

Equal opportunities: *myth or reality?* - Annual report on the state of France in 2025

FABIENNE ROUCHY

Summary of the opinion

In France, equal opportunities is an ideal that underpins many public policies aimed at reducing inequalities in several areas of public and private life. A credible political objective for some, a misleading ideology for others: where do we stand in France in 2025?

This is the subject of the 2025 edition of the Annual Report on the State of France (RAEF), which reveals growing pessimism among French people and a social determinism that is still prevalent in society. The ESEC identifies courses of action aimed at reversing this trend in the long term and reducing social divisions. The RAEF 2025 is based on three components:

- **A third edition ESEC-Ipsos survey on the state of France and the French people**
- **Nine analyses of public policies through the lens of equal opportunities**
- **An analysis of 16 socio-economic indicators**

What is the Annual Report on the State of France (RAEF)?

Submitted each year by the ESEC to the Government and Parliament, the RAEF is the country's social, economic and environmental barometer. It provides an in-depth analysis of French society, including its developments, balances, divisions and tensions.

Acting as a mirror held up to the country by its civil society organisations, it notes what has changed over the course of a year, what could or should change, and proposes solutions and public policy changes to address these issues.

THE RAPPORTEUR

Fabienne Rouchy
fabienne.rouchy@lecese.fr • (33)1 44 43 64 12

Fabienne Rouchy sits on the ESEC as chair of the CGT group. As confederal secretary, she sits on the CGT's confederal bureau, where she monitors environmental issues.

Key findings from the third edition of the *ESEC-Ipsos 2025 barometer*

Widespread pessimism, fuelled by the political situation and everyday concerns

In 2025, French people are expressing record levels of pessimism about the state of the country and their personal future. 74% of them say they are pessimistic about the state of France, an increase of 11 points in one year. This gloom also extends to their own situation: 40% of French people are pessimistic about their personal future (+4 points in one year), while 71% are pessimistic about the future of the planet and nature (+4 points).

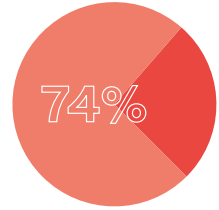
This climate of concern can be explained in part by recent political instability, which ranks third among concerns, cited by 32% of respondents (+8 points compared to last year). The top two concerns are everyday issues: health and that of their loved ones comes first (37%, down 3 points), closely followed by purchasing power (34%, stable).

Increasingly visible and felt inequalities of opportunity

The RAEF 2025 reveals that equal opportunities remain a myth for the majority of French people. Two-thirds of them (66%) say they have personally experienced at least one situation of inequality of opportunity, i.e. having had limited access to opportunities available to others, for reasons beyond their control. Women, people under 35 and single-parent families are particularly affected by these inequalities.

More worryingly, this perception extends to public policies, which are supposed to promote greater equality of opportunity: 7 out of 10 French people believe that these policies are ineffective or even exacerbate inequalities.

This feeling is even more pronounced among people who believe they have personally experienced unequal opportunities (53%) and those whose purchasing power does not cover their basic needs (52%).



74% of French people are pessimistic about France's future (+11 points in one year)



1 in 10 French people believe that equal opportunities are a reality in France.

Five areas for *reducing inequality*

The ESEC committees contributed extensively to the report, drawing in particular on the recommendations of recently adopted opinions covering a wide range of public policies. The proposals set out in the RAEF focus on five key areas.

1. Heritage

The richest 10% of households hold 60% of net wealth. The share of inherited wealth in total household wealth has never been higher (60%), significantly hindering social mobility: inequalities are passed down from generation to generation. Rising property prices and recent tax reforms have benefited the wealthiest 1%.

What can be done? The ESEC's proposals:

- **A more progressive wealth tax;**
- **Better organisation of the debate and deliberations with all stakeholders in order to bring these reforms to fruition.**

2. Education

Every year, 10% of a cohort leaves the school system without a qualification. This proportion is five times higher among children of manual workers than among those of managers. Yet qualifications are a major determinant of life trajectories.

What can be done? The ESEC's proposals:

- **Reducing class sizes;**
- **Combating school dropout rates;**
- **Improving access to healthcare and social and psychological support for pupils;**
- **Better recognition of the skills acquired.**

3. The world of work

Opportunities for access to employment are uneven across regions: northern and eastern France account for 78% of industrial job losses.

Factory closures have a domino effect on the entire local economic ecosystem, which weighs heavily on training and employment opportunities.

What can be done? The ESEC's proposals:

- A coordinated industrial strategy between the State, industry and local authorities;
- Strengthening training programmes that meet the needs of businesses;
- Enhancing the status of predominantly female occupations;
- Rigorous monitoring of public aid to ensure that it promotes employment and reduces inequalities.

4. The ecological transition

12 million people were living in energy poverty in 2022. In rural areas, dependence on cars remains high, while sustainable and affordable alternatives remain insufficient. Inequalities in the face of natural disasters, a consequence of climate change, are a growing concern, with the insurance system under strain threatening to reduce risk coverage.

What can be done? The ESEC's proposals:

- Sufficient budget and resources to support regions and economic actors;
- Financial aid targeted at those with the lowest incomes;
- Development of sustainable mobility in all regions;
- Involving citizens in the transition to avoid exclusion.

5. Territorial inequalities

They severely compromise equal opportunities, particularly in **priority neighbourhoods (QPV), rural areas and overseas territories**, where access to housing, healthcare, education, transport and infrastructure remains inadequate.

Added to this are fewer opportunities for access to employment. In these areas, it is mainly young people who are affected by the lack of equal opportunities and economic opportunities.

What can be done? The ESEC's proposals:

- Strengthening public services in the regions;
- Developing a genuine policy of republican equality;
- Guaranteeing a common set of social rights throughout the country in line with the needs of the population.