seriously calls into question AFP's seriousness in its commitment to gender equality.**

A local-contract photographer realized that her male colleague was being paid more than her for the same position. She raised the matter with her superiors, who first refused to discuss it, then denied it outright, and finally refused to completely correct the situation. After persisting, our colleague obtained a raise that narrowed the gap, but didn't completely close it. She then decided to file a pay discrimination complaint with the local court.

According to documents submitted to the court, the male photographer was paid 82% more than his female colleague working in the same job at the end of 2022. Their difference in seniority (18 versus 27 years) justified part of the pay gap, but not an 82% gulf. If the woman photographer had worked in France, her seniority would have made her RED 4 on the salary scale for journalists working under the French workplace agreement. The salary gap with RED 8, the highest rank on the scale reserved for the editor-in-chief who has much greater responsibilities, is only 55%. Thus, even in its wildest dreams, management could not justify an 82% pay gap between two photographers doing the same job.

AFP did not dispute the enormous wage gap, it defended it. Since the male photographer had won several awards, it said the gap was justified as performance-related, which local law allows. However, management did not mention the woman photographer's awards to the court, nor the fact that her workload had been considerably higher than her colleague's in recent years.

The trial court ruled earlier this year in favor of AF: the agency was well within its (local!) rights to pay the two employees differently, taking into account various factors such as their qualifications, professional experience, and the difficulty, quantity, and quality of their work. The judge criticized the photographer for not having negotiated better compensation earlier in her career. The photographer has appealed this ruling.

**The only savings here have been with the truth**

After its legal victory, AFP fired the photographer as part of a redundancy measure. Suddenly, in an office facing a dense news cycle and a lot of breaking news, AFP wanted to reduce the number of positions! We are in a difficult economic climate, but our management constantly boasts that, unlike our competitors, it has not reduced the number of journalists. Nevertheless, lightning struck our colleague swiftly following the

court ruling. This financial storm must have been just passing, however, because AFP sent two photographers as reinforcements to this same office to cover an important event in her absence. And finally, management advertised the post to replace her! So, the only savings here have been with the truth.

This photographer's case also reveals a highly reprehensible practice. Her salary and that of her colleague were presented as a lump sum, with no indication of the base salary and various bonuses. The trial judge stated that there was no evidence of discrimination, as AFP had never detailed the various components of their remuneration. How convenient!

SUD has already denounced the problem of bonuses: without a clear definition or award criteria, their use can become discriminatory. In France, this is the case with the prime de rendement, or "performance" bonus. The French workplace agreement sets out very limited conditions for awarding this bonus, but management uses it for other purposes, including to attract new recruits to AFP. This demonstrates the inadequacy of our pay scales, but instead of correcting them, management is bypassing them and gender equality is an innocent bystander.

As if that weren't enough, our colleague reported brutal and particularly destabilizing behavior by her supervisors just before her dismissal. Distraught, she sought psychological counseling from Eutelmed and reported her situation to HR in France. However, they did not acknowledge receipt of her alert. For our colleague, this lack of response, even formal, was even more painful. Another aspect that bothers us is that investigations into harassment alerts abroad are conducted solely by management, and the victim is not interviewed. This significantly undermines the credibility of these investigations, in our opinion. Management uses compliance with local legislation as its defense. But nothing prevents a more inclusive and comprehensive investigation from being conducted.

AFP has an ethics charter. However, values are not just pretty words in a glossy brochure loaded with spectacular photos. Values are not limited to compliance with local legislation. They must express what we believe is fair and equitable and be translated into clear and enforced policies. AFP can commit to structuring compensation transparently around the world to ensure there is no pay discrimination. Management is capable of building a more robust system for investigating reports of harassment. So why isn't it doing so? Good question. Why aren't we insisting? That's a better question. We deserve better, don't we?

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**SUD-AFP (Solidarity-Unity-Democracy)**