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DRAFT REPORT

on women's poverty in Europe
(2021/2170(INI))

Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on women's poverty in Europe (2021/2170(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 2 and 3(3) of the Treaty on European Union,
- having regard to Articles 8, 9, 151, 153 and 157 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- having regard to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and in particular its provisions on social rights and equality between men and women,
- having regard to the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,
- having regard to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the principle of ‘leaving no one behind’, and, in particular, Goal 1 which seeks to end poverty, Goal 5 which seeks to achieve gender equality and improve living conditions for women, and Goal 8 which seeks to achieve sustainable economic growth,
- having regard to the EU’s growth strategy ‘Europe 2020’, in particular its objective of reducing the number of Europeans living below national poverty lines by 25 % by 2020, thereby lifting over 20 million people out of poverty, and the need to fully deploy Member States’ social security and pensions systems in order to ensure adequate income support,
- having regard to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention),
- having regard to Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation¹,
- having regard to Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers²,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 5 March 2020 entitled ‘A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025’ (COM(2020)0152),
- having regard to its resolution of 13 October 2005 on women and poverty in the

¹ OJ L 204, 26.7.2006, p. 23.

² OJ L 188, 12.7.2019, p. 79.
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European Union³,

- having regard to its resolution of 8 March 2011 on the face of female poverty in the European Union⁴,
- having regard to its resolution of 26 May 2016 on poverty: a gender perspective⁵,
- having regard to its resolution of 4 April 2017 on women and their roles in rural areas⁶,
- having regard to its resolution of 14 June 2017 on the need for an EU strategy to end and prevent the gender pension gap⁷,
- having regard to its resolution of 3 October 2017 on women’s economic empowerment in the private and public sectors in the EU⁸,
- having regard to its resolution of 15 November 2018 on care services in the EU for improved gender equality⁹,
- having regard to its resolution of 30 January 2020 on the gender pay gap¹⁰,
- having regard to its resolution of 21 January 2021 on the gender perspective in the COVID-19 crisis and post-crisis period¹¹,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 10 December 2019 entitled ‘Gender-Equal Economies in the EU: The Way Forward’,
- having regard to the report of 5 March 2020 by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) entitled ‘Beijing +25: the fifth review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States’,
- having regard to the report of 27 May 2020 by the International Labour Organization entitled ‘COVID-19 and the world of work. Fourth edition’,
- having regard to report of 15 July 2021 by Eurofound entitled ‘Upward convergence in gender equality: How close is the Union of equality?’,

³ OJ C 233E, 28.9.2006, p. 130.

⁴ OJ C 199E, 7.7.2012, p. 77.

⁵ OJ C 76, 28.2.2018, p. 93.

⁶ OJ C 298, 23.8.2018, p. 14.

⁷ OJ C 331, 18.9.2018, p. 60.

⁸ OJ C 346, 27.9.2018, p. 6.

⁹ OJ C 363, 28.10.2020, p. 80.

¹⁰ OJ C 331, 17.8.2021, p. 5.

¹¹ OJ C 456, 10.11.2021, p. 191.
PE699.337v02-00

- having regard to the study of December 2017 by Policy Department C: Citizens’ Rights and Constitutional Affairs of the Directorate-General for Internal Policies entitled ‘Gender perspective on access to energy in the EU’,
 - having regard to the 2019 and 2020 Gender Equality Index of the EIGE,
 - having regard to the position paper of June 2021 by Make Mothers Matter entitled ‘Mothers’ Poverty in the EU’,
 - having regard to the assessment of February 2021 of the European Anti-Poverty Network entitled ‘Working towards a Socially Inclusive and Poverty-proof Recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic’,
 - having regard to the study of May 2021 by the Policy Department for Citizens’ Rights and Constitutional Affairs of the Directorate-General for Internal Policies entitled ‘COVID-19 and its economic impact on women and women’s poverty’,
 - having regard to the study of 14 June 2021 of the European Parliamentary Research Service entitled ‘Gender equality: Economic value of care from the perspective of the applicable EU funds’,
 - having regard to the report of 25 February 2016 of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs on meeting the anti-poverty targets in light of increasing household costs (A8-0040/2016) and the opinion of the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality thereon,
 - having regard to Rule 54 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality and the opinion of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (A9-0000/2021),
- A. whereas women in the EU are disproportionately more affected by poverty and the risk of social exclusion than men, in particular women who experience intersectional forms of discrimination; whereas in 2020, the risk of poverty and social exclusion (AROPE) in the EU was higher for women (22.9 %) than men (20.9 %); whereas since 2017, the gender-poverty gap has increased in 21 Member States¹²;
- B. whereas since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the employment rate of women has even fallen more sharply than it did during the 2008 recession and has also resulted in a lower labour intensity, leading to significant increases in women’s poverty; whereas according to estimates for 2019 in the EU-27, women are particularly affected by the risk of poverty (AROP), with the poverty rate standing at 25.1 % before social transfers and 17.1 % after such transfers;
- C. whereas poverty in general, and thus also women’s poverty, is multidimensional, and therefore includes not only material deprivation, but also a lack of access to many

¹² European Institute for Gender Equality, ‘*Gender Equality Index 2020: Digitalisation and the future of work*’, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020.

different resources and even an inability to fully exercise the rights of citizenship;

- D. whereas although work in highly female-dominated sectors is essential and of high socioeconomic value, it is undervalued and lower paid than work in male-dominated sectors; whereas there is an urgent need to reassess the adequacy of wages in female-dominated sectors related to their social and economic value and to advance on minimum wages, minimum income and pay transparency in EU regulations;
 - E. whereas there is an increased risk of poverty and social exclusion among some groups of women such as single mothers, women above the age of 65, women with disabilities, women with low levels of education and women from migrant backgrounds;
 - F. whereas single-parent families are at greater risk of poverty and social exclusion and bear a higher probability of transmission of poverty over several generations; whereas 85 % of single parent families are headed by women; whereas in 2020, 42.1 % of the EU population living in single adult households with dependent children was at risk of poverty or social exclusion;
 - G. whereas investment in universal services, including care services, has a positive impact on women's fundamental rights;
 - H. whereas poverty also makes women more vulnerable to gender-based violence; whereas this includes disproportionate vulnerability to trafficking and sexual exploitation;
 - I. whereas women have a lower employment rate and are disproportionately highly represented in low-paid, precarious and dead-end job sectors; whereas the gender pay gap stands at 14.1 %;
 - J. whereas the pension entitlements gap averages at almost 30 % as a result of the imbalances created by persistent lifelong inequalities; whereas this pension gap means that women fall below the poverty line as they get older;
 - K. whereas the current EU and national taxation policies reinforce existing gender gaps; whereas these schemes reproduce traditional gender roles and disincentivise women from entering, remaining and in particular returning to the labour market;
 - L. whereas the current EU model of socio-economic governance is harmful to the EU's commitment to reduce inequalities and eradicate poverty, in particular women's poverty resulting from a lifetime of discrimination;
1. Calls on the Commission to develop an ambitious 2030 European anti-poverty strategy, with concrete targets for reducing poverty and a focus on ending women's poverty and the risk of intergenerational poverty;
 2. Underlines that women's poverty needs to be analysed from an intersectional approach, including migrant and ethnic origin, age, race and sexual or gender orientation; calls for the EIGE's Gender Equality Index to be incorporated into the social scoreboard; calls on the EIGE to provide data disaggregated intersectionally and by gender, and calls on the Member States to use this data in order to better address country-specific

challenges;

3. Calls on the Commission to put forward a ‘care deal for Europe’, which should take a holistic, gender-sensitive and lifelong approach to care while envisaging legislative measures and investment at EU level;
4. Stresses the pivotal role of women working in the social, care and retail sectors that keep our societies functioning, as shown by the COVID-19 crisis; calls for typically female-dominated work to be reassessed and revaluated and for cross-sector gender-neutral job evaluation tools to be developed and applied in order to better assess and more fairly remunerate female-dominated work;
5. Highlights that in order to tackle the multidimensionality of women’s poverty, it is necessary to overcome the segregation of unpaid domestic care work mainly performed by women and to introduce flexitime in order to allow women and men to better reconcile their professional life with their private life (time use policy);
6. Underlines the crucial role of high-quality public services in combatting women’s poverty, in particular services for early childhood education and care, or care for other dependent persons such as elderly people;
7. Calls on the Commission to mainstream gender into the EU’s climate change policies in order to ensure that the Fit for 55 package policies and the social climate fund are designed and implemented with a clear gender dimension and benefit women as equally as men;
8. Calls for the EU and the Member States to protect women living in energy poverty by providing a timely and coordinated response to address the long-term impact of the energy crisis; highlights that access to affordable utilities must be guaranteed to low-income households, and in particular older women and single mothers;
9. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to mainstream gender into all transport-related legislation, policies, programmes and actions and to include gender criteria and work-life balance in the design of mobility, housing and urban planning;
10. Urges the EU and its Member States to integrate a gender perspective into policies and practices that address homelessness, to develop a specific strategy to combat women’s homelessness and to ensure that services work appropriately and effectively to meet the needs of homeless women;
11. Calls on the Commission to propose proactive measures through the European agricultural fund for rural development to promote women’s employment and socio-economic development in rural areas;
12. Calls on the Commission to design a special programme to fight against women’s digital poverty in order to equip women with the necessary skills to operate safely in the digital environment;
13. Calls on the Member States to ensure that all new gender-fair fiscal policy, including

taxation, tackles and eliminates socioeconomic and gender inequalities in all their dimensions;

14. Calls on the Member States to take the gender dimension into account when reforming pension systems and adapting the retirement age and to consider the differences between the work patterns of women and men and the higher risk of discrimination of women in the labour market, in particular older women;
15. Underlines that gender mainstreaming has to be applied at all levels of the EU budgetary process in order to transform revenues and expenditures into social investment and to achieve gender equality and eliminate women's poverty;
16. Points out that the EU's fiscal capacity urgently requires the revision of the current economic and social governance so that it contributes to reaching gender equalities and ending female poverty and does not just include austerity measures;
17. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Poverty levels among women are higher than among men, having risen both in absolute terms and in comparison to figures for the male population. The statistics speak for themselves. In 2020, the risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE)¹³ in the EU was higher for women than for men (22.9% compared to 20.9%). At the same time, the gender-based poverty gap has widened in 21 Member States since 2017, while the disparity regarding those at risk of poverty (AROP) ¹⁴remains significant, having risen from 1.3% in 2019 to 2.5% in 2020¹⁵.

While the gender-based poverty gap is undeniably less than might be inferred from other disparities (regarding employment, pay or pensions), findings are affected by, on the one hand, the methods used to collect information and statistics and, on the other, an overly narrow definition of poverty. No account is taken of its multidimensional nature, thereby masking the structural factors that help perpetuate poverty among women from one generation to the next. In both cases, this reflects a lack of gender mainstreaming in statistical surveys, socio-economic analyses, political action and when evaluating policies. It is therefore a matter of urgency to factor in the gender perspective when compiling statistics on poverty and the risk of poverty.

Firstly, it must be remembered that, for the purpose of compiling poverty statistics, total household income is calculated and then divided between the consumption units or persons making up the household, assuming that each receives an equal share – with exceptions being made for correction coefficients linked to age and economies of scale – and that the family unit is free of internal conflict and discrimination. It must be remembered, however, that, in the words of Amartya Sen, laureate of the Nobel Prize in Economics, the family is a place of ‘cooperative conflict’. While members of the family with no income of their own are given access to its resources, establishing a cooperative dynamic, this takes place on an unequal basis, as does the distribution of tasks and available time, these being conditioned in particular by gender or age and constituting a potential source of conflict, discrimination and even violence.

Secondly, poverty is a highly complex phenomenon arising from many interconnected factors, not all of which are monetary in nature. This was the line of thought opened up by Amartya Sen and followed by Sabina Alkire and James Foster in creating the multidimensional poverty index. Official European statistics have also taken this on board in developing the AROPE index, which shows the risk of poverty and social exclusion. For this purpose, indicators such as low work intensity and severe material privation are factored in, together with monetary earnings. However, other aspects emerging from academic research and the findings of

¹³ [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:At_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion_\(AROPE\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:At_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion_(AROPE))

¹⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:At-risk-of-poverty_rate

¹⁵ <https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do>

international organisations such as the World Bank are being neglected. These include factors such as time poverty, which affects women in particular and which is caught up in a vicious circle with material poverty and deprivation.

In other words, material poverty is being compounded by ‘time poverty’, which is defined as the absence of available time after deducting the time necessary for paid employment and unpaid work (caregiving), study or other basic necessities of life such as looking after oneself. Such multitasking by women often leads to depletion through social reproduction, leaving them exhausted by their multiple roles and unable to secure a decent life for themselves. Time poverty deprives them of the time or autonomy necessary to ensure decent working conditions, financial autonomy, training or access to the basic resources and minimum services that would guarantee them a healthy life and enable them to participate fully in their communities and societies.

Specific public policies are needed to tackle the structural gender inequalities that cause, exacerbate or perpetuate women's poverty. On the one hand, society expects women to shoulder the burden of caregiving. The least that can be said regarding the resulting gender disparity is that women continue to devote more hours and days to this task than men. Not only does this limit the amount of time a woman is able to devote to training, retraining, employment or additional availability for work, but it also panders to gender stereotypes that tacitly assign to women a role on the labour market that takes second place to their family responsibilities, effectively excluding them from certain sectors, professions or posts. This leads to horizontal and vertical segregation at the workplace, and encourages gender inequalities on the labour markets and in the home to feed off each other. Similarly, women have always been and still are traditionally expected, as a matter of course, to perform certain tasks free of charge. As a result, such labour, where remunerated, can command only low wages and precarious conditions of employment, since the necessary skills, which have been acquired without formal training and have come to be regarded as the natural preserve of the female sex, are undervalued and inadequately remunerated. Let us not forget that, although value and price are not synonymous, in market-based societies such as ours, value also means product quality, as measured by the amount of money or equivalent sacrifice required to obtain it. A better distribution of caregiving services must also be accompanied by the upgrading of care-related occupations in a bid to achieve a more balanced distribution of time and work in the domestic and business spheres, which is essential in eliminating gender inequalities and combating the resulting structural poverty levels among females.

The commitment to quality social services and their universal availability is essential to ensure that resources can also be accessed by those living in households with low work intensity, mainly older women living alone or single mothers with dependent children.

Female poverty, which is heavily concentrated in households headed by single mothers, has a direct impact on those whose lives are most severely circumscribed by penury, namely children. 85% of single-parent families are headed by women¹⁶ and, in 2020,

¹⁶ <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/poverty-gender-and-lone-parents-eu>
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42.1% of the EU population living in single-parent households with dependent children were at risk of poverty or social exclusion¹⁷

The material conditions of each household, characterised by differing access to resources and lack of skills, feed off each other to generate an exponential increase in poverty levels, especially for children, effectively depriving them of any real opportunities in adult life. Place of birth, family income, gender and disability are major factors in determining children's current well-being and later achievements in adult life. These also depend on economic conditions, public policies and the extent of welfare provision, together with prevailing social standards and gender attitudes.

Failure to develop skills in childhood cannot always be offset in adulthood and those concerned may remain affected by this for the rest of their lives. At the same time, poverty and inequality are neither inevitable nor the individual responsibility of each person. Appropriate, comprehensive and coherent public policies are needed, particularly those directly affecting children and seeking to address structural gender inequalities.

The purpose of the European Child Guarantee, which has taken up the gauntlet thrown down by the European Parliament, is to ensure that every child at risk of poverty and social exclusion in Europe is given access to the most basic services, such as health and education. However, regardless of the size of its budget, this programme will be unable to achieve the expected transformations in the absence of specific action to tackle poverty among women and bring about other more far-reaching changes.

Violence against women is both a cause and a consequence of poverty and social exclusion suffered by them and notably increases the danger of them remaining unable to escape. Violence also infringes their fundamental rights and is, in many cases, motivated simply by the fact that the victims are women. Although the problem is not confined to those on low incomes, women from such social strata with limited resources have fewer channels of escape from domestic violence or violence at the hands of human traffickers, particularly those intent on their sexual exploitation.

If abused women are economically dependent on their partners, it is more difficult for them to escape the violence inflicted on them, their only recourse being the public welfare services, which differ widely from one Member State to another. It must also be remembered that most women forced into prostitution come from impoverished backgrounds and are of migrant origin. They are therefore not legally entitled to residence, making them totally dependent on their abusers or on traffickers.

On the other hand, there are many women who lose their previous economic stability and fall into poverty and social exclusion as a direct result of violence inflicted on them. According to

¹⁷ Living conditions in Europe. Poverty and social exclusion
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an EAPN study¹⁸, gender-based violence is the chief cause of homelessness for women in Europe. Their resulting impoverishment and exclusion also affects their children, who do not enjoy protection as victims of gender-based violence in many countries. For this reason, we must ensure the full implementation of the Istanbul Convention, accompanied by effective measures to combat all forms of violence against women, including the creation of a new form of offence at the European level.

It is essential to promote structural changes in the fields of governance and taxation and to carry out effective gender mainstreaming.

On the one hand, we can observe an increase in primary inequality, with wages accounting for a smaller percentage of GDP, accompanied by increasingly lax labour legislation that is failing to keep pace with new forms of employment, such as platform work, thereby leaving millions of workers unprotected and at risk of poverty, including in-work poverty. In addition, the new technological revolution is currently placing hundreds of thousands of jobs at risk, while leaving most of the population without the skills required for the new jobs that will be created. Against this backdrop, gender equality at home and on the labour market is a long way off.

On the other hand, in order to guarantee equal access to basic services such as health, education and those relating to dependency, we must step up the redistributive capacity of individual countries and the effectiveness of welfare states. This will require adequate funding, which obviously depends in turn on fair and progressive taxation, something that is increasingly beyond our reach, given that the balance of power is tipped against us and fiscal justice is not being allowed to prevail.

This makes gender mainstreaming at every level of the EU budget process even more essential, ensuring that revenue and expenditure are translated into social investment to achieve gender equality objectives, such as measures to combat poverty among women. This directly relates to the need for a review of current economic and social governance, which, putting austerity aside, should be seeking to reduce gender inequalities and poverty levels among women.

Lina Gálvez Muñoz

¹⁸ <https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/EAPN-Gender-violence-and-poverty-Final-web-3696.pdf>