

Abstract

In 2023, nearly 2/3 of civil servants in France are **women**, yet the highest-paid and senior management positions continue to be dominated by men.

Although the *grands corps* (ie elite civil service corps in France, responsible for high-level administrative and technical management) have seen increasing feminization since the late 1970s, gender parity at recruitment remains far from achieved. Male departures tend to occur earlier and more frequently, mostly towards the private sector. Since the late 2000s, the share of women among students has fluctuated between:

- 32–41% in administrative corps
- 25–36% in technical corps

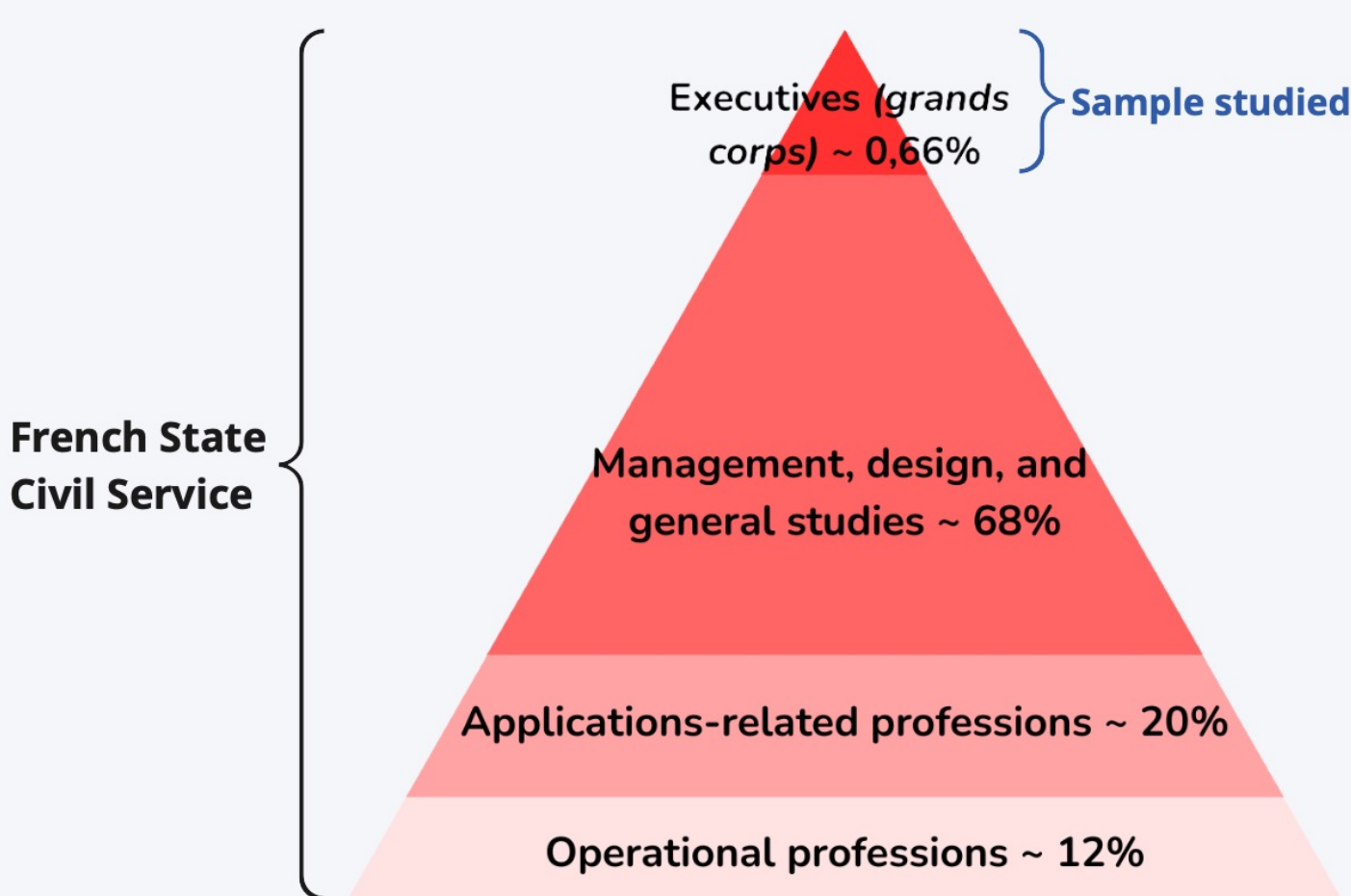
Gender pay gaps appear from the very start of civil servants' careers and grow over time. After 30 years of full-time employment in the *grands corps* (full-time equivalent, constant 2022 euros):

- Women in major administrative corps face a cumulative shortfall of **276 600€**.
- Women in technical grands corps face a cumulative shortfall of **162 900€**.

Understanding the French State civil service

- **Corps and grades:** officials are grouped by function and recruitment level.
- **Senior civil service corps (among them *grands corps de l'État*):** top managerial positions; including administrative (ENA) and technical (Polytechnique) tracks.
- **Remuneration is primarily determined by corps and grade, with progression based on seniority.** While laws aim to prevent gender discrimination, **pay gaps persist**.

Administratif corps Council of State, Court of Accounts, Inspection of Finances, ...	Technical corps Engineering, infrastructure, defense, statistics
--	--



Women in the Civil Service: Key Findings

- Average gender pay gap in the French State civil service: **13.1% in 2022** (14.8% in 2012).
- Gap partly explained by **occupational segregation** (women more often in lower-paid corps) and **part-time work**.
- Even after controlling for worker/employer characteristics, a 3% residual gap persists [Goussen and Godet, 2019].

A broad rise in women's representation in the civil service, though largely constrained when it comes to the highest-paid positions.

- **Limited feminization of top positions:** Women now make up 62% of all civil servants in 2020 (up from 53% in 1980), but remain underrepresented in the highest-paid roles.
- **Grands corps recruitment still male-dominated:** In administrative grands corps, women rose from 21% in the 1980s to 40% in 2009; in technical grands corps, women represented only 13% in 1980–1983 and first exceeded 30% in 2001. Since 2006, female representation has stagnated between 32–41% in administrative and 25–36% in technical corps.

While women are less likely than men to leave the senior civil service and tend to do so later in their careers, men exhibit greater wage dispersion, reflecting more heterogeneous career trajectories.

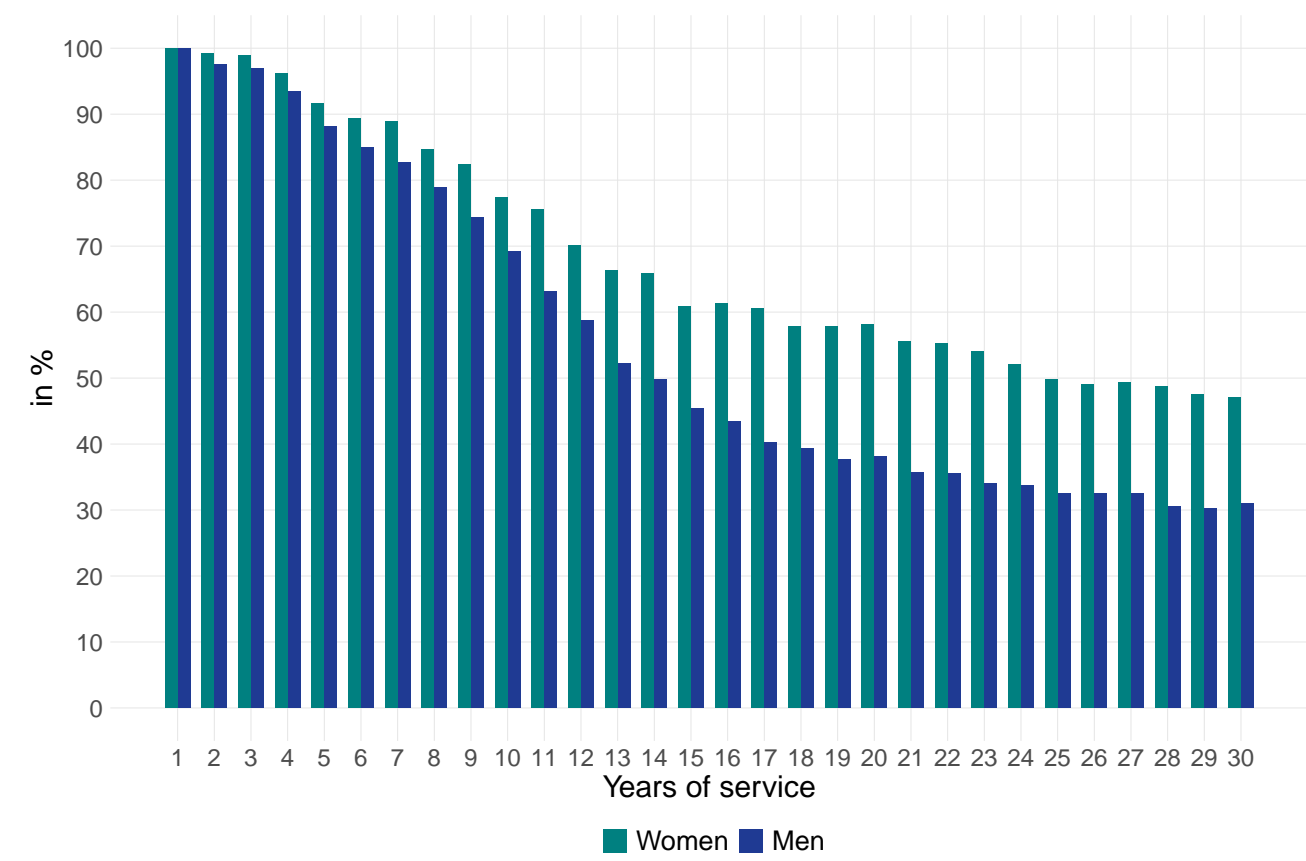


Figure 1. Proportion of civil servants still employed in the civil service among those who joined technical corps in the 1980s

Men exit the *grands corps* of the State more frequently and earlier than women, especially in the technical corps, where only 31% of men from the 1980s cohort remained after thirty years, compared to 47% of women. Such departures, often linked to private sector careers (*pantouflage*), reflect not only individual choices but also gendered recruitment biases in sectors such as banking and industry [Kolopp, 2021].

They also contribute to an **artificial rise in the share of women** within the *grands corps* of the State.

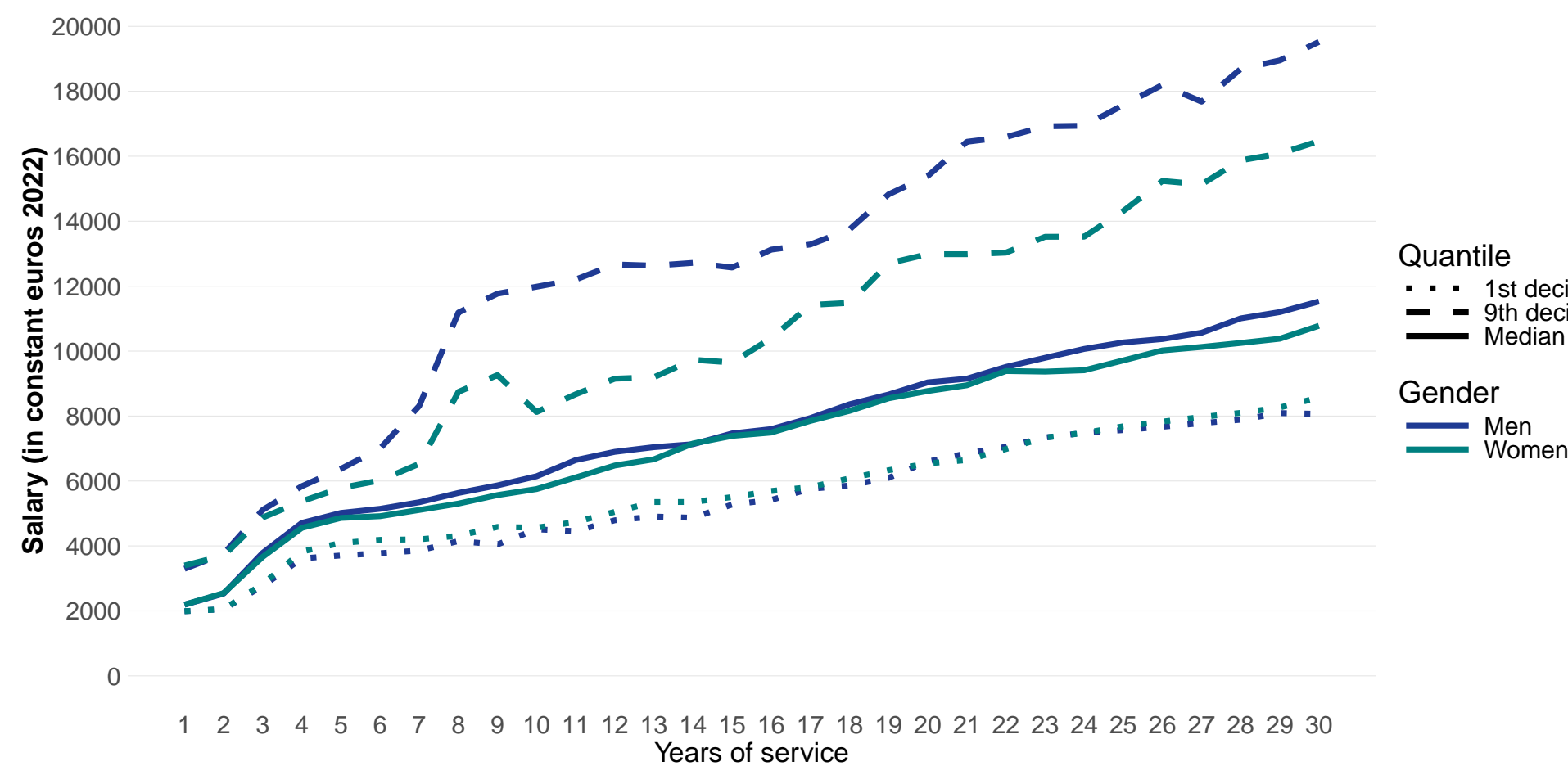


Figure 2. Salary distributions of administrative corps

Gender pay inequalities in the *grands corps* of the State are concentrated at the top of the salary distribution (Figure 2). Median gaps remain below 11%, while the 9th decile is consistently higher among men, especially in administrative corps with limited access to functional appointments for women [Marry et al., 2017].

This also reflects the difficulties women face in reaching the highest-paying positions, even within the senior civil service.

Gender pay disparities emerge at the very beginning of a career and progressively accumulate, ultimately resulting in persistent and significant inequalities within the grands corps of the State.

For cohorts entering between 1980 and 1989, gender pay gaps appear within the first years of career and widen quickly (Figure 3).

- In administrative corps, they peak at 14% after ten years and then narrow slightly as men exit more often.
- In technical corps, inequalities grow for twenty years but shrink in the last decade, shaped by institutional career stages and parental penalties [Pora and Wilner, 2025].

Over thirty years, these gaps amount to cumulative shortfalls of about **276 600€** in administrative corps and **162 900€** in technical corps, reflecting unequal promotion rates, access to bonuses, and structural barriers [Marry et al., 2017].

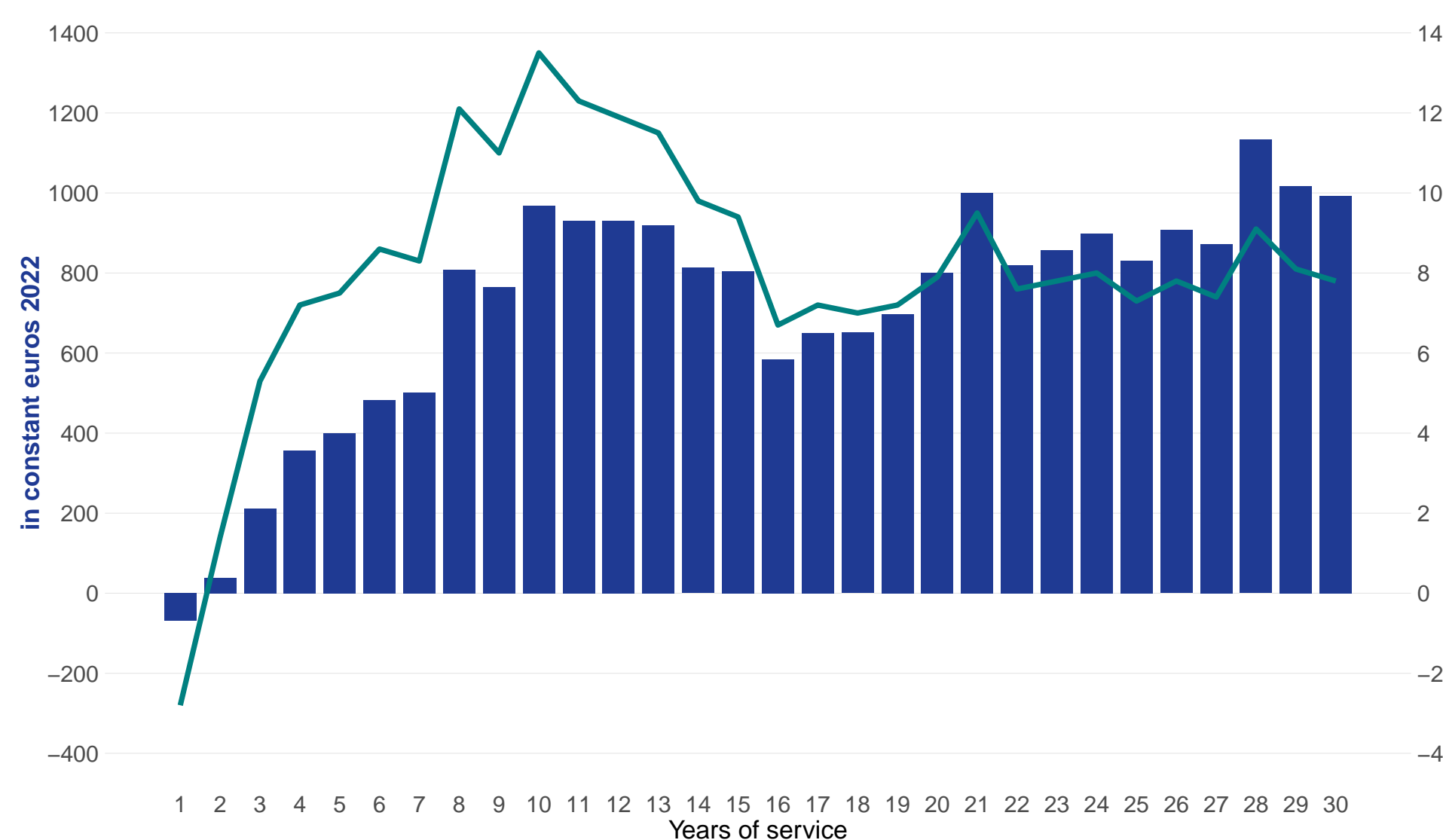


Figure 3. Salary distributions of administrative corps

Methodology – Longitudinal Study of Senior Civil Service Careers

Sample selection

Civil servants from senior civil service corps entering 1980–1989 (excluding 1981 and 1987). Identified via *élève fonctionnaire* status for precise long-term tracking.

Career tracking

Follow-up of 30 years after entry (equal observation period for all the sample). Employment counted if at least one day of work per year. This allows tracking individuals over a 30-year career, ending in 2010 or 2019 depending on their cohort entry (1980–1989).

Salary measurement

Net full-time equivalent salaries in constant 2022 euros. Cumulative pay gaps computed for agents with ≥ 25 years of civil service.

Individual-Level Administrative Databases

The FGE (1978–2009) and the SIASP (2010–2021) are rich administrative databases allowing individual-level, longitudinal tracking of public servants' employment and pay. Access to these databases is restricted, generally requiring affiliation with INSEE.

Further Research

- Link this dataset with private sector data to study *pantouflage* more comprehensively.
- Integrate social data, particularly on maternity, to analyze its impact on career trajectories.
- Examine differences across ministries and specific administrative corps in greater detail.
- Use more recent cohorts to assess trends and the evolution of career paths and inequalities.

References

- J. Goussen and F. Godet. Les salaires dans la fonction publique de l'État. *Insee Première*, 2019.
- Sarah Kolopp. Pantoufler, une affaire d'hommes ? *Sociétés contemporaines*, 2021.
- C. Marry, L. Bereni, A. Jacquemart, S. Pochic, and A. Revillard. *Le plafond de verre et l'État – La construction des inégalités de genre dans la fonction publique*. Individu et Société, 2017.
- P. Pora and L. Wilner. Dissecting child penalties. *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 2025.

Read more

