

Training & Employment

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Women skirting the edge of crisis...

A first for Céreq's *Génération* survey: at the end of 2008, results showed that the unemployment rate for young women had fallen below that for their male counterparts. Higher shares of young men have no qualifications and consequently are suffering more than women from the decline in the number of unskilled jobs. Nevertheless, women still tend to be employed in less stable, lower-paid jobs.

Employment
Qualification
survey
transition to work
Longitudinal data
Higher Education

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Is the inequality between men and women in the early stages of their working lives on the way to being reversed? For a long time, surveys on labour market entry showed that the advantage lay with men. However, the results of the most recent surveys indicate that the situation is changing: there are more young women in the labour market and they are at less risk of being unemployed. Changes in the job structure and the increasing number of women with qualifications are just two of the factors that help to explain this phenomenon, which is being further reinforced by the crisis. Nevertheless, it is still not good to be a woman with few if any qualifications, since the situation for this group is more precarious than ever before.

A first: lower unemployment rate for women than for men

Until the end of the 1990s, the employment rate for young men starting out on their working lives rapidly overtook that for young women and remained higher thereafter. Once men had completed their military service, their employment rate used to

exceed that for women by a significant margin, and from the third year of the working life onwards the two rates varied only slightly. For the next generation, the conditions at labour market entry were different, and the changes were reflected in a considerable narrowing of the gap between the employment rates for men and women who entered the labour market in 2004 (cf. Figure 1). By the end of the third year after labour market entry, the proportion of young people in employment had not really stabilised as it had for previous generations. Employment rates for both sexes gradually increased, with women little by little overtaking both men and the level of employment young women of the previous generation had reached. Finally, following the financial crisis that broke out in the autumn of 2008, women's employment rate held up better than the male rate, which actually began to decline.

Similarly, until recently, Céreq's surveys on labour market entry were recording unemployment rates for women that were systematically higher than those for men. For the generation that entered the labour market in 1998, this gap remained significant throughout the first five years of their working lives. For the generation that started work in 2004, on the other hand, the gap narrowed, largely due to a greater

Converging employment rates and lower unemployment rate for women

Figure 1 – Evolution of employment rates for the 1998 and 2004 cohorts during the first five years of the working life

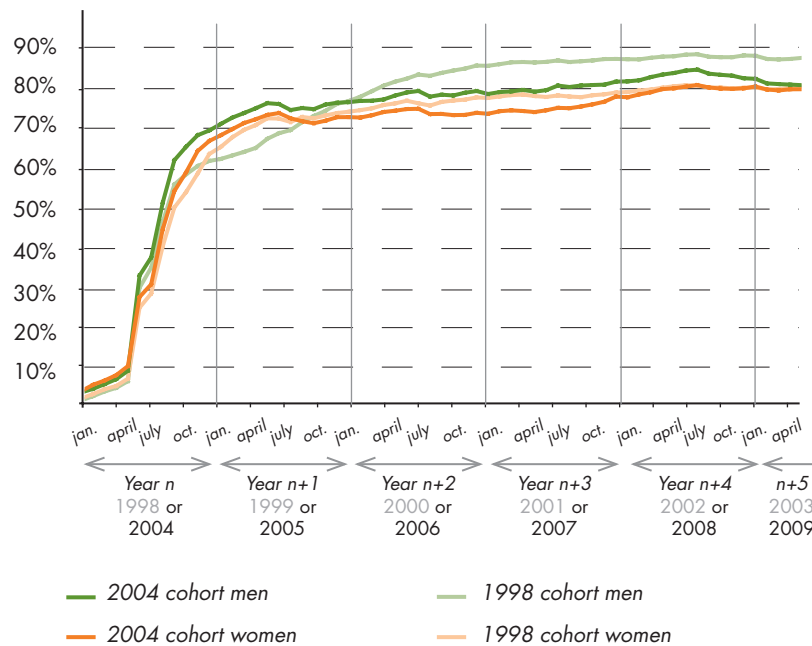
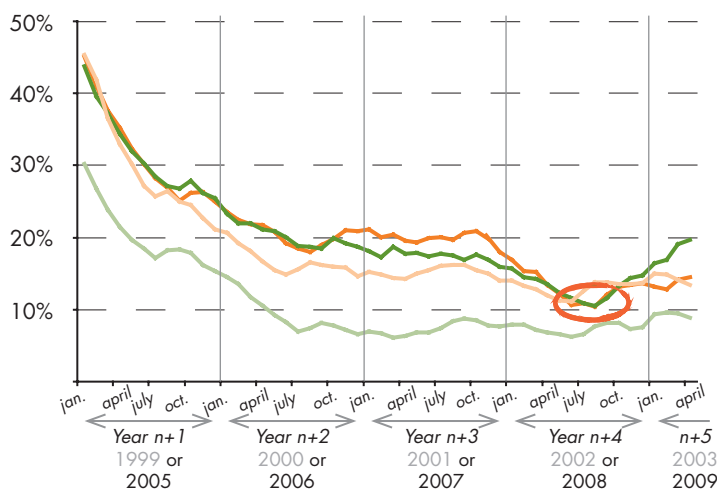


Figure 2 - Evolution of unemployment rates for the 1998 and 2004 cohorts during the first five years of the working life



Employment rate: share of young people in employment relative to the generation as a whole. The alternative situations they may be in are unemployment, education/training, inactivity.

Unemployment rate: share of unemployed people in the economically active population.

●●● increase in men's unemployment rates (cf. Figure 2). In the course of the third year of their working lives, women's relative position temporarily deteriorated somewhat. However, from the autumn of 2008 onwards, the increase in unemployment rates turned out to be much greater among men. Thus five years into their working lives, the women of this generation were at considerably less risk than men of being unemployed (unemployment rate of 12%, compared with 15% for men) - once again a most unusual phenomenon.

Thus in a situation of economic crisis, women's employment seems to be holding up better than men's. The trend is general and goes beyond the early years of the working life:

since 2007, employment levels for women with more experience in the labour market declined less than those for men. The explanation is to be found mainly in the effects of the recession, which have led to massive job losses for men employed in the large manufacturing industries, while women have suffered less because they are more likely to be employed in service industries. As far as young people are concerned, the greater resilience of women's employment has also to be seen against the background of the dynamics of labour market entry for men and women, which are tending to converge. While women's higher levels of educational attainment are undoubtedly bearing fruit (47% of young women have tertiary-level qualifications, compared with 34% of young men), this greater resilience is also - and largely - attributable to the greater difficulties young people without qualifications (two thirds of whom are men) face in the labour market.

Cyclical or structural effect?

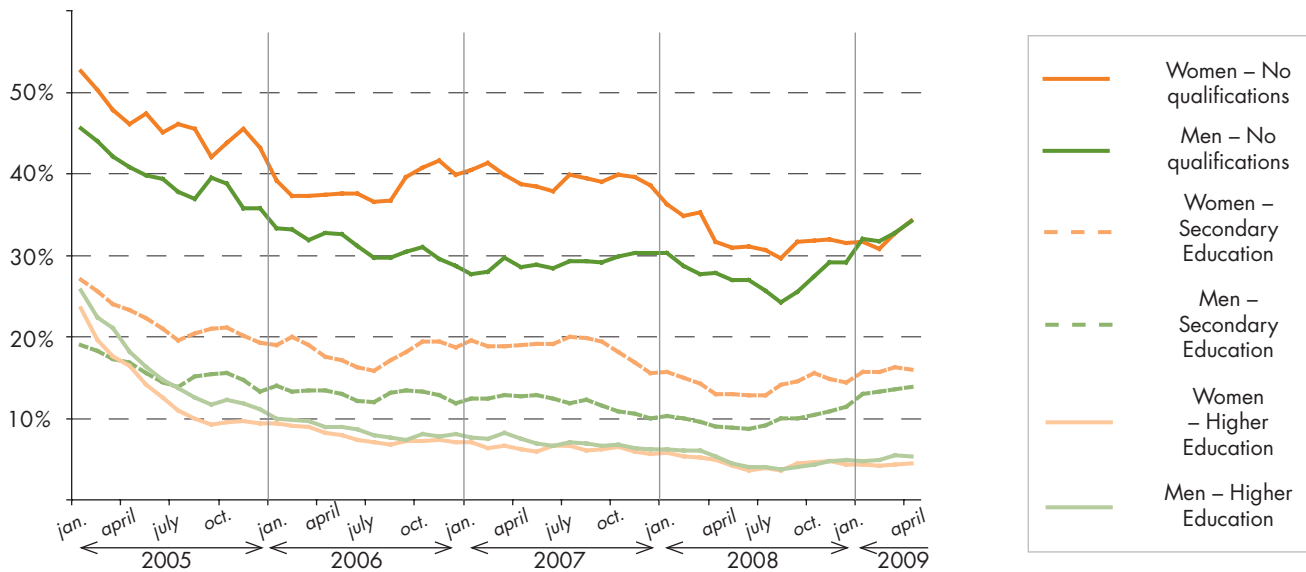
The two cohorts observed, the one that left education in 1998 and the one that left in 2004, entered the labour market under different circumstances. In 1998, unemployment was very high but went down rapidly. In 2004, it was at an intermediate level, fell only modestly subsequently and began to rise again from January 2009 onwards. These developments are reflected in the changes in the employment rate for the two cohorts over the years. Thus the 1998 cohort progressed less rapidly initially but eventually levelled out at a higher level of employment than that attained by the 2004 cohort. The gap was particularly pronounced for men, whereas the women in the 2004 cohort reached the same level of employment as their female counterparts in the 1998 generation (cf. Figure 1).

Over and above the cyclical changes in the overall unemployment rate, the convergence of the dynamics of labour market entry for the two sexes reflects longer-term changes in the labour market. The least qualified entrants, particularly young men, are experiencing increasing difficulties in finding employment.

Comparison of the two generations three years after entering the labour market, i.e. well before the crisis for those who left education in 2004, shows that the unemployment rate for men without qualifications rose by 10 percentage points from one cohort to the next, while that for young women without qualifications worsened only slightly. The unemployment rate for women in the 1998 cohort without qualifications was 12 percentage points higher than that for men after five years in the labour market. For the following cohort, the difference between the two sexes

The deteriorating situation of young men without qualifications

Figure 3: Evolution of unemployment rates for the 2004 cohort by gender and level of qualification



Source: Céreq, enquête Génération 2004

had reduced considerably by 2009 because of the spectacular increase in unemployment among young men without qualifications (cf. Figure 3).

Long a severe handicap for job seekers, the effect of having no qualifications has become even more dramatic for the 2004 cohort. The crisis of 2008 has exacerbated the already considerable difficulties the least well qualified young people, again particularly men, were experiencing in finding employment. It has accelerated the long-term trend towards a shrinking of the number of low-skill jobs in the manufacturing sector, which are traditionally held by men, and has also put a brake on recruitment in the construction and transport industries.

Thus between 2007 and 2009, the volume of women's employment increased by 7.2 %, compared with 0.9% for men. This gap is partly explained by the sectoral distribution of jobs. The least well-qualified young men are four times more likely than young women to be employed in agriculture, manufacturing and construction, sectors in which the volume of employment declined by almost 7 % between

2007 and 2009 (cf. table below). Young women are more likely to be employed in non-market services, where employment increased by more than 4 % over the same period.

In the case of secondary school leavers, young men continue to have a fairly significant advantage in terms of unemployment rate, which fell slightly as the crisis developed. On the other hand, the unemployment rate for male and female university graduates tracked each other very closely throughout the period. For this group, the differential between the two sexes at the beginning of their careers has traditionally been reflected in other indicators (access to managerial or executive jobs, pay etc.).

Young women's employment conditions are not improving

Although they have better access to jobs than previously, women's conditions of employment are still significantly inferior to those of men, even for those with the same level of qualifications. Five years after leaving the education system, those women in employment were more likely to be in precarious positions. More than a third

Distribution of employment in 2009 for the 2004 cohort by sector, gender and level of qualification

	No qualifications		Secondary-level qualifications		Tertiary-level qualifications	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Agriculture, manufacturing, construction and public works	44	10	43	11	29	11
Distribution	14	17	20	21	11	10
Services	26	41	24	25	33	27
Education, health, administration	16	32	14	44	28	53
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Céreq, enquête Génération 2004

of those without qualifications and more than a quarter of those with a CAP or BEP (secondary-level vocational qualifications) were still on fixed-term contracts or in state-subsidised jobs. While the share of temporary agency work among men was still high, the proportion of men in permanent employment rose between 2007 and 2009 by twice as much as that of their female counterparts. It should be noted that the differences observed between male and female university graduates followed the same pattern, although more than 85% of female graduates were in permanent employment.

Similarly, the part-time rate is very high for young women with few or no qualifications. Thus in 2009, more than a quarter of them were in part-time employment, compared with about 10% of young men and better qualified young women. Finally, these precarious employment forms, which are less conducive to proper integration into the labour market and the wider society, go hand in hand with particularly low rates of pay. In 2009, median pay, for all numbers of hours worked, was less than 1,300 Euros for young women with no or with only secondary-level qualifications and barely exceeded 1,350 Euros if only full-time jobs are taken into account. The differences in pay between men and women remained constant between 2007 and 2009 and tended to widen for the highest paid workers, reaching 20% for those with 5 years or more of higher education.

Hardly surprisingly, many young women are extremely unhappy about these poor conditions. Their resentment is reflected in their assessments of their situation and is particularly acute among those with no or only secondary-level qualifications. They are significantly less likely to declare themselves satisfied with their situations and a higher share of them would like to leave their jobs. Their main priority is to find or hold on to a stable job, whereas their male counterparts are more likely to state they are seeking to improve their situation. In order to advance in their careers, women are more likely to declare themselves willing to change employer or occupation, to undertake further training or to take a competitive examination

than young men, most of whom consider themselves able to progress within the firm in which they are already working.

The differences are less pronounced among university graduates. Compared with the other young women, those in this category are less likely to be seeking alternative employment but declare themselves willing, nevertheless, to change employer in order to be able to advance their careers. They are also more likely than other women, and their male counterparts, to declare that their priority is to protect their lives outside work.

Have the conditions at labour market entry deteriorated?

Even before the crisis took hold, the conditions at labour market entry were less favourable for the 2004 cohort than for those young people who entered the labour market in 1998. It was young men who experienced the greatest difficulties, particularly the least well qualified, who entered the labour market on similar terms to women. This development reflected a medium or long-term trend in the labour market, with conditions in traditionally male-dominated, low-skill sectors becoming increasingly less favourable. This trend has been further aggravated by the crisis. Nevertheless, once in employment, young men continue to enjoy higher pay and more stable forms of employment and to declare themselves generally more satisfied with their jobs than young women, even those with the same level of qualifications and working times.

During the last crisis, therefore, the effects of occupational and sectoral segregation meant there were more jobs available for young women than for their male counterparts. However, these effects are still making themselves felt in the poorer quality of the jobs women found in relatively unregulated occupations and sectors in which education and training are little recognised. If equality between the sexes is to be achieved, then employment rates and job quality have to advance at the same pace. ■

The generations succeed each other...

Since the beginning of the 1990s, Céreq has been examining in great detail the conditions under which cohorts of young people who left the education system in the same year enter the labour market. The observation period is at least three years and may be as long as five or even ten years. The results presented here are taken from the analysis of the *Génération 98 and 2004* surveys, carried out at intervals of five years. A total of 22,000 young people were questioned in the first survey and 19,000 in the second. Thus the object of analysis was the early stages of young people's working lives between 1998 and 2003 and between 2004 and 2009.

Further reading

- « Allongement séculaire des scolarités féminines et évolution récente de la ségrégation dans les professions : quelles relations ? », T. Couppié et D. Epiphane, *Économies et Sociétés*, Série « Socioéconomie du travail », AB, n°30, 2009.
- Chômage et emploi des femmes dans la crise en France, F. Milewski, *Lettre de l'OFCE*, n°318, mai 2010.
- Les métiers en 2009. Seuls quelques métiers résistent à la dégradation du marché du travail, S. Bessièrre et alii., *Dares Analyses*, n°69, octobre 2010.
- *Des bancs de l'école aux postes de travail... Chronique d'une ségrégation annoncée*, T. Couppié et D. Epiphane, Céreq, Nef, n°6, 2004.

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