

Gender-Based Wage Inequalities Persist Throughout Careers of French Senior Civil Servants [†]

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In 2023, within the French civil service, nearly two-thirds of civil servants are women; however, senior management positions—those with the highest remuneration—continue to be predominantly held by men. This underrepresentation of women in the most highly paid positions reflects differentiated professional and salary trajectories based on gender. By following the careers of civil servants who entered one of the prestigious State grands corps through competitive schools in the 1980s, this study highlights the persistence of gender inequalities throughout professional careers, both in terms of unequal access to the most highly paid positions and in salary disparities.

Although the grands corps of the French State have undergone significant feminisation since the late 1970s, gender parity at recruitment remains far from being achieved: the proportion of women among students in the major civil corps has stagnated since the late 2000s, fluctuating between 32% and 41% in administrative corps and between 25% and 36% in technical corps. Male departures from the grands corps are also more frequent and occur earlier, mostly towards the private sector.

Despite measures aimed at promoting pay equality, gender pay gaps within the grands corps of the State emerge from the very start of a career, accumulate and widen over time. After thirty uninterrupted years of full-time employment, these inequalities amount to a cumulative shortfall of 276 600€ (in constant 2022 euros) for women who began their careers in the major administrative corps in the 1980s. For those who started in the technical grands corps, the cumulative gap stands at 162 900€. These gender pay inequalities are more pronounced among the highest-paid civil servants, with wage dispersion being greater among men than among women.

[†]This study was conducted within the DERA division of the DSDS department at INSEE's General Management between June and July 2024, under the supervision of Benjamin Gilbert (INSEE Administrator, INSEE). The research was carried out as part of an internship at the end of my bachelor at ENSAE. This is an unofficial translation of the publication included in the INSEE Références *Employment, Unemployment, and Labor Income, 2025 Edition*, contributing to the broader analysis of labor market dynamics and income disparities in France, available following [this link](#)

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Since 1983, the general statute of civil servants has legally prohibited any gender-based discrimination within the civil service. Despite this legal principle, equality between women and men remains far from achieved today, both in terms of access to senior positions and remuneration for equivalent roles.

In light of this observation and an increasing awareness of gender inequality issues in professional environments, coercive policies aimed at correcting inequalities have been implemented since the 2010s. The introduction of quotas through the "Copé-Zimmermann" law of January 27, 2011, and the "Sauvadet" law of March 12, 2012, seeks to promote women's access to senior positions in both the private and public sectors. Specific measures and controls favoring professional equality between women and men within the civil service have been established, such as the professional equality index defined by the law of September 5, 2018, relating to the freedom to choose one's professional future. Transparency obligations regarding recruitment and remuneration by employers will soon be implemented, similar to those foreseen by European Directive 2023/970 of May 10, 2023, aimed at reinforcing the application of the principle of equal pay for women and men for the same work or work of equal value.

This study is conducted using a comprehensive panel of civil servants from the State civil service (see Table 1). It complements existing work and statistics on the subject to illustrate the persistence of gender-related wage inequalities within the civil service. The long-term study of career trajectories highlights that the feminization of access to the major State corps remains partial, and that within these corps, careers remain gendered, with equal pay rarely achieved.

Table 1: Distribution of the State Civil Service Workforce in 2023

Status and Hierarchical Category	Workforce (thousands)
Entire State Civil Service	2,573.9
Civil Servants	2,260.5
Permanent Staff	1,504.5
Category A	1,029.6
Teachers	763.4
Non-teachers	266.1
Major State Civil Corps (administrative and technical)	≈10.0
Other Corps	≈256.0
Category B	285.4
Category C	185.6
Unknown Category	4.0
Non-permanent Staff	756.1
Military Staff	313.4

Note: In this publication, the major administrative civil corps of the State correspond to all exit corps from the National School of Administration (ENA), or since 2021, from the National Institute of Public Service (INSP).

Reading: In 2023, the State civil service counted 2,573.9 thousand agents.

Scope: Metropolitan France excluding Mayotte, civil servants of the State civil service (FPE).

Source: Insee, Information System on Public Service Agents 2023.

Since 1980, the State Civil Service has become more feminized, but only marginally for the highest-paying positions

The French State civil service has become significantly more feminized over the past forty years: women accounted for 53% of the staff in civil ministries in 1980, then 57% in 2000, and 62% in 2020 (Table 2).

This feminization affects all employment statuses, although the increase in the proportion of women among permanent staff has been less pronounced than among non-permanent staff (+7 percentage points between 1980 and 2020, compared to +13 points). Over this period, the rise in the share of women is particularly notable among permanent staff in Category A, even though various reclassifications of civil service corps have affected these trends. For example, the more than 25-point drop in the share of women in Category B between 1990 and 2010 is mainly linked to the gradual replacement of the

corps of instituteurs (primary school teachers) by that of professeurs des écoles, introduced by the 1989 “Jospin” framework law on education.

Table 2: Share of women among agents of the State civil ministries by status and hierarchical category

Status and hierarchical category	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Tenured	53	55	57	58	60
Category A, including:	44	47	57	64	68
Excluding teachers	26	34	43	46	55
Category B	65	67	67	39	38
Categories C and D	49	52	51	63	61
Non-tenured	55	57	58	63	68
Total	53	55	57	59	62

Note: In 2020, women represented 68% of tenured agents in Category A of the State civil ministries.

Scope: France excluding Mayotte; civil agents of the State civil service (FPE).

Source: Insee, General State Files 1978-2009; Information system on public service agents 2010-2020.

Conversely, the share of women in Category A increased by 17 points over the same period. Excluding teaching staff, the proportion of women among permanent Category A civil servants rose significantly, from 26% in 1980 to 55% in 2020.

However, this dynamic of feminization—partly driven by the teaching corps—is not fully reflected at the highest levels of the State civil service, particularly in the best-paid positions: non-teaching Category A staff and functional positions (many of which correspond to senior management posts filled by appointment). Although the proportion of women in these positions is increasing, it remains below the overall level of feminization of the State civil service. Thus, in comparison with the feminization rate of all civil ministry staff, women remain under-represented among non-teaching Category A staff, where they accounted for 55% of employees in 2020 (versus 68% for all Category A staff, including teachers). They are even more under-represented among staff in functional positions, where they made up only 41% in 2024 [Massis, 2025].

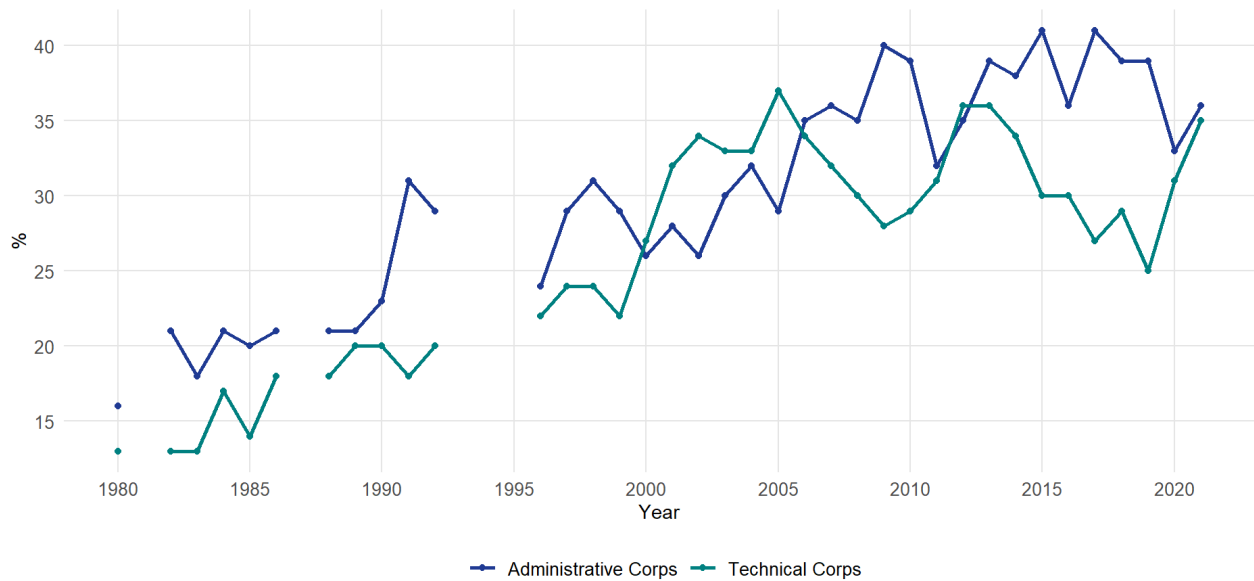
This proportion exceeds the annual threshold of 40% for new appointments set by the “Rixain” law of 24 November 2021, but still falls short of parity, which will be required for new appointments as of 1 January 2026, in accordance with the law of 19 July 2023 aimed at strengthening women’s access to positions of responsibility in the civil service.

At recruitment, the senior civil service corps remain predominantly male

This limited feminization of senior positions in the State civil service is even more pronounced within the grands corps of the State (bodies assigned to senior management roles), and this disparity is evident from the point of entry into the recruitment corps. Although graduating classes from the École nationale d’administration (ENA) have been coeducational since 1947, the proportion of women among students entering the major administrative grands corps (mostly recruited via ENA) did not exceed 21% during the 1980s. It reached 31% in 1991, and 40% in 2009 (see Figure 1). Among students entering the major technical grands corps (primarily recruited via engineering schools and écoles normales supérieures), women represented only 13% of the intake from 1980 to 1983, due to the late introduction of coeducation in the top engineering schools: the first women entered the École des ponts et chaussées in 1962, the École des mines in 1970, and the École polytechnique in 1972. Thus, with the exception of the Insee administrators’ corps, which admitted a woman as early as 1946, the first female graduates from the major grands corps did not emerge until the late 1970s: in 1977 for the Ponts et Chaussées corps, and in 1978 for the Mines corps. The proportion of women among students entering the major technical grands corps only exceeded 30% for the first time in 2001.

Since 2006, the share of women among students entering the State’s grands corps has not significantly increased. It has fluctuated between 32% and 41% for the administrative corps, and between 25% and 36% for the technical corps. Although there are multiple pathways into senior positions

Figure 1: Proportion of Women Among Students in the Major Civil Service Corps



Note: In 2021, women represent 36% of students in the administrative corps of the senior civil service.
Scope: France excluding Mayotte, civilian students of the senior civil service corps.
Source: Insee, General State Files (FGE) 1978-2009, Public Service Agents Information System (SIASP) 2010-2021.

within the State civil service, the under-representation of women at the point of entry into the grands corps mechanically and durably limits their overall representation in the senior ranks of the State administration.

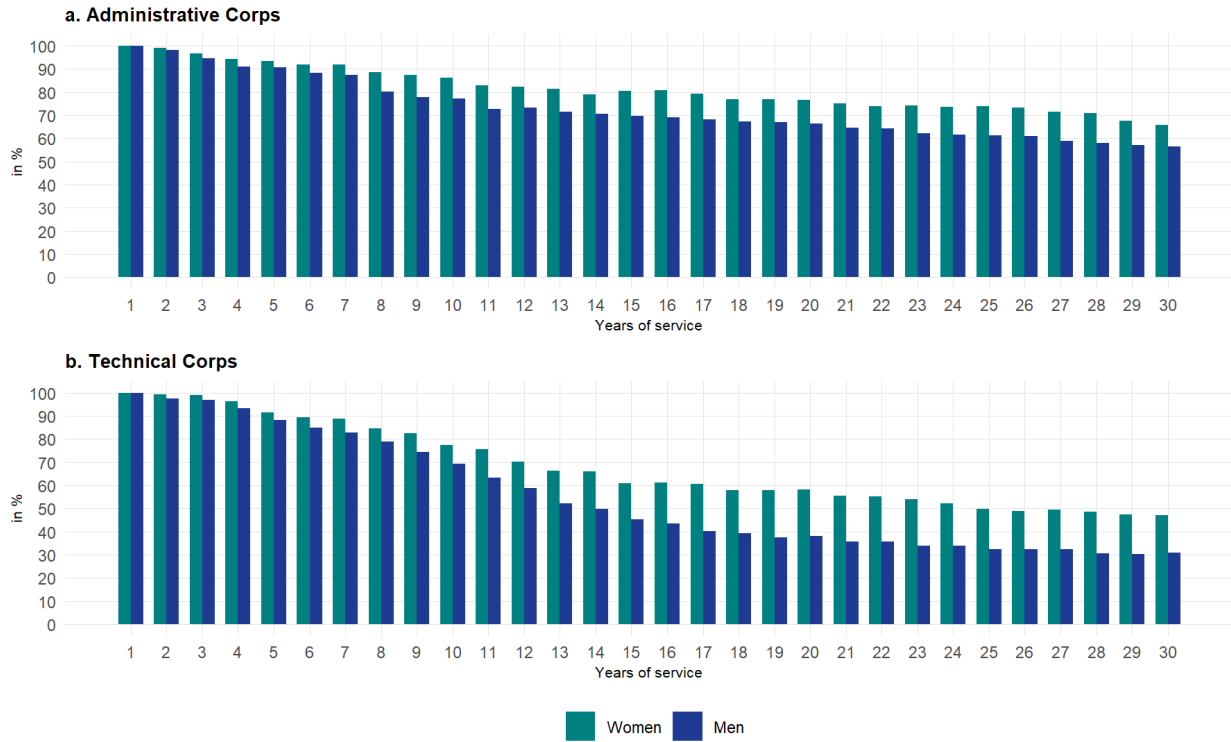
Women leave the senior civil service less frequently and more slowly than their male counterparts

While women have remained a minority among the cohorts entering the State's grands corps since 1980, their share within these cohorts increases progressively over the course of their careers, primarily due to the more frequent departures of men. This mechanism contributes to rising feminization rates across all grands corps of the State.

The technical corps are most affected by exits from the State civil service. Among those who entered these corps in the 1980s, only 34% remained in State civil service positions after thirty years. These exit patterns are notably gendered: only 31% of the men in this cohort remained after thirty years, compared to 47% of the women (see Figure 2). Although less pronounced, a similar difference is observed in the administrative corps: only 57% of men who joined an administrative grand corps in the 1980s remained in the State civil service after thirty years, compared to 66% of their female counterparts.

These departures—more frequent and earlier for men than for women—are mostly due to career changes involving employment in the private sector, a phenomenon often referred to as *pantouflage*. As shown in sociological literature, these differences—beyond individual choices—may reflect a gender bias embedded in the recruitment pipelines for corporate executives, particularly in sectors such as banking and industry (Kolopp, 2021).

Figure 2: Proportion of Civil Servants Still Employed in the State Civil Service Among Those Who Joined a Major Civil Service Corps in the 1980s



Note: After 25 years of service, only 61.2% of men who joined a senior administrative civil corps of the State in the 1980s are still employed in the State civil service.
Scope: France excluding Mayotte, employees who joined a senior civil corps of the State in the 1980s.
Source: Insee, General State Files (FGE) 1978-2009, Public Service Agents Information System (SIASP) 2010-2021.

Gender wage gaps accumulate throughout careers within the senior civil service corps

In the State civil service as a whole, the average net full-time equivalent (FTE) pay gap between women and men stood at 13.1% in 2022 [Ntamakuliro Inema, Volat, 2024]. This gap has been narrowing only very slowly: it was 13.5% in 2017 and 14.8% in 2012 (Michel, 2014). This figure, which is calculated on net FTE salaries, does not take into account the impact of part-time work on earnings, even though women are more likely to work part-time in the State civil service: in 2023, 83% of part-time employees in the State civil service were women (Esbelin et al., 2025).

According to studies on gender pay inequalities, the net FTE pay gap is largely due to the over-representation of women in corps with below-average pay and their under-representation in corps with above-average pay (a “segregation effect”).

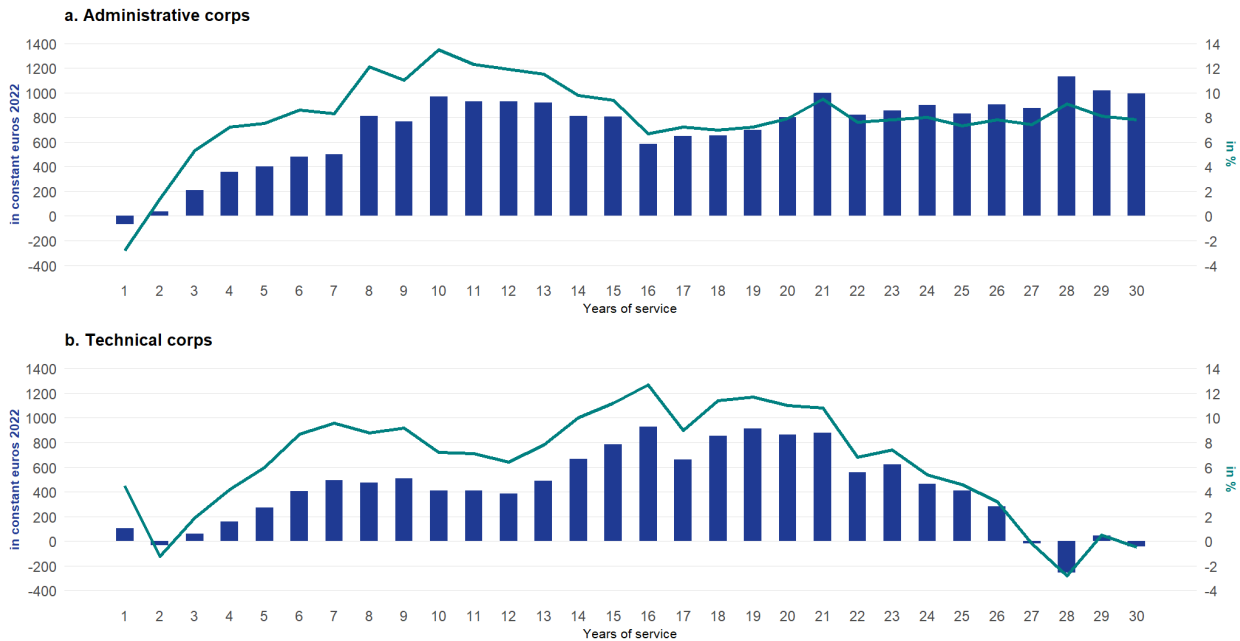
Thus, in 2022, the average net FTE pay gap between women and men falls to just 3.0% when controlling for identical employee and employer characteristics in the State civil service — a figure that has remained stable compared with five years earlier (Goussen & Godet, 2019). These gaps, calculated for identical job characteristics, highlight pay differences between women and men that cannot be explained solely by structural effects. However, they do not capture individual career paths, and in particular the differences in opportunities for career advancement linked to gender.

Measuring long-term pay gaps between women and men for those who joined a major State civil service corps between 1980 and 1989 helps to complement these conventional indicators by examining income inequalities within the State civil service over a thirty-year working life.

Individuals who joined the major State civil service corps at the same time follow different salary trajectories depending on their gender. In both administrative and technical corps, these inequalities tend to emerge during the early years of the career: while they remain small during the first two years,

they increase rapidly over the following five years — see Figure 2

Figure 3: Average Net Monthly Salary Gap Between Women and Men Among Those Who Joined a Major Civil Service Corps in the 1980s



Note: After 20 years of service in the State civil service, the average net monthly full-time equivalent salary of women who joined a major administrative civil service corps in the 1980s was 7.9% lower than that of their male counterparts.

Scope: France excluding Mayotte, employees who joined a senior civil corps of the State in the 1980s.

Source: Insee, General State Files (FGE) 1978-2009, Public Service Agents Information System (SIASP) 2010-2021.

In administrative corps, these inequalities persist over time, with the average pay gap reaching a maximum of 14% after ten years of service before decreasing slightly, partly due to more frequent and earlier exits from the State civil service among men. In constant 2022 euros, these gaps represent substantial amounts from the start of the career (an average net monthly FTE pay gap of €400 after five years of service, i.e., 7.5%). In technical corps, the average pay gap between women and men widens over the first twenty years of service, but narrows again during the final ten years.

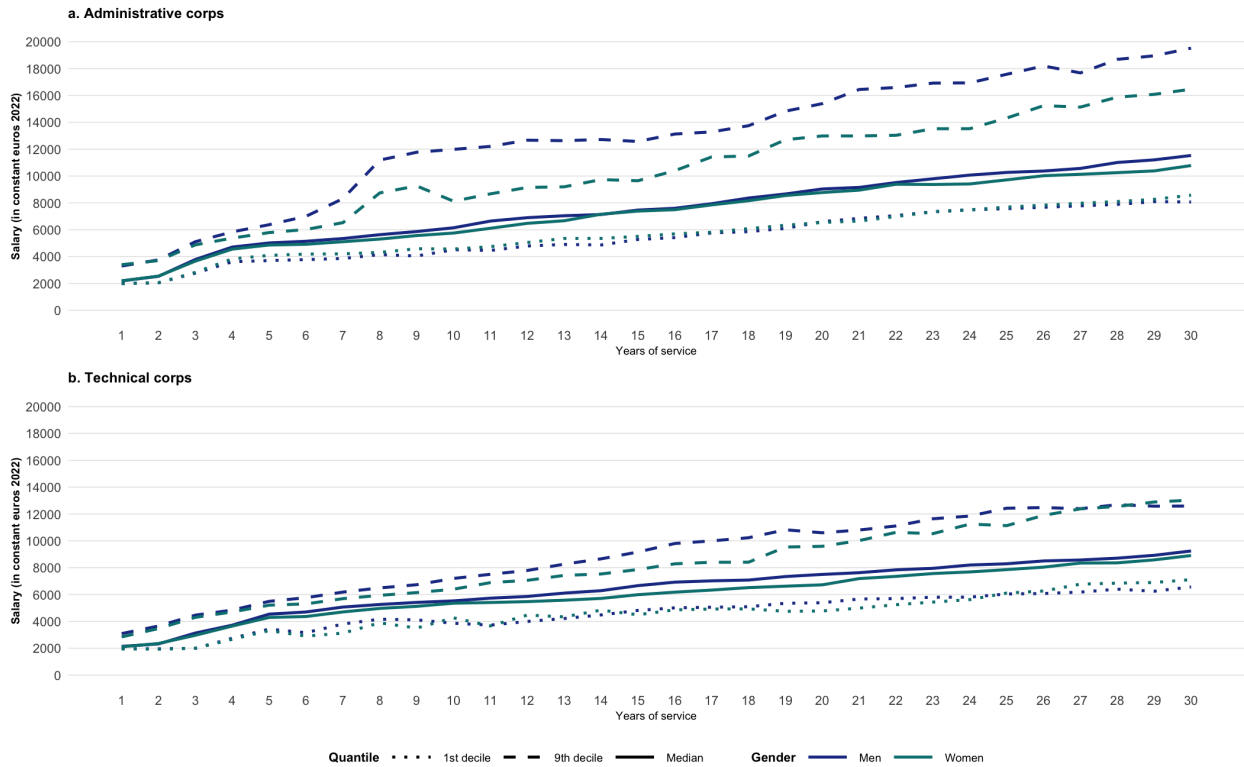
These dynamics reflect, at least in part, how careers unfold within the major State corps and the key stages that shape them: assignments to a corps based on class ranking at graduation from the ENA for administrative corps, leading to a gendered distribution across the major administrative civil service corps from the start of the career; greater opportunities for moving to the private sector at the end of the ten-year mandatory service period (“ten-year commitment”); internal promotions and appointments to senior positions, which are partly discretionary after ten to fifteen years of service; and reaching the upper limit of the corps pay scale after ten to fifteen years, which contributes to a reduction in pay gaps during the second half of the career. These trends also reflect the “penalties” on labour income associated with parenthood, borne almost entirely by women (Meurs & Pora, 2019; Pora & Wilner, 2025).

Within the senior civil service corps, wage dispersion is higher among men than among women

In the major State civil service corps, the first decile (D1) of net full-time equivalent (FTE) salary—the threshold below which the 10% lowest-paid employees fall—remains at a similar level for women and men throughout the 30 years of observation. Median wage gaps stay below 11% over the first three decades of career, both in administrative and technical corps. In contrast, the ninth decile (D9)—the threshold above which the top 10% of earners are found—concentrates the bulk of gender-based pay disparities and is consistently higher for men.

In technical corps, the gap among top earners widens rapidly: after ten years of career, the ninth decile salary reaches 6 398€ for women versus €7,199 for men (see Figure 4). It peaks after eighteen years of service, at 8 410€ for women compared to 10 231€ for men—a difference of 18%. However, the gap gradually narrows after 25 years of service, due to the attainment of the highest step within grades and to exits from the public sector.

Figure 4: Salary distributions of employees who joined a major State civil service corps in the 1980s



Note: After 10 years of service in the State civil service, the median net full-time equivalent (FTE) salary of women who joined a major administrative civil service corps in the 1980s was 5 752€ (in 2022 constant euros), compared to 6 145€ for their male counterparts.

Scope: France excluding Mayotte; employees who joined a senior State civil service corps in the 1980s and were still working in the State civil service.

Source: Insee, General State Files (FGE) 1978-2009, Public Service Agents Information System (SIASP) 2010-2021.

In administrative corps, the average gender wage gap is similarly driven by differences at the top of the salary distribution. Among the top 10% of earners, the disparity widens quickly: after ten years, the ninth decile reaches 8 125€ for women versus 11 984€ for men—a 32% gap, which only halves over the following twenty years. Appointments to high-responsibility (so-called “functional”) positions—less frequently held by women than men—are more common in administrative corps than in technical ones.

Thus, although women and men may enter a major State corps at the same time, women gradually accumulate wage disadvantages throughout their careers in the State civil service. These disparities are mainly the result of differentiated promotion rates (and thus access to higher pay), less frequent appointments to positions associated with technical or managerial bonuses, and under representation in functional posts.

These differences translate into substantial cumulative wage gaps. On average, after 30 years of career, women who joined an administrative grand corps and spent at least 25 years in the State civil service earned 276 600€ less (in 2022 constant euros) than their male counterparts. The corresponding gap within technical corps amounts to 162 900€.

Sociological research suggests that while these inequalities may partially reflect differing family and career choices by gender, they also reveal structural male advantages that hinder women’s access to leadership positions in the State civil service—such as the delegitimization of maternity leave, peer effects, and gender-based discrimination (Marry et al., 2017).

Sources

This entire study was conducted using data on employment characteristics and remuneration components of civil servants in the State civil service from 1980 to 2021. From 1978 to 2009 (excluding 1979, 1981, 1987, 1993, 1994, and 1995), the General State Files (FGE) recorded the workforce, employment characteristics, and remuneration of State civil servants. These files were compiled from the State’s annual payroll data. From 2010 to 2021, the Public Service Agents Information System (SIASP) collected data on employment characteristics and remuneration of agents across the three public service sectors (State, territorial, and hospital). It is constituted from monthly State payroll files, the State Agents Census (RAE), annual social data declarations (DADS), and, increasingly since 2020, nominative social declarations (DSN).

Methodology

Figures 2 3 and 4 focus on agents from the major State corps who began their careers in the 1980s, identified through their status as trainee civil servants. To conduct a long-term statistical study of agents in the major State corps, an operational definition based on entry status into the civil service was adopted. Although entry paths into these corps do not always require attendance at a training school, agents of the major State corps in this study were identified by their trainee civil servant status. Viewing the major State corps through the lens of training allows for precise and relevant tracking of individuals throughout their careers, whereas an approach based on employment would be more complex for comparing individuals. To ensure a sufficiently large sample of agents, all civil servants who joined a major State corps between 1980 and 1989 (excluding 1981 and 1987, during which General State Files (FGE) were not produced) were selected, and their careers within the State civil service were followed until 2020. For each agent, employment and salary trajectories were tracked over a span of thirty years following their entry into the corps, in order to maintain an equal duration for all agents in the sample, although a maximum duration of forty years is observable for some agents. Indeed, the thirtieth year of career corresponds to 2011 for agents who joined a major civil State corps in 1980, and to 2020 for those who joined in 1989. The proportions of agents employed in the State civil service were calculated for each year of the career, based on whether they worked at least one day during the year. The salaries analyzed are net full-time equivalent salaries for each individual and are consistently expressed in constant 2022 euros. Means, medians, and deciles are calculated for the subset of agents still employed in the State civil service each year of their careers. To control for biases due to long-term career interruptions, cumulative remuneration gaps over thirty years were calculated based on agents who worked at least twenty-five of the thirty years considered in the State civil service. The major corps that were merged in 2009 following decrees no. 2009-63 of January 16, 2009, and no. 2009-1106 of September 10, 2009, are grouped under their new designations. For reasons related to the impossibility of individual-level tracking of military positions from 1980 to 2009, major State corps with military status are systematically excluded from statistics concerning technical corps.

Definitions

The civil service is divided into three branches: the State civil service (FPE), the territorial civil service (FPT), and the hospital civil service (FPH). This study exclusively addresses the FPE. The State civil service encompasses ministries and national public administrative establishments (EPA) such as France Travail, Crous, CNRS, or universities (Law No. 84-16 of January 11, 1984, constituting Title II of the general statute), excluding national social security EPAs, whose standard recruitment status is private law, notably the National Health Insurance Fund (CNAM), National Old-Age Insurance Fund (CNAV), and Family Allowance Fund (CNAF).

A corps corresponds to a grouping of civil servants subject to the same statute. The major State corps, commonly referred to as “high civil servants” corps, denote in this publication all State civil service corps assigned to senior management missions. Unlike other categories of the State civil service, they do not have a strictly legal existence. The classification of these corps includes both major

administrative and technical corps.

The major administrative corps mainly consist of agents recruited through the National School of Administration (ENA). As this study covers data from 1978 to 2021, the major administrative corps remain under their former designation, although the 2021 senior civil service reform, which replaced the ENA with the National Institute of Public Service (INSP), led to the gradual phasing out of most of these corps.

The major technical corps consist of mining engineers, civil engineers of bridges, waterways and forests, armament engineers, administrators, and general inspectors of INSEE, mostly recruited through engineering schools and the Écoles normales supérieures (ENS).

The senior civil service corresponds to what the legal texts call “senior management of the civil service.” In reality, it is broader than the notion of major State corps, encompassing jobs, ranks, corps, and various functions. Corps are classified into hierarchical categories (A, B, C, and until 1992, D) according to recruitment level and the functions of their members. These categories partially overlap with socioprofessional categories (executives, intermediate professions, workers, and employees). Functional positions designate jobs filled by secondment (for civil servants) or by contract recruitment (for contract employees), for a limited duration, governed by a job statute which specifies selection, appointment, classification, promotion, and remuneration modalities. They mainly correspond to senior management positions. Unlike corps, functional positions denote posts, not status groups. Net salary (after social contributions) is the salary actually received by the agent before income tax deduction. It is obtained by subtracting employee social contributions, the Generalized Social Contribution (CSG), and the Contribution to the Repayment of Social Debt (CRDS) from the gross salary.

Full-time equivalent salary (FTE) is a salary converted to full-time over the entire year, regardless of actual work volume. For example, for an agent who held a position for six months at 80% workload and received a total of 10,000 euros, the FTE salary is calculated as $10,000 / (0.5 \times 0.8) = 25,000$ euros per year.

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