

12-month postdoctoral position in France
Aix Marseille University
SOCIOLOGY

Contract type : Postdoctoral contract

Contract duration : 12 months

Profile : Postdoc holding a PhD

Discipline : Sociology

Department : LPED – Population, Environment and Development Laboratory

PRESERVER 2 project – MAMP Waters: Reuse, Detection of Emerging Xenobiotics, Public Perception, Effects of Mixtures on Living Organisms & Sustainable Treatment Solutions

Topic: Scientific research, institutional concerns and public debates: the case of PFAS in the Aix-Marseille Provence metropolitan area

This postdoctoral research is part of PRESERVER 2, a large-scale interdisciplinary project funded by the Mediterranean Institute for Environmental Transition (ITEM) at Aix-Marseille University (<https://institut-item.univ-amu.fr/fr/node/321>). It involves a multidisciplinary consortium of the Aix-Marseille University laboratories LCE, IMBE, CEREGE and LPED.

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) occupy a special place within the broad field of contemporary pollution. International media coverage – notably the eighteen partners of the collaborative investigation “Forever Pollution Project” – recurring campaigns, particularly downstream of Lyon (Le Naour, 2025; Petit & Thomas, 2025) or at European level (led by Générations futures or Notre affaire à tous), the response of the French public authorities, which have introduced new regulations (such as the Act of 27 February 2025), and the organisation of scientific research (Chaudret et al., 2025) all help to bring to light chemical pollutants which, more often than not, remain largely hidden from view. A great deal of social science research highlights the social dynamics that render the effects and origins of industrial pollution invisible (Bécot & Le Naour, 2023; Boudia & Jas, 2015). The case of PFAS is therefore particularly worthy of study from a sociological perspective.

The research is set within the Aix-Marseille Provence metropolitan area, where the issue of PFAS receives little attention in the public sphere. In April 2026, an independent daily newspaper revealed PFAS contamination in the Crau aquifer, which supplies drinking water to thirteen municipalities. This led to a prefectural ban on drinking water consumption within the area of the major seaport of Marseille and to the diversion of a water intake. A public meeting was held on 24 June 2026, yet the announcement appears to have caused little stir.

A study will seek to understand why this announcement did not find local support to be debated more widely. If PFAS pollution remains confined, the aim will be to understand why by examining the key stakeholders involved (metropolitan authority, municipalities, prefecture, scientists, associations, etc.) through a qualitative study based on semi-structured interviews. Broader perceptions of water quality and of new wastewater treatment methods may also be explored through a quantitative survey of residents.

The postdoctoral researcher will:

- trace the history of public responses to PFAS pollution at various levels (European, French and local);
- compile a social science bibliography on the issues related to these pollutants;
- conduct a sociological survey using semi-structured interviews with the stakeholders concerned within the Aix-Marseille Provence metropolitan area, supported by an analysis of the local press;
- carry out a quantitative survey of a yet-to-be-defined group of users on perceptions of water quality and of the reuse of treated wastewater;
- help organise a discussion meeting.

Deliverables:

A summary report presenting the state of the art, the surveys carried out and the results, and a publication in a social sciences and humanities journal.

References:

- Bécot R., Le Naour G. (dir.). 2023. Vivre et lutter dans un monde toxique : violence environnementale et santé à l'âge du pétrole. Le Seuil.
- Boudia S., Jas N. 2015. Gouverner un monde contaminé. Les risques techniques, sanitaires et environnementaux. In C. Bonneuil, D. Pestre (dir.), Histoire des sciences et des savoirs, t. 3. Le siècle des technosciences, Seuil, pp. 380-397.
- Brown P. 1987. Popular epidemiology: community response to toxic waste-induced disease in Woburn, Massachusetts. Science, Technology, & Human Values, 12, 3/4, 78-85.
- Chaudret B., Donard O. F. X., Eisenstein O., Pietrykowski E., Rochet J. 2025. La pollution aux PFAS : état des lieux des connaissances et enjeux de société. Académie des sciences (France).
- Gillot C. 2025. Juger les pollueurs, rendre justice aux victimes des polluants éternels. Étude comparative du contentieux de la réparation en Europe et aux États-Unis. Écologie & Politique, 71(2), pp. 89-107.
- Le Naour G. 2025. Mesurer les pollutions industrielles et documenter les atteintes à la santé : des incertitudes chroniques au Sud de Lyon. In M. Dupré, J.-C. Le Coze (dir.), Risques industriels majeurs et environnements : défis pour les acteurs internes et externes, Presses universitaires du Septentrion, pp. 175-193.
- Petit K., Thomas V. 2025. Résorber l'ignorance, et après ? Savoirs journalistiques et mobilisations collectives sur les polluants éternels dans le sud lyonnais. Quaderni, 114(1), pp. 31-44.
- Victimes environnementales : reconnaître, réparer, résister. 2025. Écologie & Politique, (71).

o Qualifications, research field, professional skills:

Level of study: PhD in sociology, political science, ethnology and anthropology, or social geography.

Skills: the candidate must have the knowledge and skills required to apply a social science approach to a socio-environmental situation involving PFAS pollution. Knowledge of the issues surrounding this type of pollutant is desirable, as is a good command of standard sociological methods, both quantitative and qualitative. Interdisciplinary experience and/or curiosity, and engagement with other scientific disciplines, will be appreciated.

Soft skills: as the project is interdisciplinary, the successful candidate must be motivated and integrate complementary areas of expertise in a balanced way. They will work with the various partners of the PRESERVER 2 project, regularly present the progress of their work to the team and write a scientific article. They should demonstrate organisational skills, the ability to listen, dynamism and good communication skills.

o **Place of work:**

The successful candidate will join the LPED, Population, Environment and Development Laboratory (www.lped.fr), located on the Saint-Charles campus of Aix-Marseille University, in the centre of Marseille.

We offer:

The successful candidate will have an office for the full duration of the contract. They will be supervised by Carole Barthélemy (LPED) and will receive support from the LPED teams.

Working hours : Full-time

Date of publication : November 2026

Application deadline : 15 December 2026

Expected start date : March 2027

Gross salary: €2,616.35 or €3,062.56 depending on the length of professional experience since completing the PhD.

o **How to apply**

Send:

- Curriculum vitae
- Cover letter
- Letter of recommendation (welcome)

To:

Carole Barthélemy – carole.barthelemy@univ-amu.fr

Applications will be assessed and oral interviews (remote) conducted by a consortium of researchers from the PRESERVER 2 project: <https://institut-item.univ-amu.fr/fr/node/321>