

And women became better qualified than men...



Thomas COUPPIÉ

(Céreq)

Dominique ÉPIPHANE

(Céreq)

Over the last two decades across Europe, young women's position in the labour market has improved. Better qualified and with participation rates on the increase, they have also begun to narrow the pay gap and to gain access to occupations and sectors that used to be largely male preserves. In France, however, this convergence between men and women has been driven in part by a deterioration in men's situation. And despite everything, inequalities persist, particularly in access to cadre status, i.e. to managerial, executive and professional positions.



GENDER BASED
DIVISION OF LABOUR

WOMEN'S
EMPLOYMENT

WAGE INEQUALITY

GÉNÉRATION 2010
SURVEY

GÉNÉRATION 92
SURVEY

For 20 years, the *Génération* surveys have questioned, at regular intervals, a broad sample of young people who left the initial education and training system in the same year. Thanks to these surveys, Céreq is today in a position to give an account of the enduring features of and principal changes that have taken place in young people's access to the labour market after two decades that have seen both the entrenchment of mass unemployment and ever increasing numbers of young people going into higher education. While inequalities between men and women at work are a long-standing and recurrent phenomenon, the increasing convergence between men's and women's labour market outcomes in the early years of their working lives can be regarded as one of the major changes in this period.

This convergence is based on two major trends that can be observed in men's and women's socio-economic behaviours. Firstly, the intensification of women's labour market participation, which got underway in the mid-1960s, has continued unabated. Thus in 2015, women accounted for 48% of the employed labour force. Secondly, upstream of the labour market and against the background of a general expansion of young people's education and training, girls first caught up with and then overtook boys in terms of educational attainment, to the point where they are now on the whole more highly qualified.

Young women increasingly highly qualified

Educational levels among young people as a whole have risen: the share of each cohort obtaining the *baccalauréat* rose from 48% in 1991 to 78% in 2015 [1]. For more than forty years, girls have represented a majority of the young people leaving secondary education with the *baccalauréat*; today, they account for 56% of those obtaining the general *baccalauréat* [2], the pathway that best prepares young people for the longer and more demanding higher education courses. And fewer and fewer girls are leaving education with just lower secondary qualifications: in 1990-92, the share was 25%, compared with just 10% in 2014-16. Over the same period, the share of men leaving with just lower secondary qualifications fell from 28% to 15% [1].

Young women have also increased their presence in higher education, particular at the highest levels (master's degree and PhD). Since the 1990s, the range of higher education courses on offer has widened significantly, and the establishment of the LMD* degree structure has further expanded the choice of qualifications with the introduction of vocational bachelor's degrees. This expansion has been accompanied by a general increase in the levels of exit from the education system, which is even greater among young women. Over the period between 2014 and 2016, of the young people completing their initial education, 40% of men and



49% of women were higher education graduates, compared with 32% and 33% respectively over the period between 1990 and 1992 [1].

*** Educational segregation** measures the extent of the disparities between the trajectories of girls and boys within the different pathways in the educational system. It is maximal (complete segregation) if boys and girls follow completely separate paths through the system and minimal (50/50 gender balance) if there is an even distribution of boys and girls in each.

*** LMD:** licence, master, doctorat/bachelor's, master's, doctorate.

*** CAP:** certificat d'aptitude professionnelle – an upper secondary-level vocational qualification.

*** BEP:** brevet d'études professionnelles – an upper secondary-level vocational qualification.

Educational segregation weakened

Things have also changed in terms of educational pathways, with course choices becoming less gendered. Some male and female bastions remain in place, however. Upper secondary-level vocational courses in industrial Fields of study, university science courses and the elite engineering schools are still overwhelmingly male preserves, while young women still account for the majority of students in CAP-BEP* programmes in service-sector Fields of study, paramedical and social work courses and in literary courses at both secondary and tertiary level. However, this segregation is tending to weaken under the influence of two mechanisms. Firstly, on most courses, there is a tendency towards an equal ratio of male and female students. Secondly, the courses on which numbers have increased most are the ones that are least segregated (university courses in healthcare and economics and business and social administration and business schools). Conversely, those courses that are more than averagely segregated (CAP-BEP* in industrial fields of study, *baccalauréat* programmes in literary subjects, university science courses) have lost students [3].

Is the rise in young women's levels of educational qualification, combined with the weakening of educational segregation, being reflected – as one might suppose – in a reduction or even a reversal of the inequalities at work that have historically been observed in the labour market?

Towards convergence in access to employment

Young men and women have not been affected in the same ways by the changes in the labour market resulting from successive crises. From one *Génération* survey to the next, the conditions under which they access the labour market have tended to converge. Five years after leaving the education and training system, equal shares of men and

women were in employment in 2015, whereas in 1997 women lagged behind by 13 percentage points (cf. Figure 1).

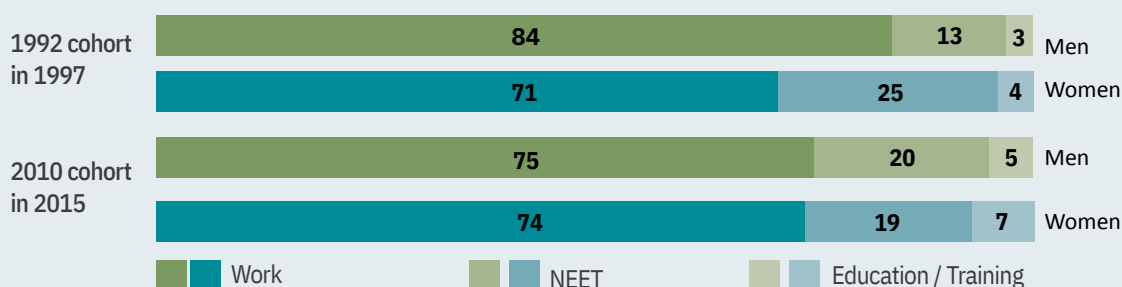
This convergence is a direct consequence of the increasing difficulties young men have experienced in finding jobs from cohort to cohort, while the position of young women has improved. This clearly reflects the impact of the decline in industrial employment, which was largely male-dominated and was particularly badly affected by the 2008 crisis. Thus among the young people in work five years after leaving education, the share of those employed in the industrial sector fell by 31% between the two cohorts. Conversely, the 10% increase in the share of services in young people's employment has particularly benefited the young women in the 2010 cohort.

Moreover, the conditions under which young people enter the labour market have deteriorated for everyone over 20 years. Among the young people in work five years after leaving education, the share of those in permanent jobs (civil servants and those on permanent contracts or the self-employed) fell by 9 percentage points for women and by 7 points for men (cf. Table 2). Unsurprisingly, those with lower secondary qualifications only have been more adversely affected by the increasing precariousness of employment, which does not spare those with secondary-level qualifications. The differences observed between men and women have widened particularly at the bac+2/3 level (cf. Table 3, fixed-term employment rate).

Reduction of pay inequality

With regard to pay levels five years after leaving initial education, two major phenomena emerge. On the one hand, the persistence of one long-standing and recurrent phenomenon, also observed in today's labour market, is confirmed: young women earn, on average, less than young men, whether it be in 1997 (-320 constant euros) or in 2015 (-190 constant euros). On the other hand, in the most recent cohort, the level of women's pay has grown closer to that of men, with the differential amounting to -11% in 2015 compared with -20%

1 Situation of each cohort five years after leaving the initial education and training system (%)



Example: in 1997, 84% of the men in the 1992 cohort were in work. *NEET: young people not in employment, education or training. Source: Céreq, *Génération 1992* and *Génération 2010* surveys, individuals surveyed 5 years after leaving the education system.

in 1997. This convergence is the result of pay rises which, from one cohort to the next, have been much greater for women than for men. For the entire population of young people in employment five years after leaving initial education, the purchasing power of the average salary has risen by 20% for women and by just 8% for men.

This rebalancing of pay levels in favour of young women can be explained by various factors. Firstly, the increase in their levels of education has enabled them to access more highly-paid jobs at the start of their careers. It has also afforded them a degree of protection from the increased selectivity in the labour market in the most recent period. After all, the groups that have been most severely penalised in terms of access to jobs in the economic crisis have been young people with the shortest educational careers and/or those with qualifications in industrial fields of study, which has led to a significant reduction in the employment rate of the least well qualified five years into their working lives. This resulted in an increase in the share of the most highly qualified in the young people actually in work in 2015, which led in turn to an overall increase in pay levels. Thus increases in levels of qualification and in the share of the most highly qualified among the young people in work explain 100 of the 130 euros increase (75%) in men's purchasing power and 120 of the 260 euros increase (47%) in women's purchasing power. Finally, the decline in part-time work, which affects women more than men, has also helped to narrow the gender pay gap.

However, the average pay gaps at each level of qualification, despite the downward trend, are still significant (from -11% to -16%). They are still almost always greater than the average gap for each cohort as a whole (- 11 %). This paradox is only an outward discrepancy, when one considers that

the average pay gap in the population as a whole takes into account the fact that young women are overall more highly qualified than men, and were even more so in 2010 than in 1992. Thus women's greater educational success helps to conceal a part of the pay inequalities that persist at all levels of qualification.

The convergence of occupational trajectories

For several decades now, the jobs held by young people have become gradually feminised, a process driven by the dual trend towards the development of the service sector, on the one hand, and the increase in the skill levels of jobs in France, on the other [4]. As with the decline in educational segregation, this dual trend has gone hand in hand with a decline in occupational segregation between the 1992 and 2010 cohorts. Thus after five years in the labour market, the share of highly feminised or extremely male-dominated jobs (i.e. those in which the share of men or women holding them is greater than 75%) declined very significantly between 1997 and 2015, by 4 percentage points in both cases, in favour of occupations with a more mixed composition (between 25% and 75% of jobs held by women), whose share increased by 8 percentage points.

This development can be explained by two concomitant phenomena. On the one hand, the share of jobs in the service sector – traditionally mixed or held mainly by women – has increased considerably, while the share of jobs in industry and agriculture, often held mainly by men, has fallen. Thus the share of occupations with a relatively mixed composition (sales executives and professionals, senior administrative staff, shelf stackers and waiters, for example) in the jobs held by labour market entrants has increased.

* **The Generation survey** studies young people's transitions from school to work.

* **Cadre:** managers and executives.

* **Baccalauréat:** The French baccalauréat is the highest upper secondary qualification, possession of which gives access to higher education.

2 Employment conditions five years after leaving the initial education and training system (%)

		1992 cohort in 1997			2010 cohort in 2015		
		M	W	Difference	M	W	Difference
Employment status	Permanent	79	75	-4	72	66	-6
	Fixed-term + temp agency	18	19	1	21	26	5
	Subsidised jobs	3	6	3	7	8	1
	Total	100	100	0	100	100	0
Working time	Part-time	9	31	21	9	20	12
Company's sector of activity	Manufacturing	30	16	-14	22	10	-12
	Construction and public works	10	1	-9	10	2	-9
	Market services	44	49	5	52	51	-1
	Non-market services	16	34	18	16	37	21
	Total	100	100	0	100	100	0
Remuneration (wage employment)	Average net wages (constant euros)	1 580	1 260	-320	1 710	1 520	-190
				-20 %			-11 %

Source: Céreq, Génération 1992 and Génération 2010 surveys, individuals surveyed 5 years after leaving the education system.

3 Differences in employment situation and conditions between men and women by level of qualification, observed in 1997 and 2015, five years after leaving the initial education and training system (%)

	Fixed-term employment		Rate		Part-time		Wages	
	Difference 1992 cohort (W - M)	Difference 2010 cohort (W - M)	Difference 1992 cohort (W - M)	Difference 2010 cohort (W - M)	Difference 1992 cohort (W - M)	Difference 2010 cohort (W - M)	Difference 1992 cohort (W - M)	Difference 2010 cohort (W - M)
Lower-secondary certificate only	-17	-4	4	3	29	21	-24	-11
Upper-secondary qualifications	-15	-5	7	10	29	16	-23	-15
Bac +2/3	-9	-5	4	9	11	9	-15	-12
Bac +4 to +8	-8	-2	5	8	8	7	-19	-16
Total	-13	-1	4	6	21	12	-20	-11

Scope: entire cohort for employment rate, individuals in work on the survey date for the other indicators.

Example: for those in the 1992 cohort with lower secondary qualifications only, the difference between the male and female employment rates was 17 percentage points.

For the 2010 cohort of leavers, the gap in 2015 was only 4 percentage points.

Source: Céreq, Génération 1992 and Génération 2010 surveys, individuals surveyed 5 years after leaving the education system.

➔ Further reading

[1] *L'état de l'école*, Paris, Direction de l'évaluation, de la prospective et de la performance (DEPP), ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche, 2016 and 2018 issues.

[2] *Filles et garçons sur le chemin de l'égalité, de l'école à l'enseignement supérieur*, DEPP, ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Recherche, 2018.

[3] « La relation genre-insertion a-t-elle évolué en 20 ans ? », T. Couppié, D. Épiphanie in *20 ans d'insertion professionnelle des jeunes : entre permanences et évolutions*, T. Couppié, A. Dupray, D. Épiphanie, V. Mora (coord.), Céreq Essentiels n°1, 2018.

[4] « Comment ont évolué les métiers en France depuis 30 ans ? Forte progression des métiers du tertiaire et des métiers les plus qualifiés », C. Babet, Dares analyses, 3, 2017.

Conversely, certain highly segregated occupations are in decline in labour market segments open to young people; these include a number of manual occupations (skilled or unskilled) in which young men are very much in the majority and certain highly feminised occupations (check-out operators and secretaries). On the other hand, there is an observable trend towards convergence in access to certain occupations: some historically male bastions are opening up to women (security jobs, IT managers and professionals), while other, historically feminised occupations are opening up to men (supermarket checkouts etc.).

Gendered divisions are also emerging in the socio-occupational hierarchy of jobs held. Thus in 2015, 6 young women out of every 10 who left secondary-level programmes in 2010 – the “heiresses” of a system characterised by a high degree of educational segregation – held jobs in the “clerical support, services or sales workers” category, compared with less than a quarter of the young men with the same levels of education. At the same time, more than half of the young men were employed in jobs in the “manual worker” category, compared with less than one fifth of the young women. Among the most highly qualified, it is at the bac+2 and bac+3 levels that women have made the most progress. Only 50% of them had obtained jobs with cadre status or in the “*professions intermédiaires*” (more or less the Technicians and Associate Professionals category) in 1997, with a gap of 15 percentage points between them and men; by 2015, they had almost closed the gap, with 60% of them in such jobs, compared with 63% of their male counterparts.

Finally, access to cadre status has also changed significantly. The share of young women holding

jobs with cadre status five years after entering the labour market is now equal to that of men. Nevertheless, given their level of education, young female graduates should in fact have cadre status more frequently than they actually do. Thus a higher share of young women with qualifications requiring 4 or more years' higher education obtain cadre status than in the past (63% in 2015, compared with 56% in 1997), but their share is still lower than that of men with the same levels of qualification (73% in 2015).

Thus the past 20 years have seen a gradual convergence of men's and women's educational and occupational trajectories, leading to a perceptible reduction in the inequalities observed in the past. As far as education is concerned, women now surpass men at the highest levels of education, with the exception of the elite engineering schools, which remain a male preserve, and, to a lesser extent, at PhD level. Furthermore, a real trend towards a more equal gender balance in the choice of educational pathway is emerging, even though male and female bastions remain. Similarly, at the start of their working lives, men and women face increasingly similar conditions in terms of access to jobs and conditions of employment as well as less segregation in their choice of occupation.

It remains the case that, in part at least, this relative convergence is taking place “from the bottom up”, in that it owes as much, if not more, to a deterioration in the young men's labour market situation than to an improvement in that of young women. It should also be noted that the differences between men and women have narrowed but have not disappeared; from this point of view, the progress achieved in the labour market still falls short of the changes observed in education. —●

Subscribe to our newsletter



SINCE 1971
Get to know the training - employment - work links better.
A scientific collective at the service of public action.

+ info and all studies
on www.cereq.fr



National public institution under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Employment.

T&E N°140 | 2019 | Newsletter on employment and training research from Céreq

Publications manager:
Florence Lefresne
Translation:
Andrew Wilson

Reproduction permitted provided that the source is cited / Published free of charge
Registration of copyright 1st trimester 2019 / ISSN 2119-0496
Centre d'études et de recherches sur les qualifications
10, place de la Joliette CS 21321 • 13567 Marseille Cedex 02 / T. +33 (0)4 91 13 28 28
All of our publications are available on our web site at www.cereq.fr