

# Equality at risk from simplification

By [Françoise Milewski](#) and [Hélène Périvier](#)

## Legislating to promote equality

The laws on equality in pay and in the workplace have come a long way since 1972, from the affirmation of the principle of equality to the production of a detailed numerical diagnosis that puts flesh on the bones of inequality (via the Comparative Situation Reports that have been drawn up since 1983 under the Roudy law) as well as to the duty to negotiate. The 2006 law paved the way for hitting recalcitrant companies with financial penalties, as set out in an article in the 2009 law on pensions. There were numerous attempts to limit the scope of the law up to 2012, when things were more or less clarified: companies are now obliged to produce a CSR, which reports annually on the state of inequality in well-defined areas; they must then conduct negotiations on occupational equality and equal pay and, if there is no agreement, they are required to take unilateral action. There are exhaustive controls, with agreements or plans to be filed with the government (no longer on a one-off basis as in the first formulations of the implementing decree). Companies that fail to comply with the law are put on notice to remedy this on pain of financial penalties of up to 1% of payroll.

The duty to negotiate entails collective management of the issue. Since 2012, the number of agreements signed has increased, as have formal notices and sanctions. While the content of the agreements and plans is often too general, it's a start. The framework law of 4 August 2014 on equality has complemented and strengthened these arrangements.

## Simplification: naïveté or retreat?

On the occasion of the Rebsamen bill on social dialogue, this long legislative process is suddenly being called into question under the pretext of simplification. In the bill's initial version, the requirement to produce a detailed diagnosis in a CSR is gone, having melted into the company's single database. The duty to negotiate on occupational equality also disappears, integrated into other negotiations (quality of life at work).

Given the extent of the reaction (associations, individuals, unions, researchers, etc.), the three ministries concerned issued a statement reaffirming certain principles, including that "it shall continue to be obligatory to transmit all the information that is currently found in the CSR". Amendments will be tabled to that effect. But nothing is settled. The gender indicators remain integrated into the single database, so the CSR loses its specificity. Negotiations that focus on equality are not restored, and their frequency remains unclear (annual? triennial?). Uncertainty remains.

Whatever the outcome of the parliamentary debate that is starting up on social dialogue, business has been given the signal that equality policy can be challenged, that previous requirements are ultimately not all that imperative, and that the measures taken in recent years can be relativized in the name of simplification.

If, by leaving it up to the social partners to negotiate on gender equality, this issue had emerged on its own and led to significant progress, no law on the subject would have been necessary. It was in response to inertia and persistent inequality that constraints were imposed on companies. It is because our society needs to make gender equality a fundamental principle that laws, coupled with constraints, were approved. The complexity of the social dialogue on this subject reflects the resistance of the different parties. This simplification is at best naive, and at worst a refusal to come up with public policy to promote equality.

In the field of equality, vigilance is vital. Removing the constraints means going back on the principle of equality. A desire for equality requires clear, ongoing political will: continuity and coherence in public policy is crucial.

This is the meaning of a statement by men and women researchers that was published on the *Les Echos* website on 19 May.

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# Women's employment and unemployment: decreasing inequality?

By [Françoise Milewski](#)

The deterioration of the labour market since the start of the crisis has hit men and women differently. Recent trends show that adjustments are being made in different ways. Gender inequalities are producing differentiated trends in employment and unemployment, which is leading in turn to specific forms of inequality.

Since spring 2008, category A job searches [\[1\]](#) have increased for both men and women, but much more for the former (93% against 60%). The trend was more uneven for men under the influence of the business and public policy cycles, especially partial unemployment measures.

Men jobseekers have outnumbered women jobseekers since November 2008. In December 2014, men represented 52.9% of jobseekers. But this breakdown is close to their respective

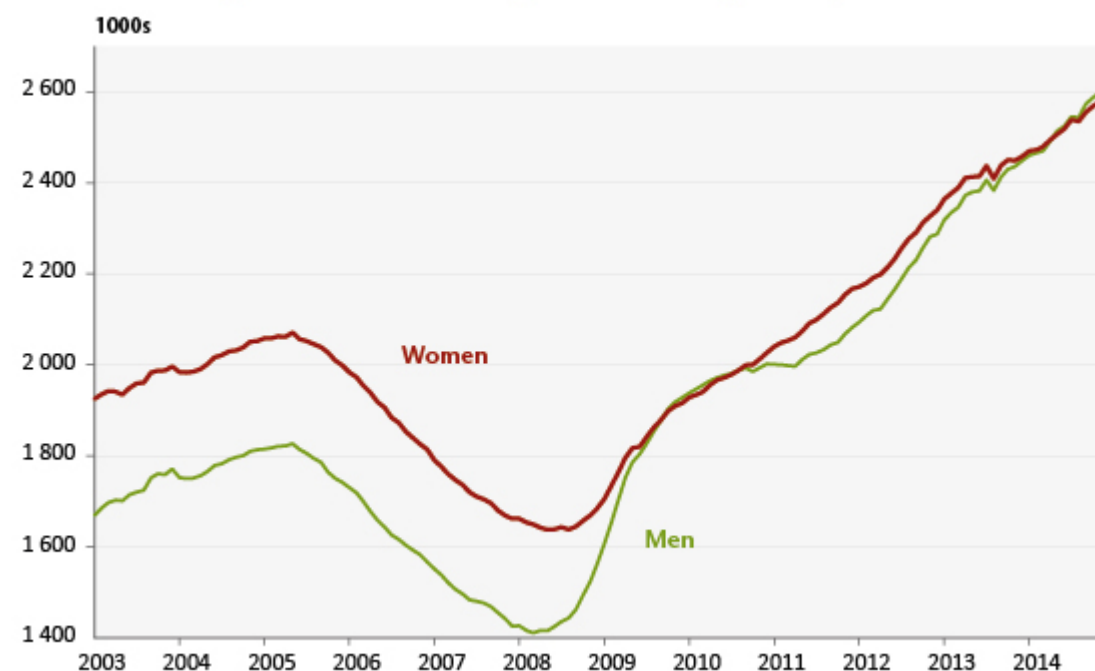
shares in the labour force and in employment. It is the previously existing situation that was abnormal: women, a minority on the labour market, had been a majority in category A unemployment.

Despite this, job searches by those on low hours [\[2\]](#), that is to say, people who have a part-time job but are registered at the job centre because they want to work more, are mostly by women (55.4%); this proportion has not changed much from before the crisis. Women are also over-represented in category B, short-term low-hours jobs. The increase in job applications from those on low hours was slower and less uneven than those in category A. It was also less differentiated by gender.

Overall, if we take into account demands for jobs from categories A, B and C, there have been slightly more men jobseekers than women since summer 2014 (50.2% in December 2014). This is a new feature of the labour market (Figure 1).

This characteristic holds true for those who are under age 25 and age 25 to 49. In contrast, more women over the age of 50 are unemployed than men, due to the high level of job applications from those working low hours.

**Figure 1. Demands for jobs from Categories A, B and C**



Source: DARES.

## **The impact of the lack of gender diversity of professions and employment sectors**

These trends are due to changes in employment. Women are concentrated in the service sector, and men more in industry and construction. But the greatest job losses have occurred in industry and construction. The services, which are traditionally less cyclical, have seen fewer job losses, and even some job creation in a few years (from 2010 to 2012 and then in 2014) if interim work is reassigned to the user sectors. This job creation has been on a small scale, but women's employment has suffered less from the crisis, or at least in a different way. It fell in 2009, then increased slightly, and then stabilized. This is of course a break in the trends for growth rates in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, but there is a clear difference with men's employment, which fell significantly in 2009 and again in 2012 and 2013. The 1980s and 1990s were already not favourable years for men's employment.

Single-sex trades result from the gender-biased school experience and job training, and reinforce this in return. This explains why there are such great differences in job opportunities between sectors. Service jobs, particularly personal services, are the preserve of women: their supposedly "innate" skills lead them to do in the commercial sphere what they are already doing in the family sphere: upbringing, educating, caring for others, cleaning, etc.

Inequalities in career guidance thus have a "positive" counterpart in employment, at least if we confine ourselves to the volume of jobs. But the poor quality of certain jobs and their under-valuation also stems from this.

## **A trend in employment rates favouring women**

The participation and employment rates can be linked with the unemployment rate (according to the ILO [\[31\]](#)) in order to

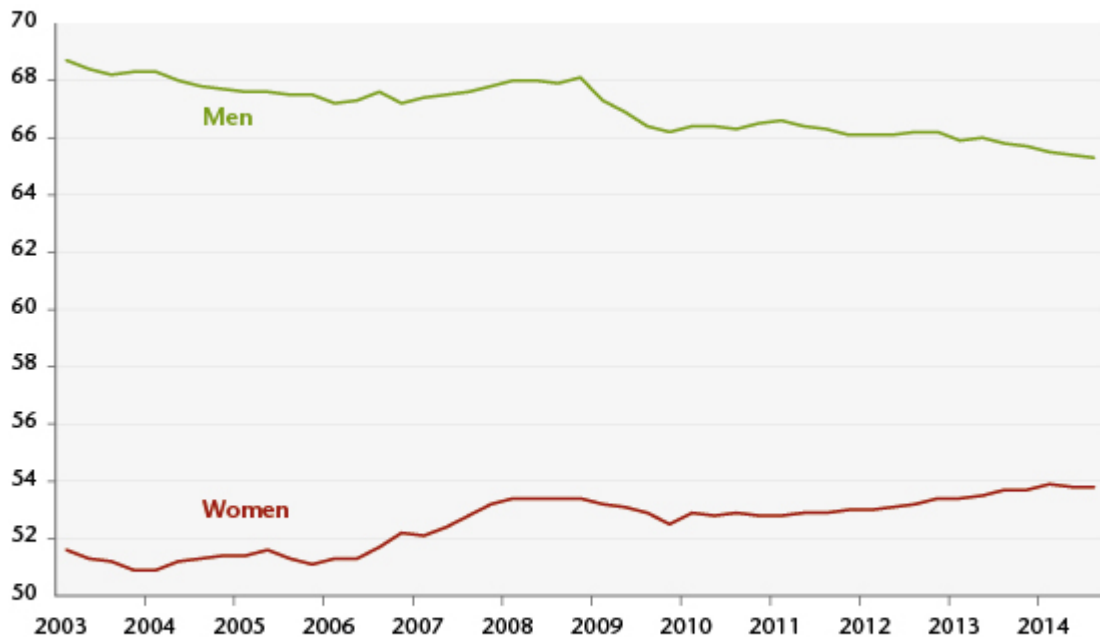
clarify both the differences between women and men and the profound differences by age group.

Taking all ages combined, women have increased their labour force participation rates over the period 2008-2014 (2.3 points). Their employment rate fell between 2008 and 2010 and then recovered to exceed its pre-crisis level. The unemployment rate thus rose sharply in the initial period of the crisis, then stabilized before rising again since early 2012, with the increase in the employment rate remaining lower than in the participation rate. The full-time employment rate at first declined and then stabilized, while the rate of part-time employment rose slightly. The share of part-time employment is up from early 2008, but only by 1 point.

With respect to men, the participation rate increased very slightly (+0.6 point) while the employment rate decreased significantly (-2.1 points), resulting in the greater increase in unemployment. The decline in men's employment rate is associated essentially with full-time employment. As the level of part-time employment is still very low, its increase has had little impact on the overall picture. The share of part-time employment for men did, however, rise from 5.5% in spring 2008 to 8% in the third quarter of 2014.

The employment rate in full-time equivalents is therefore diverging: the rate for men fell over the period, while women's rate, following a decline at the start of the crisis, has been picking up at a moderate but steady pace since 2011 (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Employment rate in full-time equivalents**



The employment rate in full-time equivalents is the ratio of the labour force (in jobs in full-time equivalents) to the total population.

Source: INSEE, job surveys, over age 15.

The “halo” around unemployment [\[4\]](#) has grown, particularly among men (+37.4% compared with +8.8%), but women are still over-represented in it (56.9% of the total at end 2014).

However, these averages reflect trends that differ greatly by age group. The stabilization of the male participation rate is the result of a decline for both young people and those aged 25-49 together with a rise for those over age 50. But the rise in the employment rate of older workers has not been sufficient to offset the decline in other categories. For women, only the participation rate for those aged 15-24 has been declining, and the higher employment rates of those over 50 has offset the decline in the rates for both young people and, more moderately, for those age 25-49.

### **Older employees have been especially affected**

The labour force participation, employment and unemployment of older workers are atypical because this age group's position has been weakened by the impact of the later retirement age. The trends in unemployment rates have been similar for both

genders, including in terms of volume. The participation rate has risen steeply since 2009: for men, this follows a long period of decline until 1995, then a rise due to the 1993 pension reform, followed by a renewed decline (moderate) between 2003 and 2008. The rise since 2009 petered out in 2013 and 2014 (due to the end-of-work measures affecting workers age 60 with lengthy careers, which in practice mainly affected men). For women, the increase has been continuous since 1990: after plateauing between 2005 and 2008, the rise picked up pace, without the tapering-off seen at the end of this period for men. The steadier increase for women reflected the rise of the participation rates of the younger generation in previous decades. The employment rates have not risen as steeply as the participation rates, as unemployment has increased for both sexes. The difficulty of finding a job has also pushed up part-time employment rates, especially for women. The share of part-time employment reached 10.2% for men at the end of the period (still significantly below women's rate: 33.4%).

The unemployment rate of 25-49 year-olds increased for both sexes, especially for men, leading to a convergence in rates since end 2012. However, men's activity rate declined slightly since the beginning of the crisis, in contrast to women's rate, which on average stabilized over the period. The fall in employment rates was very marked for men (-5.2 points), and less so for women (-1.7). This was also the case for full-time employment rates. The share of part-time employment has been increasing a little for men, but is still very low (just over 5%), while it has stabilized for women. The employment rates in full-time equivalents have changed very differently: the rate has fallen steeply for men, but only a little for women. The deterioration in the volume of employment is thus hitting men in particular. But the levels are still very different.

### **Young women do not benefit as much from their education**

The unemployment rates for men and women under age 25 converged in the early 2000s, in contrast to other age groups.



Since then, they have tended to evolve similarly. The level of the labour force participation rates differs significantly, with women's rate still about 7 percentage points below that of men. The participation rates have declined in tandem since the crisis began, as have employment rates. Young people who are unable to find jobs are prolonging their education.

It is the rate of full-time employment that has declined the most, especially for young men. The part-time employment rate failed to offset this decline: it remained stable for men, except since the end of 2012, when it rose slightly, while it decreased for women (but only moderately).

It is striking to see the large difference in the respective levels of part-time employment even at this age (about 4 points). But the cause is not parental duties! The reason needs to be sought instead in the nature of the jobs associated with different professions and industrial sectors. Part-time work as a share of all employment came to nearly 35% for women at year-end, against 17% for men. This, however, is up sharply over the last six quarters. It is too early to say that this represents a rupture with previous trends, with the crisis leading young men to take jobs that they previously refused, or that they are shifting more towards service sector work that hasn't been hit as hard.

The level of training is to the advantage of women. Yet it is clear, first, that a diploma offers protection against unemployment and the crisis (the highest unemployment rates are among those with few or no qualifications), and second, that girls do better in school and on average graduate more frequently. How then is it possible to explain that the unemployment rate is equivalent for men and women? An INSEE study on career starts was conducted in 2010 over the period 1984 to 2008 [\[5\]](#). It showed that in the early 1980s significantly more women were unemployed relative to men during the initial five years of working life, but that the gap has narrowed, with the unemployment rates converging in

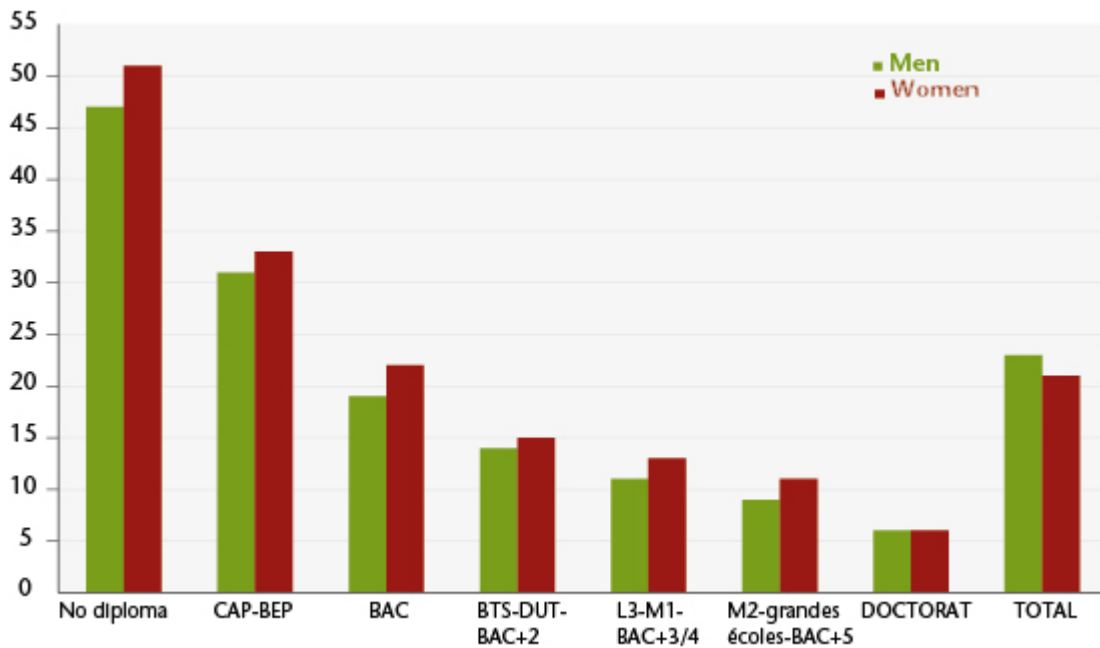
2002. In 2007 and 2008, the female unemployment rate had fallen even lower than that of men at career start, thanks to the rise in their educational level. For the same level of training, young men usually fare better on the labour market: young women still tend to have higher unemployment rates and lower salaries because of the educational specialties they have chosen. The INSEE estimated that for identical degrees, specialties and job lengths, women's risk of unemployment was 7% higher than for men during their initial years of work.

What about since the crisis? The CEREQ conducts work surveys on the future of young people leaving the education system. The last of these "Generation surveys" was conducted in 2013 on the 2010 generation[\[6\]](#). It shows a worsening situation due to the crisis and very sharp differences by degree level. In 2013, three years after leaving school, 22% of young people were still hunting for work. This is the highest level ever seen in the CEREQ surveys. The increase over the 2004 generation was 16 points for young people without degrees and 3 points for long-term higher education graduates.

Better-educated women are standing up to the crisis better. For the 2010 generation (contrary to the 2004 generation), the employment rate for men decreased so as to match women's rate, and the unemployment rate for women is lower than that for men. Young men are more exposed to long-term unemployment. Women's relative advantage is due to their higher level of schooling, which has risen more than that for men.

But there are persistent inequalities in the labour market, to the disadvantage of women: for comparable schooling at any level (from non-graduates to high school diploma +5 years, except the PhD level), the unemployment rate for women is higher than for men (Figure 3). Thus, women's lower level of unemployment is due only to their higher level of education, which does not have a full impact.

Figure 3. Unemployment rate at 3 years for the 2010 generation



Source: CEREQ.

### A reconfiguration of inequality

The inequalities between women and men are shifting, but persistent. Unemployment has increased less among women during the crisis than among men. This is due, first, to the sectoral distribution of their jobs (especially in the service sector) and to single-sex trades. Second, raising the average level of education has enabled women to withstand the crisis better, but the magnitude of this effect is lower than it should be. It is therefore not enough to wait for time to do its work: even among the young generations, there is still discrimination in hiring and in the initial years of working life. Unless, of course, we await a time (hypothetical and hardly desirable) when generations of highly skilled women will exist side by side with generations of unskilled men, and labour market inequalities finally diminish...

Job quality is also a real challenge: part-time work is spreading among men, especially the older and younger age groups, but it is still particularly widespread among women, who continue to assume most parental duties. But part-time work is also more common among women under age 25 who are not

yet in this situation.

Service jobs, particularly personal services, offer opportunities for the less skilled, but often part-time. Do we really want women to more readily accept “poor” jobs?

What is taking place is, therefore, a reconfiguration: women are improving their educational level, and the increasing numbers of them with higher qualifications are becoming a stable part of the workforce. However, they benefit less from their training, not only in terms of their salary and career progression, but even when they first begin their working lives, including in terms of employment and unemployment. Less-qualified women are at a particular disadvantage and form the core of the “precariat”, which is growing. Deregulating the labour market tends to amplify inequalities by forcing those in a weaker position on the labour market to accept part-time work with reduced hours on a large scale. So it is not enough to wait for inequalities to disappear or even diminish.

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[\[1\]](#) Category A: Job seekers registered at the French Pôle emploi job centre who are unemployed and required to conduct a positive job search.

[\[2\]](#) Job seekers registered at the French Pôle emploi job centre who are required to conduct a positive job search and have worked fewer hours (78 hours or less during the month) for category B, or more hours but less than full time (more than 78 hours in the month) for category C.

[\[3\]](#) An unemployed person within the meaning of the International Labour Office (ILO) is a person of working age (15 or older) who has not worked, even for one hour, during the given week, is available for work within two weeks, and has begun an active job search in the previous month (or found a job that starts within three months). The unemployment rate

is the ratio between the number of unemployed and the number of people in employment (employed or unemployed).

[4] The halo around unemployment includes people who do not have jobs and want to work but who are not considered unemployed by ILO standards as they are not available to work within two weeks and / or are not seeking work.

[5] “Femmes et hommes en début de carrière. Les femmes commencent à tirer profit de leur réussite scolaire” [Women and men at the start of the career. Women are beginning to benefit from their success at school], Alice Mainguené and Daniel Martinelli, *Insee Première*, no. 1284, February 2010, [http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/document.asp?ref\\_id=ip1284](http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/document.asp?ref_id=ip1284).

[6] “Face à la crise, le fossé se creuse entre niveaux de diplôme” [In the face of the crisis, the gap is increasing between diploma levels], Christophe Barret, Florence Ryk, Noémie Volle, *Bref CEREQ* no. 319, March 2014, <http://www.cereq.fr/index.php/publications/Bref/Enquete-2013-a-upres-de-la-Generation-2010-Face-a-la-crise-le-fosse-se-creuse-entre-niveaux-de-diplome>.

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**An homage to Alain  
Desrosières, statistician,  
sociologist, historian and**

# philosopher of statistics

By [Françoise Milewski](#) and [Henri Sterdyniak](#)

Alain Desrosières has passed away, at the age of 72. An administrator at the INSEE, he had been editor of the journal *Économie et statistique*, then head of the Department of social studies, before working on the comparative analysis of Europe's statistical systems.

He was the troubled conscience of official statistics in France.

Alain's many books and articles traced the birth and growth of statistics. His articles discuss their scientific and social foundations. They highlight the links between statistical standards and the production of statistics, between the history of economic policy and statistical methods and categories, in the face of the trend to "naturalize" them. "The ways of thinking society, managing it and quantifying it are inseparable", he declared. Statistics cannot be separated from its use, and it evolves with changes in public policy. And so, for instance, he raised questions about "the quality of quantity".

Alain passionately lived and studied the contradictions of statistics, a tool for knowledge and a tool for governing. Are statistics in the service of democracy, helping society to better understand itself, or of the State, helping it to better achieve its goals? And this State, which organizes and finances the statistical system, itself has two faces: the welfare state, an instrument of resistance to market forces, as well as a State in the service of a social formation shaped by capitalism.

Statistics measures and classifies. But is it a neutral scientific discipline, or does it express the vision that society has of itself at a given point, especially since it

must rely on administrative sources that are themselves not neutral? Should it base itself on people's everyday experience, or, on the contrary, challenge this in the name of science?

Can we account for different societies using the same categories? Alain has devoted great attention to the statistical harmonization that the European Union implies, with its risk of negating differences between societies.

He questioned the policy on indicators implemented by the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) and France's organic law on budget bills (LOLF). Policies define indicators that statisticians are supposed to measure, and then set targets for these indicators. But this practice is dangerous, as these indicators become the focus of the analysis even as the policies aim to improve the indicators, which tends to cause them to lose their significance.

Below we reproduce some snippets from his articles, as an invitation to read them in their entirety. The myth of the data that is indisputable because impartial, the unconditional respect in the face of indicators that, because quantified are thus indisputable, regardless of the methods, standards and conventions underpinning their calculation – all these are a constant threat for the social sciences, particularly economics. And for society.

Alain Desrosières took part in numerous meetings of statisticians in order to give his colleagues food for thought about their practices and their methods (see in particular the conference of 30 March 2011: "[Official statistics as a unique public good](#)", Workshop 3). He developed fertile links between statistical practice and sociologists, in particular Pierre Bourdieu and Bruno Latour.

He showed the influence of nomenclatures on the constitution of statistical information and, through that, on the

structuring of society (*Les Catégories socioprofessionnelles*, co-authored by Laurent Thévenot, La Découverte, Repères collection, 1988).

Alain leaves us a number of major works: *La politique des grands nombres, histoire de la raison statistique* (Editions La Découverte, Paris, 1993) and *L'argument statistique*, in two volumes: I: *Pour une sociologie historique de la quantification*, and II: *Gouverner par les nombres* (Les Presses des Mines ParisTech, Sciences sociales collection, Paris, 2008).

He leaves us his most recent work: "[Est-il bon, est-il méchant ? Le rôle du nombre dans le gouvernement de la cité néolibérale](#)" (*Nouvelles perspectives en sciences sociales*, volume 7, no. 2, May 2012).

Alain set an example as a modest but demanding intellectual who sought to put his professional experience and scientific efforts in the service of democracy.

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A few short excerpts from his writings:

"How can the contradiction be resolved between the ethos of the statisticians and taking feedback into account, even when it seems to them just an annoying obstacle to their mission, which they conceive of as 'providing unbiased reflections of reality'? It is not possible to isolate a moment of measurement that is independent of its uses, in particular the conventions that are the first step in quantification. The training of statisticians needs to be decompartmentalized and supplemented with the study of history, political science, the sociology of statistics, econometrics, probability, accounting and management. This program, inspired by the achievements of *Sciences Studies* (Pestre, 2006), could facilitate the inclusion of quantitative tools in social debates, without winding up in either *a priori* rejection or unconditional,



naïve respect for 'facts that are indisputable because quantified'."

[Est-il bon, est-il méchant ? Le rôle du nombre dans la cité néolibérale](#). Conclusion of a presentation to the seminar *L'Informazione Prima Dell'Informazione. Conoscenza E Scelte Pubbliche*, Milan Bicocca, 27 May 2010, *Nouvelles perspectives en sciences sociales*, volume 7, no. 2, May 2012.

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"Quantification has become a sign of objectivity, rigor and impartiality that is mobilized in a variety of situations, from political debate to scientific demonstration, and including business indicators and the measurement of public opinion. However, quantification, in its various statistical formats, is not content merely to provide a reflection of the world, but also creates new ways of thinking, representing, expressing and acting on it, through the power of its models and its procedures, its broad dissemination and its use in argumentation. This book shows how 'statistical argument' is historically constructed, and what the cognitive and social effects of quantification systems are today."

[Pour une sociologie historique de la quantification](#), Volume 1 of *L'argument statistique* (Les Presses des Mines Paris-tech, Sciences sociales collection, Paris, 2008), back cover.

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"Governments of men use and abuse the 'argument of statistics'. With the emergence of a neo-liberal state, public policy is increasingly relying on quantitative indicators that provide evaluations of the performance of different policy actions. The various 'winners' are broadcast widely (often under the Anglo-American rubric of 'benchmarking'), ranking high schools, universities, even nations. This rite of quantification, far from providing a neutral image of phenomena, transforms and performs them. This book offers

specific case studies, surveys of family budgets, planning commissions, local statistics and national accounts, analyzing the production of official statistics and their use by the public authorities. And it will be seen how statistics has imposed itself as both an evidentiary tool in the empirical sciences and a tool of government, in accordance with the intuition that Foucault had already presented in the 1970s under the name of 'governmentality'."

[Gouverner par les nombres](#), Volume 2 of *L'argument statistique* (Les Presses des Mines Paris-tech, Sciences sociales collection, Paris, 2008), back cover.

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"Major crises are of course times when statistics are mobilized intensively to express the gravity of the situation. But they are also times of great debate, during which the role of the state in the regulation and control of the economy is completely rethought. To each of these crises corresponds the emergence of new ways of quantifying the social world. New models of action imply new variables and new systems of observation.

Economic and political history from the 1880s to the present day has offered at least three (if not four) examples of such configurations, combining ways of thinking society, ways of acting on it, and statistics adapted to the times. The crisis of the 1880s prompted the great statistics on labour and employment. The crisis of 1929 was the source of Keynesian macroeconomic policies and national accounts. The crisis of the 1970s was thought about in the neoliberal categories of microeconomics, and led to state reforms focusing in particular on performance indicators. Finally, the two crises of the 2000s, ecological and then financial, will perhaps give rise to radically new ways of thinking and quantifying public action. A review of the way that a few somewhat older crises were experienced, and their impact on the use of official

statistics, may be useful for thinking about the magnitude of the changes that may result from these two recent crises.”

[“Crises économiques et statistiques, de 1880 à 2010”](#), *ParisTech Review*, 30 August 2010.