

INEQUALITIES IN FRANCE

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

Alexandre Pasche for SDSN France; 4D; wecf France; ATD Fourth World; French Committee for International Solidarity (CFSI); Les Petits Débrouillards (Resourceful youth); Water Coalition; CLER Réseau pour la transition énergétique (Energy Transition Network); French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT); Fondation Internet Nouvelle Génération (FING); Max Havelaar France; Notre Affaire à Tous (Our shared responsibility); Surfrider Foundation Europe; Humanité et Biodiversité (Humanity and Biodiversity); Human Rights League (LDH); Coordination SUD (Southern Coordination)



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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

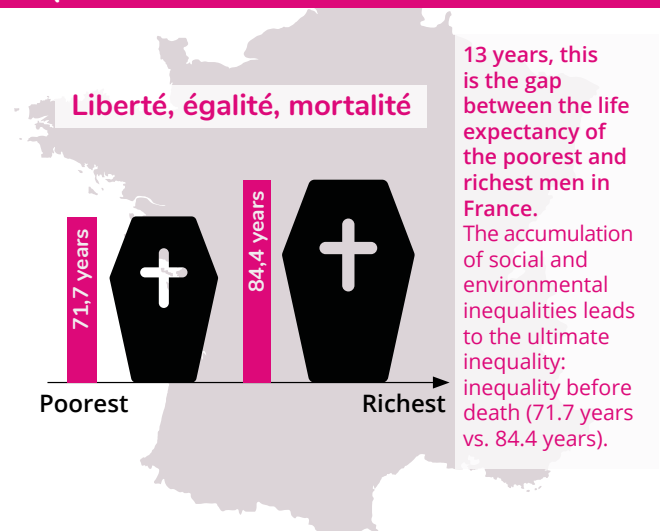
The salary differential between men and women is 9% for equal status and work. More women are part-time workers (1,241,800 women as opposed to 471,800 men – 2015). In addition to being paid less than men and having less job security, women spend longer on household tasks – 3.5 hours a day as opposed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

PRESENTATION

The 4D Association and Women Engage for a Common Future (wecf) France are coordinating the creation of a **report on inequality** in the context of the European development, education and awareness-raising project entitled Make Europe Sustainable for All, which they are implementing in France. The aim of this report is twofold: on the one hand, it aims to **gather** quantitative and qualitative **data** on all forms of inequality and combine it in a single document to write up exhaustive findings on the state of inequality in France; on the other, thanks to this multidimensional aspect, it aims to serve as an **advocacy tool** targeting NGOs and associations engaged in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and reducing inequalities, while 2019 is marked by a very rich French and international political agenda on the question of inequality. This year will effectively be punctuated by legislative follow-ups to the Grand Débat National, the finalisation of the national road map for implementation of the SDGs (June), the high-level political forum and its review of the progress made in implementing SDG 10 (Inequalities reduced), climate, education, inclusive growth, and peaceful societies (July), the G7 summit on inequality chaired by France (August), and the UN summit on the SDGs and climate (September).

Moreover, this report is inclusive, rigorous and innovative in its method. **Inclusive** because, echoing the 2030 Agenda, its writing has been collaborative, with a panel of participants representing the various civil society actors whose work focuses on the question of inequality. 17 partners for 17 SDGs, representing the following sectors: social, international

development and solidarity, environment, gender, workers, youth and research, have contributed to this report to provide data on inequality in relation to the SDG(s) at the centre of their field of expertise. This multi-partner methodology reinforces the exhaustiveness and legitimacy of the report. **Rigorous** because its argument is based on scientific data, notably drawing on academic work on inequalities carried out by researchers from the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), the Paris School of Economics World Inequality Lab, or the Groupement d'intérêt scientifique sur la société de l'information et les usages d'internet (Scientific interest group on information society and Internet use). Coupling the results of this work with the quantitative and qualitative data provided by NGOs has increased the legitimacy of the report. **Innovative** because it aims to report on the state of inequality in France in a concise, striking and engaging way, by emphasising the multidimensional nature of inequality and proposing collective and political solutions to reduce it. The contributions of the 17 partners have thus been structured according to the following format: (i) **a key figure** that both clearly explains the link between the SDG in question and the inequality, and strikingly illustrates the situation relating to the inequality present in the SDG concerned; (ii) **a message** presenting more detailed findings of the inequalities associated with the theme of the associated SDG and containing political advocacy elements; and (iii) **a visual aspect** (photo, infographics, drawings, etc.) illustrating the partners' message.

Partners:



INTRODUCTION

Social inequality: where does France stand? Alexandre Pasche for SDSN France*

Social inequality, put back on the agenda by the Yellow Vest movement, indeed seems to be getting worse in France, whatever the 'inequality sceptics' say.

France has a motto: '*liberté, égalité, fraternité*' (liberty, equality, brotherhood). We know that the second term is more of an ideal than a reality. But for a number of years now, numerous observers have been asserting, supported by figures, that social inequality in France is increasing. Despite the significance of these sources, there are still 'inequality sceptics' (just as we speak of 'climate-change sceptics'). Let us try to contribute to dispelling these doubts and concentrate on the solutions.

The poor are more numerous and have less purchasing power than before.

Concerning the number of poor, first of all: the French Observatoire des inégalités (Observatory of inequalities) reports that the number of people below the poverty threshold increased by 820 000 between 2006 and 2016. The total number of French people with a net monthly income (after tax and social services) below the poverty line of € 1 026 per month has now reached 8.8 million, i.e. 60 % of the median income. The number of poor has therefore indeed increased.

Our 'inequality sceptics' would claim that purchasing power has only been growing for the last 30 years. This is so, if one believes Insee, but not if one listens to Philippe Herlin, the author of *Pouvoir d'achat: le grand mensonge* (Purchasing Power: the Great Lie), who discounts the Insee results as false for two main reasons:

1. Insee does not consider a house purchase to be an expense but rather an investment. This has led the institute to estimate the percentage of household budgets represented by accommodation costs at only 6 %. Based on his work, Philippe Herlin estimates this figure at 15-20 %. The Insee calculation, meanwhile, effectively almost disregards the rise in housing prices during the 1990s and 2000s.
1. Insee introduces what it calls the 'quality effect' on changing product prices. This lowers the real price of an item while its quality has increased. Over the years, the price of iPhones has increased, but according to Insee, their real price has fallen, because the models have more memory or functions.

These two trends have led Insee to generally underestimate the price rises, although they are particularly significant for basic necessities corresponding to unavoidable expenditure: housing, heating, electricity, transport, vehicle fuel, food and basic products and services.

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The rich are richer than before but not more numerous.

The 'inequality sceptics' will say "there have always been rich people". Difficult to deny, certainly, but have they ever in the past achieved the level of the richest French today?

According to the 2019 Forbes ranking, the five richest people in France own € 156 000 000 000, the equivalent of 10 000 000 years of earnings at the net minimum wage (SMIC). This level is the highest ever reached since the ranking was created in 1996.

Furthermore, Challenges magazine makes the following observation: 'In 22 years (from 1996 to 2017), the wealth of the 500 richest people in France (the ultra-rich) has increased sevenfold, from € 80 000 000 000 to € 570 000 000 000'. During the same time frame, the GDP of France has only doubled.

If we extend this to the richest 1 %, there is a real but less spectacular increase. In France, the proportion of heritage owned by the 1 % richest increased from 17.2 % in 1980 to 23.4 % in 2014 according to economists belonging to the [wid.world](#) collective.

Let's extend now to include the millionaires: according to the 2018 report by the bank Crédit Suisse, France had 2 100 000 such households, less than in 2011 and 2014, when there were 2 600 000 millionaire households in France.

Without claiming to resolve the question of inequality in France in this short article, there are therefore serious reasons to think that the poor, in France, are more numerous than before and that their purchasing power has been reduced. Moreover, it is clear that the moderately wealthy are not more numerous, while the very rich are very much richer than before. Notwithstanding the 'inequality sceptics', the feeling of injustice and falling living standards is not a figment of the popular imagination.

An act of universal conscience 4D & wecf France

Adopted by France and all of the international community in September 2015, the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide state and non-state actors with **a common framework and tools to reduce inequality** in all its forms. Inequality is a cross-cutting and multidimensional challenge, present within each of the 17 SDGs: poverty, gender inequality, inequality in access to education, food inequality, inequality in exposure to environmental risks, inequality in access to public services, etc. Actions aimed at reducing inequality can **catalyse the implementation of all of the SDGs** and facilitate their achievement by 2030. Conversely, without significant progress in this regard, the SDGs will not be achieved.

At a time when budgetary policies are tending to aggravate inequalities, the role of NGOs is essential in shedding light on the diverse range of inequalitarian situations and in characterising the nature of the inequalities present in our society to develop—or advocate for the adoption of—solutions aimed at mitigating them.

The contributions below clearly set out the links between the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and inequalities. They give an overview of the state of inequality in France, according to the topic of the SDG concerned, and propose collective solutions to mitigate it.



SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere ATD Fourth World

'17 SDGs targeting the poorest 10 % will make it possible to completely fulfill SDG 1 and further contribute to SDG 10.'

The difference between the life expectancy of the poorest and the most well-off men in France is **13 years**. The multidimensional aspects of poverty result in cumulative inequalities and the ultimate inequality: inequality in mortality. (71.7 years versus 84.4 years).

The Fourth World People's University in the European Parliament, 6 February 2019. Participation of the poorest people in decision-making bodies, debates and citizen dialogue is the way to achieve equality.



© ATD Fourth World

Combating poverty reduces inequalities, but the opposite is far less evident! We must not fight the wrong battle. In France, 2 000 000 people are living on less than € 700 per month, nearly 5 000 000 are receiving food aid and over 200 000 are living in dwellings unfit for habitation or on the street. France, one of the world's richest countries, is far from having eradicated poverty.

Can we still talk about inequalities between the poorest and the most well-off? Not really, because their situation is in no way comparable. For the poorest, it is not only about the absence of decent incomes to live, but about the violation of fundamental rights: access to food, healthcare, equal opportunities in education, gender equality, access to water, energy, decent work, quality infrastructure, decent housing, reasonable consumption, a healthy environment, justice and citizen participation. Poverty is multidimensional.

If each of the Sustainable Development Goals was completely implemented and really reached the most vulnerable, it would contribute to the fight against poverty and therefore to reducing inequality. In this regard, a given goal should not be considered achieved unless it has reached the poorest 10 % of the target population; then a decisive step will have been made against poverty and towards equality. This is the essential principle of the 2030 Agenda: 'Leave no one behind'.



SDG 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

French Committee for International Solidarity (CFSI)

One in five French people lacks food security: they are unable to provide themselves with enough healthy food for three meals a day.

Libre-service de la solidarité (Solidarity self-service),
Secours populaire (People aid), Reims.



© Pascal Montary

to isolation associated with the shame of not being able to feed oneself alone, and ultimately to social exclusion.

Les Banques Alimentaires, France's number one food aid network, distribute 212 000 000 meals each year and the volumes distributed are increasing by 3 % per year. Food aid is often a route to accessing overall support (health, housing, job hunting, sport, leisure, culture, holidays, etc.), to break the solitude and help to regain a balance. As well as distributing food, Secours Populaire also implements 'self-service' assistance, for example, where the people receiving aid can choose from a range of foods offered and retain autonomy and dignity at difficult times. Kitchen workshops are also offered, to stimulate the desire to cook despite the lack of resources and raise awareness of balanced nutrition.

However, the fight against food insecurity and for access for all to sustainable and healthy food cannot be fought only by associations. Food aid and the overall support provided by associations are no substitute for a true public social integration policy, with a defined interministerial strategy for combating food insecurity, identified at the *États Généraux* on food (French National Food Conferences) as one of the great five-year challenges. It also requires rethinking the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). This is why CFSI works with 34 organizations gathered within the Platform for another CAP. This coalition calls policy-makers to transform the actual CAP in a Common Agricultural and Food Policy. Such CAFP should encourage universal access to healthy food and foster decent employment at local level. It should be coherent with – and should not compete with – policies that aim at developing family farming in developing countries so that everyone can eat and live in dignity.

In 2018, one in five French people was finding it hard to feed themselves (21 %); one in two of these belonged to the poorest sector of the population.¹⁵ Poverty also has consequences for dietary habits: of the 5 500 000 people using food aid, only 1.2 % were meeting the guidelines to eat five portions of fruit and vegetables per day.¹⁶ Food is the adjustment variable in the budgets of the poorest households. The weight of food fell by 9 percentage points in the most modest 20 % of households between 1979 and 2005, and has stopped falling since 2007, having probably bottomed out at a level that cannot be reduced any further.¹⁷ Not being able to access sufficient quantities of healthy well-balanced foods is to expose oneself to numerous problems of health and well-being, but also



SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

wecf France

'We must build the capacities of individuals or groups of individuals to act on health issues'.

France is among the most inegalitarian countries in western Europe in matters of health. In 2013, the difference in life expectancy at 35 between a manager and a manual worker was over **6 years** for men and **3.2 years** for women.

A Nesting training session was organised by a Nesting host at the Grand Sud Polyclinic in Nîmes.



© wecf France

Although France remains at the top of the European Union in terms of life expectancy at birth (82.8 years in 2014 as compared with an average of 80.9 years in the countries of the EU), France has one of the highest rates of social inequalities in health (ISS) in western Europe, although the Regional Health Agencies have made it their priority to reduce it. These inequalities, which are complex in nature, derive from a set of social factors in the development of individuals, as well as inequalities of access to care that depend on the social situation despite the mechanisms in place to combat poverty, such as universal health cover (CMU), the aid for complementary health insurance or the geographical situation.

The environment is also a contributing factor: differing exposure to pollution, access to natural resources, and differing vulnerability and capacity for resistance.

Social inequalities in health do not concern only the most precarious situations but follow a social gradient that is not clearly restricted to any particular group; they begin to develop from early childhood, meaning that public policies need to address this as early as possible.

In the case of women, there are many types of health inequalities: delayed diagnoses and inferior care (on average female heart attack victims receive treatment an hour and a half later than males), higher exposure to chemical pollutants due a gendered distribution of jobs as well as the use of menstrual hygiene products (as confirmed by the report of the French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health & Safety [ANSES] published on 19 July 2018), and specific vulnerability of pregnant women and their unborn babies, and foetal exposure to environmental toxins. In response to these findings, wecf France has implemented a chemical pollutant exposure prevention programme for parents and future parents; more than 550 workshops were organised in metropolitan France in 2018.

Public authorities must regard health not as the sector of a single ministry, but as an intersectoral challenge that questions our notions of justice and offers fair treatment for all populations as regards the distribution of hazards and environmental amenities. To achieve this, it is essential to implement concrete measures to reduce environmental exposure and to apply the precautionary principle in the context of the fourth National Environmental Health Plan (PNSE) and the second National Strategy on Endocrine Disruptors (SNPE2), taking into account both social inequalities in health and gender inequalities.



SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Les Petits Débrouillards (Resourceful youth)

The youth poverty rate has greatly increased in recent years: there are 3 000 000 children living in poverty in France today! These insecurities are multidimensional: social, geographical, etc. The right to education (language acquisition, access to school, access to culture) strongly correlates with these insecurities but is poorly exercised in respect of numerous children, not least the most vulnerable. While it is difficult to know the numbers, out-of-school children are often poorly accommodated, disabled, unaccompanied minors, etc. Concerning early childhood, a child under three years old with at least one parent working in management can produce 500 words in 20 minutes, while a child with non-graduate parents can only express 300.¹⁸

Thus, access to culture, leisure and sciences plays an essential role in emancipation, building self-reliance and gaining control over children's own destiny. It is essential, through education to science and through the practice of scientific and technological activities, to train these young people and guide them along the paths of self-reliance, integration and emancipation in increasingly complex societies.

This is also the way to develop and sharpen their critical thinking and allow them to actively participate in addressing ecological and digital challenges, by giving them the means to contribute to societal debates and transformations, as well as ecological transitions.

The initiatives of the Petits Débrouillards in this regard, with our partners in the Fédération des Acteurs de la Solidarité (Federation of actors in solidarity) on the Grands voisins site (formerly the Saint Vincent de Paul hospital) have allowed us to develop and test relevant educational mechanisms (workshops, adult education schools and institutes, Ecole des Petits Voisins [emergency education for out-of-school children], etc.) that we would like to share and make more widely available. How best to bring to life and materialise today the practice that we strive to preach: to be actors in popular education and defenders of cultural rights? This is the question that we are asking ourselves.



SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

wecf France

'We must propose a law to force employers to achieve equal pay between men and women.'

The salary differential between men and women in France is **9%**, for equal status and work.

Do trades have a sex? 2015 exhibition of the Quinzaine de l'égalité femmes-hommes (15 for equality for men and women)



© wecf France

The findings are harsh: in a world whose leaders have committed to guaranteeing prosperity for all and protecting the planet, inequalities between men and women remain a black spot against achieving the 2030 Agenda. Although there has been progress in recent decades in terms of access to rights, women are still limited in terms of their effective participation to the definition of the models of governance and development, and their specific needs have not yet been sufficiently taken into consideration, even though equality between men and women appears to be a precondition for success in the fight against climate change, as reflected in the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change.

Gender inequalities have an impact on women's living conditions: persistence of pay inequalities – for comparable professional characteristics, women earn 9 % less than men per year and on average 24 % less than men, as they occupy less well paid positions; more part-time work (in 2015, 1 241 800 women were active in part-time work, as opposed to 471 800 men); women still carry out more household duties, despite men increasingly participating (3h26 versus 2h00 on average in 2012); higher rates of insecurity for women, coupled with an increase in the number of single-parent households managed by the mother in recent years (84 % of women at the head of a single-parent household).

These inequalities also have an impact on women's health: for example, the gender distribution of trades exposes women to specific risks associated with chemical substances (contact with pollutants in aesthetic activities, healthcare, textiles and housekeeping or the cleaning of business premises).

Although women are the first to be affected by climate change, their initiatives have great potential for innovation and transformation. To improve their representation in decision-making bodies, it is necessary to support their leadership and participation and secure the capacity of women's organisations by ensuring long-term support and financing.



SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Water Coalition

650 000 French citizens are not connected to a drinking water network (Insee). Nearly one million households only have access to water at a price that is considered excessive compared to their incomes.

IJBA, slum dwellings in Canéjan (Gironde), August 2018



© Félicie Gaudillat et Hippolyte Radisson

In metropolitan France, 650 000 people living precariously do not have permanent physical access to drinking water or toilets: homeless people, migrants, Roma, those living in slums or unfit dwellings, etc. These vulnerable groups, often suffering discrimination, are dependent on public facilities, which are often non-existent.

Inequalities are also linked to the financial accessibility of services: more than one million households pay their water bills at a cost that is considered excessive relative to their incomes, i.e. greater than 3 % of their effective household income, according to a consensus reached in France and the OECD countries. Furthermore, numerous rural households are having difficulty financing the mandatory upgrading of their existing independent sanitation installations, which no longer comply with sanitary and environmental standards.

The situation is still more critical in Overseas France, due to significant delays in the implementation of public policies relating to water and sanitation. For example, 47 % of the residents of Mayotte do not have toilets at home and 22 % do not have running water.¹⁹

Access to water and sanitation must be recognised as a human right and a priority, and this must be accompanied by strong measures, such as social pricing of water and the free installation of public standpipes and sanitary facilities, nationwide. At European level, the currently ongoing revision of the Drinking Water Directive must integrate ambitious measures to improve access to drinking water and sanitation for all.



SDG 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

CLER Réseau pour la transition énergétique (Energy Transition Network)

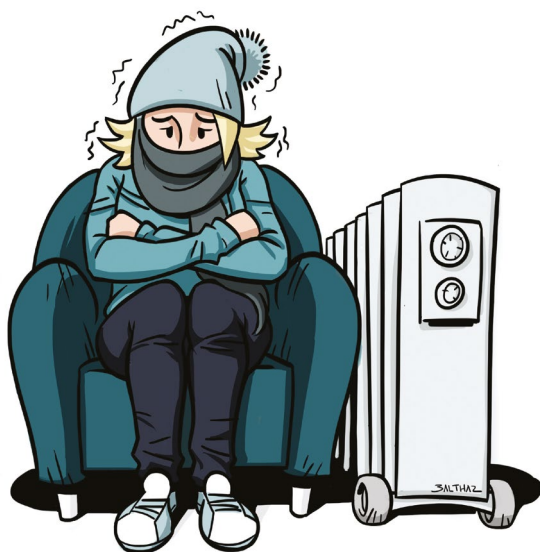
12 000 000 people in France are living in energy poverty.

In France, 5 600 000 households²⁰ are 'experiencing particular difficulties in providing their dwelling with the necessary energy to satisfy their basic needs, due to inadequate resources or their living conditions'.²¹ They are living in energy poverty, one aspect of poor housing.

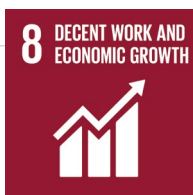
Of the 7 400 000 'energy sieves' (dwellings that cannot be heated at manageable cost), half are occupied by households with modest incomes.²²

The poor thermal performance of these dwellings, combined with disrepair of heating and domestic hot water production equipment, inflates the energy bills²³ of these citizens and exacerbates their poverty. Whether they give up paying the bills, deprive themselves in another area of spending (rent, healthcare or school costs) or prefer to give up heating their dwellings to limit the amount, this reality affects one French citizen in five, and particularly single people, single-parent families, people of foreign origin, job seekers, the inactive (pensioners, students) and rental tenants.

The economic, health and social consequences of this phenomenon are well known and the societal costs are colossal.²⁴ Only an ambitious renovation of the dwelling that they are occupying can enable these households to consume according to their needs rather than according to their resources.



© Balthaz



SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT)

+1 000 000 workers in poverty in France since the start of the 2008 crisis.

In figures

THE MONTHLY POVERTY THRESHOLD DIFFERS ACCORDING TO THE TYPE OF HOUSEHOLD



€1,015
single person



€1,523
couple without children



€1,320
single parent family with one child <14 years old



€2,132
couple with two children <14 years old



€2,538
couple with two children >14 years old



14% of the population, or 8.8 million people, were living below the poverty threshold in 2016.

Sources : Insee - 2015 data © Observatory of inequalities.
Insee Première No 1710 of September 2018.
Infographics : © CFDT Magazine

Sustainable Development Goal 8 upholds the importance of maintaining an adequate, shared and sustainable growth rate that makes it possible to offer everybody remunerative and productive employment, workplace safety and social security for their families. The quality of social dialogue must obviously be up to the level of the challenges faced. In this context, our objective must be ongoing improvements to labour organisations, as well as development sustained by the skills and qualifications of all of the workers.

By way of illustration and concerning France, we feel that to achieve the ambitions of SDG 8, one important strategy will be the defence of stable, sustainable jobs. Recent and disturbing as the phenomenon is, we find that more and more workers are affected by poverty and insecurity. We estimate that 3 400 000 workers are living in poverty and insecurity in France. Some of them are sleeping in their cars; this is a reality. And even if working generally means a decent life, neither an employment contract nor financial aid guarantees the beneficiary an escape from poverty. Generally, the difficulties feed on each other for these workers plunged inextricably into situations in which they are unable to house and care for themselves, travel, afford childcare or keep up-to-date with routine administrative procedures.

The CFDT, alongside a number of associations, has asked for a real plan to be rolled out to fight poverty. But over and above releasing financial resources, it will never be possible to build an inclusive society without close collaboration with people living in poverty and all social and economic actors.



SDG 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation

Fondation Internet Nouvelle Génération
(New Generation Internet Foundation - FING)

'We must go from digital inclusion to digital technology that empowers'.

17 % of French citizens do not have an Internet connection at home. These French citizens are predominantly women, seniors, non-graduates and people in rural areas.

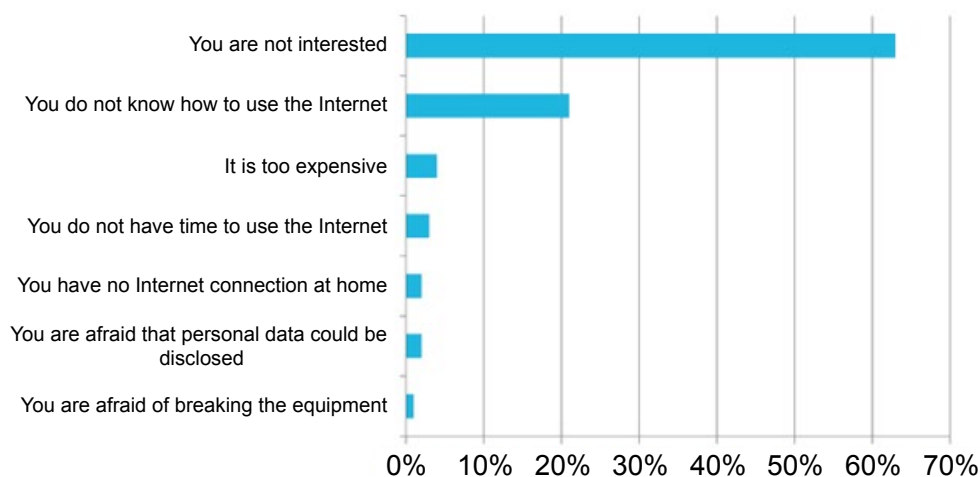
Since the advent of digital technology, the question of its capacity to reinforce or reduce social inequalities is typically framed in terms of catching up and bridging the digital divide. There is a lot of social prejudice surrounding this perception that the majority are 'inside' while a minority of poorer, older, less educated laggards are 'outside'. However, homeless people, people with disability, or who are illiterate find that digital technology can help them to be self-reliant. Conversely, well-off people use the technology little or badly, or have difficulty with their documents and their use of digital services.

The digital divide is thus secondary to the main disparities such as social and economic exclusion, educational difficulties and the administrative divide. Remedial policies to try to bridge the digital divide can be costly in resources and have uncertain results: the nature of the lag changes over time and we can all potentially fall behind.

It is time for a paradigm shift and to commit policy-makers and those working to facilitate inclusion to a new way forward: putting digital technology at the service of people's empowerment. This perspective invites to review the tools currently available to combat 'digital exclusion': physical and online mediation devices; premises for mediation, creation or prototyping; designing paperless systems (access to rights). It also invites us to review social policies based on digital technology.

First results of the Capacity survey on the usage of digital technology by French citizens, IMT Atlantique / Marsouin (2017).

What is the main reason you do not use the Internet?





SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries 4D

Nine out of ten French citizens consider that there has been no progress in reducing inequality in France over the last 12 months.

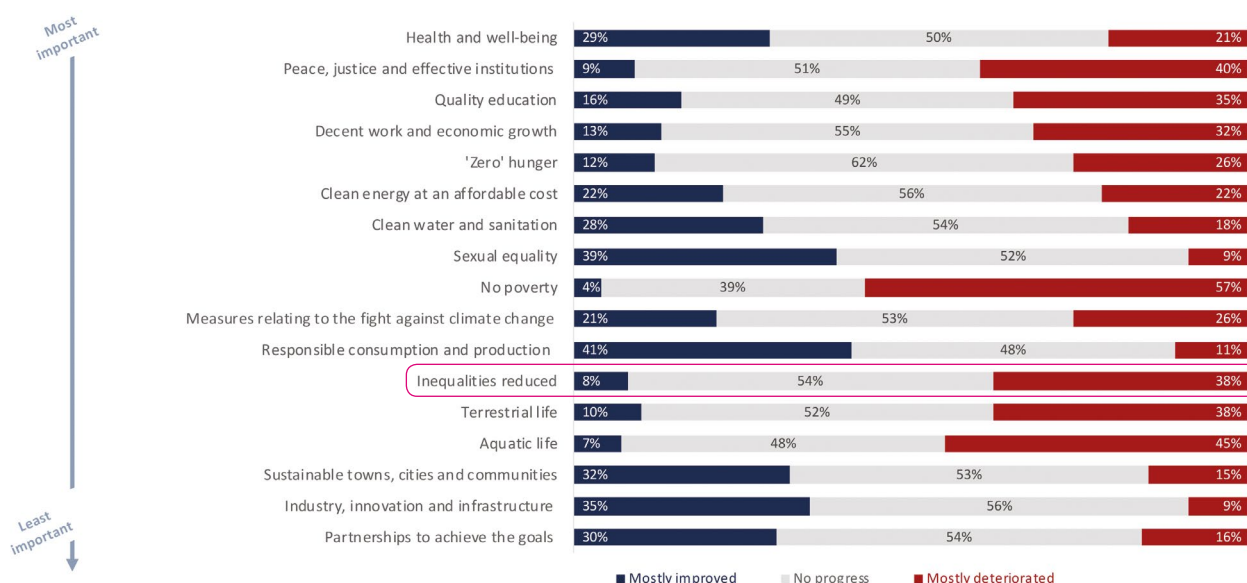
In France, the report on the new wealth indicators published by the government on 28 February 2019 indicated that the dispersion of living standards (the difference between the highest and lowest income quintiles for the population) has remained stable since 2013. The dispersion of income in France appears to be less significant than in the European Union, not least because of a social and taxation system that, through redistribution, plays a dominant role in containing income inequalities.

Nevertheless, the fiscal and social reforms implemented by the government since the finance law of 2018, as well as the budgetary austerity policy, which have resulted in clear cuts in public investments, could in time compromise the role of the French social and taxation system as a firewall containing inequalities.

The poorest 5 % have suffered falling housing benefits and an increase in indirect taxation (energy, tobacco, etc.), which have only partially been compensated for by improvements in social services. In total, the poorest households have seen their living standards fall by 0.6 %, i.e. a loss of € 60 per year, per household. As for the richest 5 %, they have seen their living standards rise by 1.6 %, i.e. € 1 730 per year, per household. The latter category includes the 280 000 richest households in France (the top 1 %), who benefit most from the fiscal and social reforms: their living standards have improved by 4.8 %, thanks to the removal of the wealth tax and the flat-rate deduction of 30 % on capital, also known as flat tax.

To meet and exceed the targets of SDG 10, three courses of action should be followed: (i) adopt progressive taxation rates, (ii) remove subsidies on fossil fuels and allocate the generated revenues to social protection, and (iii) increase public investments in the priority sectors of education, health and environmental protection.

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





SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Ateliers populaires d'urbanisme de Villeneuve

Five million residents live in over 1 500 priority districts in France. Of these, 2 000 000 live below the poverty threshold.

Mobilisation of the residents of Villeneuve de Grenoble against the demolition of social housing, January 2019. The residents are asking for a citizens' initiative referendum, a right to the city and justice in urban planning.



© lecrieur.net

In France, over 75 % of the population live in towns and cities and 5 000 000 residents live in over 1 500 priority districts. The districts concerned contain more than a quarter of the French population below the poverty threshold, namely around 2 000 000 residents. Towns and cities concentrate inequalities and the situation within French urban space is particularly worrying. We regularly see tragedies associated with insanitary buildings and dwellings, as well as the reappearance of slum dwellings in recent years. This was recently the case when two buildings collapsed in rue d'Aubagne in Marseille city centre: 8 people died, more than 200 buildings were evacuated and over 1 500 people were displaced.

Combating inequality in the urban environment is therefore one of the fundamental challenges of the SDGs. SDG 11 and the new urban agenda adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) aim

to rehabilitate and plan towns and cities to offer employment opportunities for all, access to basic services, energy, transport and public spaces, while improving the use of resources and reducing their environmental impact. France has moreover defined two priority objectives that have strong implications for towns and cities and their territories: achieve ecological and energy transition by adapting urban planning tools and strengthen territorial cohesion by ensuring access to housing and better integration in deprived towns, cities and districts.

The policies of the current government are not going in the right direction. The Elan law and the reduction of personal housing benefit (APL) are leading to the privatisation of thousands of dwellings, deterioration of living conditions, rising rents and evictions. The national urban regeneration programme allows investments to be earmarked but its results are uncertain and its implementation contested. In Grenoble, for example, residents of the Villeneuve district are demanding a halt to the demolition of social housing and thorough reform of the French National Agency for Urban Renewal (ANRU).

Ensuring that towns, cities, and human establishments are open to all, strong, safe and sustainable in order to achieve SDG 11 means building urban policies to reduce inequality, for example by strengthening residents' power to act, by implementing a right to the town or city through the construction of social housing and by improving the quality of public transport, services, schools and public equipment. Numerous initiatives are being developed by civil society. These are aimed at improving residents' mobility, urban services, schools and equipment, as well as at addressing the causes of rising violence with the aim of bringing about a new urban prevention policy. A multidimensional initiative is necessary to address the underlying causes of poverty in working-class districts.



SDG 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Max Havelaar France

26 948 agricultural households in France benefited from dignified guaranteed income for all in 2017, a rise of 8.3 %. In France, 30 % of farmers have an income of less than € 350/month.²⁵

Responsible consumption is booming in France: +17 % on sales of organic products and +10 % on sales of fair-trade products.



© Max Havelaar France

Everybody agrees that farming is a noble job. At the same time, the sector is a source of significant inequalities in France and in the world. The price war resulting from the development of consumer society continues to reduce farmers' revenue, the weakest link in supply chains in which the value distribution is declining very steeply.

Sustainable agriculture begins with the agricultural producer and the prices paid for their work. Fair trade is a process permitting the three pillars of sustainability to be implemented: economic, social and environmental. It offers a model for sustainable consumption and production and naturally falls within the scope of SDG 12. It also contributes to a number of the 2030 Agenda targets.

Sustainable consumption and production require a market policy and context that favour social and environmental responsibility. More sustainable commercial and supply policies, which protect the most vulnerable producers, must guide the change in consumer behaviour.

The experience of the Fairtrade / Max Havelaar movement for more than 30 years in developing countries shows that it is possible to guide thousands of rural communities and connect them with millions of involved consumers by imposing fairer rules. This unique system integrates undertakings and distributors that change their practices and demonstrate that another form of trade is possible, to mitigate the absence of regulation in international trade, as an essential factor in sustainable development worldwide.



SDG 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Notre Affaire à Tous (Our shared responsibility)

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 income.

Maurice Feschet, the French complainant in the People's Climate Case, filed on 24 May 2018 by 10 families, in Europe and the world, before the Court of Justice of the European Union.



© Notre Affaire à Tous

The fight for climate justice reveals the inequalities associated with climate. In France, these are distinguished by population and territory, since people who are already vulnerable will be the first victims of climate change.

On the one hand, they will be economically vulnerable because the most insecure of them rely on climate-sensitive professions, such as agriculture, which is dependent on water resources. Industrial and construction workers will also be more exposed to risks during heatwaves.²⁶ On the other hand, climate change accentuates social vulnerabilities²⁷ (health, energy poverty, pollution, inequality in access to a healthy environment, to information, etc.).

It is necessary to integrate these vulnerabilities into public policies to combat injustice: by renovating housing, financing public transport, fighting energy poverty, and taking into account individuals' differentiated capacities.

Achieving climate and social justice is also a legal battle: it means giving polluting States and multinationals new responsibilities and compelling them to honour them. Each individual must have the right to engage in legal action as recommended by the European Court of Human Rights, to defend their rights, including environmental rights, and to protect the rights of present and future generations and recognise the rights of nature!



SDG 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Surfrider Foundation Europe

'The Ocean is a source of benefits and binds us all, let's learn how to protect it with commitment and passion.'

+200 000 000 people worldwide are threatened by sea level rise by around 1 metre by 2100 (Strauss et al., 2015). In metropolitan France, 850 000 people are currently living in 'low zones', at an altitude below the levels reached by the sea during extreme meteorological conditions.

Initiatives Océanes, beach clean-up operations involving people with disabilities.



© Surfrider Foundation Europe

Climate change directly threatens the most vulnerable people, especially next to the sea, as this compounds their vulnerabilities and risks. Thus, in our overseas territories, rising sea levels and violent storms are a reality. In France, the question of the resilience of the territory, through its terrestrial and marine ecosystems, is at the centre of the fight against climate change: coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass beds, wetlands and dune belts perform essential roles in reducing the impact of storms, rising sea levels and the risk of submergence.

Climate justice must be a priority and a vector for equality for all. Working to protect and sustainably manage the ocean and the shore, as well as the populations enjoying its bounty, means allowing all to access these benefits and this richness. An association like ours offers awareness-raising sessions tailored to the public, regardless of age, background, or social conditions, on the richness and benefits of the coastal space and the sea, its future and the risks associated with human activity and climate change. We thus work with various institutional partners such as the Ministry of Justice, or with various social integration organisations which help people with disabilities, to give them access to the beaches and to cultural activities through the Ocean Initiatives that we have been organising for over 25 years.



SDG 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Humanité et Biodiversité (Humanity and Biodiversity)

Social and environmental factors account for about 80 % of health inequalities.²⁸

The Marseille Climate March, 8 September 2018.



© Jean-Paul Pelissier / Reuters

Biodiversity continues to be eroded throughout the world, despite initial targeted sectoral public policies – some of which have already proven effective and given rise to commitments and initiatives by private actors. Nevertheless, this challenge is still often relegated to second place after climate (in the best-case scenario!).

However, the living world provides the resources and conditions essential to the well-being of our species: food, medicines (the majority of populations in rural areas use traditional plant-based medicines), water and air purification, pollination, mitigation of the impacts of extreme meteorological events, a framework for life or spirituality, etc. The poorest areas are thus the most affected by the loss of biodiversity.

The nearly two billion people who depend on the forest as a means of subsistence suffer directly from lasting deforestation or land grabs. In urban areas, facilitated access to 'green' or 'natural spaces' is still reserved for the most well-off populations – with charges being introduced or transport being increasingly necessary, further exacerbating social inequality – although today we know that they are necessary and have a positive impact on health and social relations.

Preservation of the biodiversity on which we all depend requires a political leap forward at all levels and global mobilisation of all actors involved. It is the key to the well-being of all of us and our best ally in the fight against – and adaptation to – global changes.



SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Human Rights League (LDH)

'We must make access to law and justice a reality.'



Incessant reforms, largely addressing routine litigation and justified by public performance and management, bypass access to a judge by developing conciliation, mediation and arbitration procedures that do not offer the necessary guarantees, particularly when they take the form of online dispute resolution and private and paying platforms with the risks of conflicts of interest and high costs. This avoidance of the judge is also found in the transfer of competences that were previously held by judges to adult welfare bodies or family allowance funds. The inequality of citizens' access to a judge is further exacerbated by the elimination of local courts, the specialisation of certain jurisdictions, the general requirement for compulsory representation by a lawyer in procedures in which the parties could defend themselves alone, and ever more complicated procedures for bringing cases to employment tribunals that discourage employees from initiating proceedings.

The right to effective remedy is a fundamental right. However, access to law and justice is increasingly difficult for a growing number of people, especially the most vulnerable. Legal aid, due to over-restrictive conditions on access to resources, does not ensure egalitarian access to legal professionals and the courtroom.



SDG 17: Partnerships to achieve the goals

Coordination SUD (Southern coordination)

USD 147 000 000 000 is the net total amount of public development aid that was paid out by the OECD-DAC countries in 2017

Vs

€ 180 000 000 000, which is the estimated figure for the annual shortfall due to tax evasion by the transnational undertakings established in those countries.

Mobilisation Action by French NGOs in favour of an increase in French Official Development Assistance (ODA) from a barge moored in front of the Ministry of Finance in Paris, 2011.



© Coordination SUD

Public and private investments, world trade, access to technology, debt, etc. The areas covered by SDG 17 are so diverse due to its nature that each may be addressed specifically through the prism of the fight against inequality. Here, we focus on the first two

targets of this structural goal, with a view to addressing the inequalities BETWEEN countries (targets 10.6, 10.a and 10.b). In this regard, the confrontation between the estimated amount of tax evasion depriving developing countries of the resources due to them (17.1 – mobilisation of national resources) and the flows of ODA is particularly alarming, especially given that the economic actors responsible are often from the main donor countries. Who are the first victims of this situation? The most vulnerable, as usual, as many States are incapable of providing basic services to their population. How can we avoid giving with one hand and taking with the other, thereby ensuring that industrialised countries have a consistent development policy (17.14)?

In order to reduce illegal and/or aggressive fiscal practices worldwide, the solutions are known: require transnational groups to present country-by-country reports, condemn tax haven practices, develop international technical cooperation to build the capacities of tax administrations in developing countries to levy taxes, reform governance of the fight against tax evasion, which has mainly been addressed at European and OECD level (excluding developing countries from the negotiations) through the creation of a UN fiscal body, etc.

Grist to the mill for France, which has made the fight against inequality the main pillar of its presidency of the G7 in 2019, and whose concrete proposals echoed strong demand from developing countries, that Macron could take up on the podium at the United Nations in September!

CONCLUSION

In this report, we have taken the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals to show the extent to which inequalities are multidimensional. Social, economic, digital, democratic, urban, environmental, etc., they are present in all of the structures governing our society. These inequalities often overlap and reinforce each other, dragging the most vulnerable into an inegalitarian spiral from which they struggle to escape. Thus, socially and economically precarious populations are also victims of environmental injustice, such as inequality of access to environmental resources, inequality in exposure to environmental risks and inequality in resilience in the face of environmental damage. Furthermore, social inequality and inequality of access to resources, particularly energy or quality food, result in health inequality. Research has shown, for example, that the most inegalitarian countries are also those with the highest rates of chronic non-communicable diseases, such as cardiovascular diseases, and obesity (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2013).

If the findings on the state of inequality in France presented in this report are worrying, all of the contributors also show that inequality is not irreversible and that the actions of NGOs on the ground contribute to their reduction. Nevertheless, the contributors would also like to reiterate that a sustainable reduction of inequalities cannot be achieved without public action and disruptive policies. Which public policies should be framed to mitigate inequalities in all its forms?

To reduce inequality, public action should focus on three main areas: firstly, reducing inequality means reinforcing the welfare state by adapting its functions to ecological crises and creating an ecological vulnerability branch within the social security system (Laurent, 2014). Indeed, if the welfare state establishes rights to solidarity in the face of risks, it must then protect the population from environmental risks, because the well-being of any individual depends in part on their living conditions in the environment.

Secondly, establishing a progressive social and ecological taxation system, i.e. one that differentiates between incomes by redistributing a share of the revenue to the poorest households in the form of compensation. For the social and ecological taxation system to be efficient and fair, it is also necessary to eliminate the tax loopholes and subsidies on fossil fuels. The latter are effectively a significant fiscal lever with which to reduce inequality, because the amounts saved could be reallocated to social security (Chancel, 2017). In France, these subsidies totalled € 7 800 000 000 in 2017. A share of the revenue released by their elimination could be used to finance the new ecological risks taken into account by social security and therefore to finance the social and ecological welfare state.

Finally, any sustainable reduction in inequality implies increasing public investment in priority sectors such as education, transport, sustainable agriculture and energy retrofit. In France, as in many

developed countries, public wealth is reducing, States are becoming poorer, falling into debt and limiting these investments, necessary as they are to reduce inequality. In France, the share of the national heritage represented by public heritage (State-owned buildings, land and shares in undertakings) stood at 3 % in 2015 as opposed to 17 % in 1980 (World Inequality Lab, 2018). The French public capital continues to break down with the PACTE law (Action plan for business growth and transformation), which now permits the State to transfer its shares in large undertakings in which it has hitherto been the main shareholder, such as Aéroports de Paris. There are a number of solutions available to reverse this trend and which have been implemented in the past by States in heavy debt, notably debt relief or cancellation.²⁹

The Sustainable Development Goals are a relevant tool for the task of leadership in these three priority areas for public action, in that they allow us to think about public policies to combat inequality in a non-siloed way. By contributing to 'embeddedness',³⁰ as Polanyi coined it, namely integrating ecological, social, political and economic challenges, the SDGs allow us to improve our knowledge of potential conflicts or synergies in the simultaneous reduction of different types of inequality and ultimately improve the effectiveness of actions implemented by the State, NGOs and all other actors committed to an ecological and inclusive transition.

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.

¹⁵ Ipsos-Secours Populaire Français Barometer 2018.

¹⁶ French Institute for Public Health Surveillance (INVS), 2007.

¹⁷ Insee, 2013.

¹⁸ French National Institute of Health and Medical Research (Inserm), 2014.

¹⁹ Report of the French general council for the environment and sustainable development (CGEDD), dated June 2015.

²⁰ French national child protection observatory (ONPE) 2016.

²¹ Definition of energy poverty taken from Law 90-449 of 31 May 1990.

²² Households whose incomes are less than the third decile.

²³ Households living in energy poverty spend an average of € 1 925 each year on energy in their dwelling, compared to the national average of € 1 584.

²⁴ For an exhaustive bibliographical review, please refer to the ONPE study (2017): Consequences, usages and costs incurred as a result of energy poverty.

²⁵ Mutual agricultural fund.

²⁶ Jean Jouzel, Agnès Michelot, La justice climatique: enjeux et perspectives pour la France (Climate Justice: challenges and perspectives for France). Report and opinion of the Economic, social and environmental council, editions of the Official Journals, September 2016.

²⁷ Catherine Larrère (dir.), Les inégalités environnementales (Environmental inequalities), Paris, Puf-Vie des idées, 2017, 104 p.

²⁸ National Strategy for Health and Environment.

²⁹ See the work of the World Inequality Lab researchers.

³⁰ The notion of embeddedness was first proposed by Karl Polanyi, in The great transformation - 1944 and refers to integration of the economy (and dependence on it) in the social system.



Created in 1992 after the first Rio Earth Summit, **Association 4D** is a citizen think-tank that aims to build knowledge and raise awareness on sustainable development, to facilitate the networking of actors in order to contribute to the implementation of France's international commitments related to sustainable development. It completes this mission through the organization of debates and conferences, the dissemination of information and experiences, capacity-building sessions and educational activities towards citizens, NGOs, local authorities, local and national policy-makers, and private actors.

Created in 2008, **wecf France** aims to strengthen the capacities of women through the development of locally-based projects. Its activities are based on three pillars, all related to gender equality: the promotion of an environment free of toxic chemicals, the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, and the promotion of a circular economy.

The European-wide project **Make Europe Sustainable for All (MESA)** is coordinated by the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) and implemented in 15 European countries by 25 partners. It aims to raise citizens', CSOs', and policy-makers' awareness on the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the 193 Member states of the United Nations in 2015. At the core of the project are campaigns and advocacy on inequalities, sustainable agriculture, gender equality, climate change, migration and sustainable consumption and production. This report was produced as part of the **Fighting Inequalities** in Europe campaign of the project, and contributes as well as the global **Faces of Inequality** campaign, which gives social exclusion, poverty and discrimination a face.

#SDGS4All ■ <https://makeeuropesustainableforall.org> ■ <https://makeeuropesustainableforall.org/fight-inequalities>
<https://gcap.global/faces-of-inequality>