

Introduction

This work was compiled on the eve of the European elections and gathers the key statistical elements allowing a comparison between France's economic and social situation and that of its European Union partners. A perspective of this kind serves to identify the main trends, both common and divergent, that affect the Union as a whole. It is all the more important in that the Union, formed in 1958 of six countries, now has twenty-eight member States, with their varied histories and geographies, their different levels of economic development, and their disparate institutional and social structures. So as you can imagine, drawing comparisons has not been an easy task. This work follows on from the one published in 2008, the year in which France held the Presidency of the European Union.

Five reports focus on economic growth, inequality and poverty, the new European socio-economic categories, early school leavers, and foreign trade in food products. Twenty or so fact sheets then present summaries of issues related to population, living conditions, the labour market, and the economy.

The official statistics authorities regularly produce data enabling European comparisons. In particular, international data sheets are published in most of the thematic issues of the *INSEE Références* collection. Some of these documents are used here.

This work is for people who wish to gain a better insight into the European economies and the way France fits into the Union, whether they are students, teachers, researchers, public stakeholders or citizens, and provides them with objective background material for an informed contribution to democratic debate.

Happy reading!

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a vertical line extending downwards.

Jean-Luc Tavernier
Director-General of the INSEE