

# HOW CAN EMPLOYERS PREVENT DISCRIMINATION & PROMOTE INCLUSION TO TACKLE POVERTY IN THE LABOUR MARKET?

A joint webinar from the Adecco Group and the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), 3 June 2025

## WEBINAR PAGER



# INTRODUCTION

The European Anti-Poverty Network and the Adecco Group partnered to foster dialogue, between stakeholders from across sectors, exploring how employers and civil society organisations can collaborate and create synergies to raise awareness on the interplay of work and poverty and to stimulate common actions addressing barriers faced by people experiencing poverty in the labour market.

In December 2024, we jointly hosted a workshop titled “Making Work a Safe Road out of Poverty”, bringing together institutions, companies and people experiencing poverty (PePs), as the start of a reflective journey to raise awareness about the complexity of poverty, including in-work poverty. This rich exchange was crucial to highlight the multidimensional interplay of work and poverty.

The collaboration created momentum to continue this joint effort, leading to the June 3<sup>rd</sup> webinar “How Can Employers Prevent Discrimination & Promote Inclusion to tackle poverty in the labour market?” focusing on how PePs may experience discrimination in-work or in accessing employment, and on how employers are addressing this and putting in place measures and actions to promote inclusion of persons experiencing poverty.

To complement the topics discussed, the practices and approaches shared by participants in the webinar, the present document summaries key concepts and recommendations related to in-work poverty and discrimination that PePs can face while accessing employment or when in employment.

## IN-WORK POVERTY A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL ISSUE

Poverty has more than only one dimension. In addition to income, poor living conditions, limited access to health, education or employment are also important dimensions. The measurement (and therefore definition) of in-work poverty is not obvious because it mixes 2 aspects: income poverty (household level) and employment status (individual level).<sup>1</sup>

At EU level, a person “in-work” is defined as one that is employed for more than half of the reference year. This may lead to exclude from the definition certain groups of workers such as those that work non-continuously throughout the year.<sup>1</sup>

[1] Source: Conchita D'Ambrosio and Vincent Vergnat, “Societal indicators' report”, Working Yet Poor project, 2020. Funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 Programme.

# WHAT ARE THE MAIN DRIVERS THAT INCREASE THE RISK OF IN-WORK POVERTY

## 1. Individual and household characteristics

Having a low level of education, being young, being born abroad, being in a single-parent family or living in a household with a low work intensity.

## 2. Job characteristics

Having a low-paid job, a temporary or part-time job or being self-employed. There are more frequent career interruptions, less bargaining power, may hold different jobs than permanent and full-time workers.

## 3. Country level factors

Generosity of the welfare state, a centralised wage bargaining system, the share of young people living with their parents.<sup>1</sup>

In-work poverty does not affect evenly all participants in the labour market. Some groups of workers are significantly more affected and at higher risk of being working poor.

For example, women, racialised and migrant communities, long-term unemployed, persons with disabilities continue to face systemic discrimination in the labour market. This reality often leads to their overrepresentation in low-wage sectors, exposure to precarious contracts, limited opportunities for career advancement, and enduring barriers to financial stability. Women notably are disproportionately affected by in-work poverty, with young women, single mothers, migrant women, and women with disabilities facing the highest risks. They are more likely to work part-time and remain concentrated in undervalued, low-paid, and insecure sectors. These patterns are not coincidental: they are the result of structural inequalities and gaps in labour legislation that are mirrored in everyday market practices. To effectively tackle in-work poverty, it is essential to, on the one hand, strengthen labour protections, dismantle systemic discrimination, and ensure that all workers have access to decent work, fair wages, and equal opportunities. And on the other hand, it is equally important to leverage and increase the use of labour market policies focused on activation of long-term unemployed persons, skilling those workers that are impacted by the twin transition.

# IN-WORK POVERTY AND DISCRIMINATION<sup>2</sup>

Discrimination of PePs in-work can take multiple forms whether directly or indirectly and may not be proactively brought to the attention of the employer or direct line manager.

Decent lodging, access to (affordable) transportation, health insurance, care support while not seemingly linked to job tasks can have an impact on a worker's performance or ability to complete job tasks as required or expected.

Lower work intensity, frequent career interruptions or non-linear careers affect career progression, one's ability to demonstrate acquired skills, one's ability to project oneself in different jobs or proactively adapt to labour market skill changes.

Difficulties in accessing or attending training or financial support for training or lack of in-work training opportunities (versus training taken on one's own personal time) can hinder skills development and therefore career progression.

Being able to participate in informal work-related events or activities can affect a workers' ability to effectively network or adhere to the company culture and may contribute to job satisfaction or engagement.

## WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO TO TACKLE IN-WORK POVERTY AND DISCRIMINATION

Addressing in-work poverty and workplace discrimination of persons experiencing poverty demands more than a focus on compensation and job contracts. While fair wages and secure employment are essential, other workplace factors, such as mental health, discrimination, access to career progression, and even transport, play a vital role in ensuring all workers can lead a dignified life.

Employers have the power and responsibility to create inclusive, fair, and supportive working environments. This leads to better employee engagement and satisfaction. But concretely, what can be the first steps?

[2] For more information and case studies, visit EAPN WorkYP publications:  
<https://workingyetpoor.eu/press/>

# TOWARDS INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES: PRACTICAL STEPS EMPLOYERS CAN TAKE

**Employers play a key role in addressing in-work poverty** and systemic discrimination. Ensuring fair pay and advancement starts with regularly assessing pay structures to uncover and correct disparities affecting vulnerable and underrepresented groups. Developing and conducting regular consultations of employees with the aim to identify and gather feedback on lived experiences of employees experiencing poverty is a key step in building any initiative aiming to address in-work poverty.

**Addressing disparities** also means recognising the value of roles where essential skills can be learned on the job and creating formal career progression and mentorship pathways, particularly for underrepresented workers.

**Inclusive hiring and onboarding practices** are equally critical. Employers can level the playing field by eliminating hidden costs for candidates, such as fees for transportation, by using anonymous CVs, accessible job postings, and conducting targeted outreach to attract diverse talent. Rather than isolating inclusion as a side project, diversity goals should be embedded directly into operational planning and performance metrics.

**Improving working conditions and retention** also requires intentional action, actively supported and driven by companies' executive management and senior leadership. Employers should actively prevent stigma, and discrimination through adopting strong policies and mandatory in-company training or adapting existing policies and guidelines to be inclusive of persons experiencing poverty. Building in-company awareness through regular campaigns, creating communities of champions or ambassadors should be at the core of any effective and impactful inclusion strategy.

**Practical support and measures**, such as providing access to reliable transport and affordable childcare, or support to access existing financial solutions for the acquisition of a lodging, a means of transport, etc. can reduce turnover and improve job satisfaction.

**Creating a culture of empathy**, offering peer support, and ensuring access to mental health resources are essential steps in supporting worker dignity and care.

**By offering decent working conditions** and more predictable work engagements where possible, employers would be able to contribute to workers' wellbeing and mental health. We should notably make sure that for those workers who are in any form of flexible work, some amount of predictability and social protection is ensured, as provided by the EU Directive on Transparent & Predictable Working Conditions.<sup>3</sup>

**Finally, building partnerships with public services,** trade unions, and civil society organisations can help support workers holistically, ensuring that no one falls through the cracks and contributes to the development of practices and solutions that are more sectorially-based or more easily scalable.

Inclusive employment practices not only uphold workers' rights but also contribute to stronger, more resilient businesses and communities. Tackling in-work poverty requires bold leadership and a genuine commitment to structural change: starting in the workplace.

## KEY DEFINITIONS

### **In-Work Poverty:**

"Since the early 2000s the EU adopted a definition of In-Work Poverty as the proportion of the population earning a balanced disposable income below 60% of the median income in a specific country. Disposable income corresponds to gross income (from work, capital, etc.) plus social benefits received (public pensions, means-tested or non-means-tested benefits) minus direct taxes (social insurance contributions, income tax, property taxes, etc)."<sup>4</sup>

### **Social Inclusion:**

"Social inclusion is a process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social, political and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living that is considered normal in the society in which they live. It ensures that they have greater participation in decision making which affects their lives and access to their fundamental rights" (Commission of the European Communities, 2003, p. 9).<sup>5</sup>

[4] Source: EU Directive 2019/1152 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June on transparent and predictable working conditions in the European Union.

[5] Source: Ratti L, Garcia-Muñoz A. EU law, In-Work Poverty, and vulnerable workers. *European Law Open*. 2022;1(3):733-747. doi:10.1017/el0.2022.41

[6] Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Social Inclusion: Chapter 1. 2016. United Nations, <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/rwss/2016/chapter1.pdf>.



## Discrimination

“Any distinction, exclusion or preference made on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national or social origin, which has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation.”<sup>6</sup>

In some countries, legislators have introduced specific references to social-economic status in anti-discrimination regulations. For example, in France, it is considered an act of discrimination to treat a person differently on the basis of a particular vulnerability resulting from their economic situation, apparent or known (Article 225-1 of the “Code Pénal”). The legislators sought to tackle, for example, discrimination in employment linked to CVs having a social enterprise or social housing or shelter as a place of residence, etc.

## Missing Poor<sup>7</sup>:

The term “missing poor”, which refers to those who are invisible in traditional poverty statistics, includes the following groups: racialised people, Roma people, people in informal or undeclared work, homeless people experiencing multiple grounds of discrimination, undocumented migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, institutionalised individuals, and people deprived of liberty.

## Intersectional Approach<sup>8</sup>:

Intersectionality is a concept that examines how different forms of social stratification, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, disability, and other identity markers, intersect and interact to shape individuals’ experiences of privilege, oppression, and discrimination.

[7] Source: International Labour Organization. (n.d.). Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111). Retrieved May 16, 2025, from [https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx\\_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:55:0::NO::P55\\_TYPE,P55\\_LANG,P55\\_DOCUMENT,P55\\_NODE:CON,en,C111,/](https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/nrmlx_en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:55:0::NO::P55_TYPE,P55_LANG,P55_DOCUMENT,P55_NODE:CON,en,C111,/)  
[8] Source: Creshaw K. On Intersectionality: Essential Writings. March 2017. Columbia Law School <https://scholarship.law.columbia.edu/books/255/>



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