

INEQUALITIES IN FRANCE

RESPONDING TO INEQUALITIES SCEPTICS: AN ASSESSMENT OF INEQUALITIES IN FRANCE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS.

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Executive summary

Income and wealth

Inequalities are on the rise in France.¹ There are now 8.8 million people below the poverty line,² receiving a net income of less than €1,026 per month; two million people are living on less than €700 per month; nearly five million are receiving food aid; and over 200,000 are living on the street or in dwellings unfit for habitation. CFTD estimate the number of workers in poverty and insecurity to be 400,000. 30% of farmers have an income of less than €350/month.³

Housing benefits have been cut for the poorest 5% and there have been increases in indirect taxation. Prices of basic necessities and housing, heating, electricity, transport, vehicle fuel, food and services have all increased.

The rich have not increased in number, but in 20 years they have seen their wealth increase sevenfold. The five richest people in France are worth €156 billion.⁴ Opinion polls show that 9 out of 10 French people believe that there has been no reduction in inequality in the past year and report keen feelings of injustice.⁵

Gender

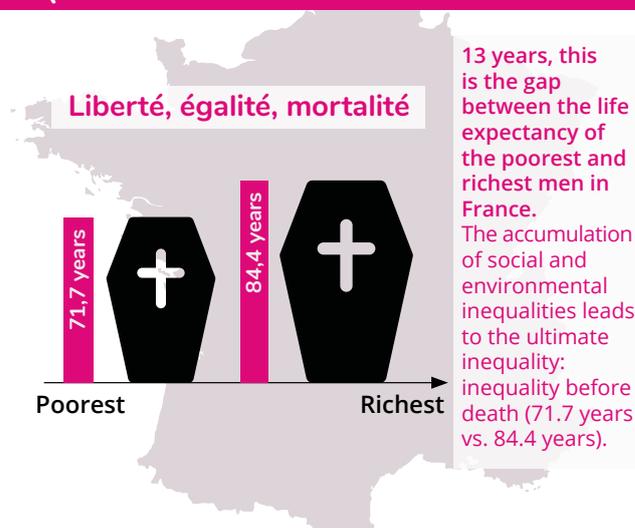
The salary differential between men and women is 9% for equal status and work. More women are part-time workers (1,241,800 women as opposed to 471,800 men – 2015). In addition to being paid less than men and having less job security, women spend longer on household tasks – 3.5 hours a day as opposed to 2 for men (2012). 84% of single parent households are headed by women.

Women's health is adversely affected by exposure to chemicals in occupations where women predominate, such as beauty salons, and there is particular concern regarding foetal exposure to environmental toxins.⁶ In the health system women experience delayed diagnoses and inferior care: for example, on average, female heart attack victims receive treatment an hour and a half later than males.

Health

Life expectancy at birth in France is very high, 82.8 years as opposed to the EU average of 80.9 years. France has universal health coverage and obligatory social health insurance but high rates of social inequality in health. Social and environmental factors account for 80 % of health inequalities.⁷

INEQUALITY IN THE FACE OF DEATH IN FRANCE



Source: ATD Fourth World

In 2018, 20% of French people found it hard to feed themselves⁸ and 5.5 million people used food aid, and of these only 1.2% were consuming the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables per day.⁹ The lack of nutritious food compounds health inequalities, as does the lack of access to affordable and safe drinking water and sanitation. 650,000 French citizens are not connected to drinking water mains¹⁰ and one million households only have access to water at a price that is considered excessive relative to their incomes. In 2016, 5.6 million households were described as living in poor housing and experiencing energy poverty.¹¹ Those most affected were single people, single-parent families, people of foreign origin, job seekers, pensioners, students and rental tenants. These inequalities are reflected in differing life expectancies: overall life expectancy of the poorest French men is 13 years less than that of the richest, while at the age of 35 a middle class male can expect to live six years longer than a manual worker. For women the figure is 3.2 years.¹² Countries with the greatest inequalities are also those with the highest rates of chronic illness.¹³

Environment

In France, the richest emit 40 times more carbon than the poorest, although the latter pay four times more carbon tax as a percentage of their incomes. Climate change accentuates social vulnerabilities¹⁴ with those working in climate sensitive occupations, such as agriculture, being the most exposed.

Inequality and development cooperation

In response to the strong demands made by developing countries, France made the fight against inequality the main pillar of its presidency of the G7 in 2019. France should now complement its commitment to aid with action on tax justice to release resources for investment in developing countries.

Conclusions

France presents a complex picture of the multi-dimensional and mutually reinforcing challenges of inequality which are dragging the most vulnerable into a downward spiral from which it is difficult to escape. Civil society organisations can shed light on the different ways in which inequalities are manifested and help develop and advocate proposals to reduce or eliminate them, which are needed to advance implementation of the SDGs by 2030.

Recommendations

- Expand the scope of welfare provision to incorporate protections against environmental risk, potentially through the creation of an ecological vulnerability branch of the social security system
- Restructure the taxation system so that those affected by the consumption of fossil fuels and the emission of CO₂ can be fairly compensated
- Eliminate tax loopholes and subsidies on fossil fuels
- Increase public investment in priority sectors including education, transport, sustainable agriculture and energy renewal

To read the full national report and the comprehensive Europe-wide report with all references, please visit: www.sdgwatcheurope.org/SDG10



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¹ French Observatoire des inégalités

² See The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) France

³ Mutual agricultural fund.

⁴ See 2019 Forbes ranking

⁵ The perception of inequality in France, IFOP survey for 4D, July 2018

⁶ See French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health & Safety [ANSES] report 19 July 2018

⁷ National Strategy for Health and Environment

⁸ Ipsos-Secours Populaire Français Barometer 2018.

⁹ Guidance given by French Institute for Public Health Surveillance (INVS), 2007.

¹⁰ Insee

¹¹ French national child protection observatory (ONPE) 2016

¹² For an exhaustive bibliographical review, please refer to the ONPE study (2017): Consequences, usages and costs incurred as a result of energy poverty

¹³ Kate Pickett & Richard Wilkinson (2013). The Spirit Level: Why more equal societies almost always do better.

¹⁴ Catherine Larrère (dir.), Les inégalités environnementales (Environmental inequalities), Paris, Puf-Vie des idées, 2017, 104.