Gender and Poverty

The human stories behind the policies

Factsheet

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European Anti-Poverty Network



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The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) is the largest European network of national, regional and local networks, involving anti-poverty NGOs and grassroots groups as well as European organisations, active in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. It was established in 1990.



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01. Glossary

AROPE – At risk of poverty or social exclusion

Criminalisation of poverty
The use of criminal or administrative laws and enforcement practices to penalise behaviours or activities associated with poverty, homelessness, or survival. It can include sanctions against begging, sleeping rough, informal economic activities, or other forms of survival.

EAPN – European Anti-Poverty Network

EU – European Union

EU APS – European Anti-Poverty Strategy

European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)
The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) is a framework of 20 key principles and rights aimed at creating a fairer Europe by strengthening rights relating to labour markets and welfare systems. Initiated by the European Commission and formally proclaimed in November 2017 in Gothenburg by the European Parliament, the Commission and the Council, the EPSR is structured around three main categories: equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions and social protection and inclusion.

Gender mainstreaming
The systematic integration of a gender equality perspective into the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, legislation, programmes and budgets.

Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB)
An approach to public budgeting that assesses how revenue and expenditure decisions affect people of different genders and integrates gender equality objectives into budgetary processes and resource allocation.

Informal carer
A person who provides unpaid care or support to a family member, partner, friend, or another person who requires assistance with daily activities. Providing informal care can have significant impacts on carers' health, employment, income and social protection.

Intersectionality
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.

Long-term care (LTC)
A range of services and forms of support designed to assist people who, because of illness, disability, or ageing, require help with everyday activities over an extended period. Long-term care can be provided formally through services or informally by family members and other carers.

Marginalised groups
In this paper, the term "marginalised groups" encompasses groups that are disproportionately affected by poverty: women, racialised people, LGBTIQIA+ people, older people and young people, undocumented people, migrants, Roma people, Travellers, people with disabilities, people discriminated against on the basis of religion or belief, and single parents.

Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)
The Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) is the European Union's long-term budget plan, setting expenditure ceilings for the EU over multiple years. The current MFF runs from 2021 to 2027. The next MFF will run from 2028 to 2034.

Non-take-up of benefits
A situation in which people who are legally entitled to a social protection benefit or service do not receive it. Reasons can include lack of information, complex administrative procedures, stigma, uncertainty about eligibility, or difficulties accessing services.

PEP – People experiencing poverty

Platform work
Paid work organised, mediated, or facilitated through a digital platform. Platform workers may face particular challenges concerning employment status, income security, working conditions, social protection and collective representation.

Stability and Growth Pact (SGP)
The Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) is a set of EU rules designed to ensure fiscal discipline among Member States and maintain the stability of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), particularly of the euro. Its main purpose is to prevent excessive government deficits and debt levels that could threaten economic stability in the EU. According to the SGP, Member States should keep their annual government budget deficit below 3% of GDP and public debt should not exceed 60% of GDP or, if it does, should decrease at a satisfactory pace towards that level.

02. Introduction

In her 2025 State of the Union address, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, pledged to eradicate poverty by 2050, reinforcing the political imperative to translate ambition into concrete action. This commitment has since been bolstered by the adoption, in May 2026, of **the first EU Anti-Poverty Strategy (EU APS)**, which sets out the EU's approach to preventing and addressing poverty across its different dimensions and over the life course.

This framework builds on the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) and its renewed Action Plan, **published on 22 July 2026**, which reaffirms the EU's social headline target of **reducing the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by at least 15 million by 2030**[1]. Progress towards this target remains slow, and the Union is set to fall short of reaching it: poverty remains a persistent reality across the European Union, where at least 21% of the population is at risk of poverty or social exclusion[2]. The EU now has three important and complementary frameworks relevant to tackling gendered poverty: the **EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, the renewed European Pillar of Social Rights and the Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030 (GES)**.

Addressing poverty effectively requires a comprehensive understanding of its root causes and manifestations. For the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), poverty constitutes a direct violation of fundamental rights. It is inherently multidimensional, encompassing not only a lack of income but also limited access to quality employment, social protection, affordable housing, essential services and meaningful participation in decision-making. As such, policies must reflect this complexity by addressing the conditions and power relations that push people into poverty, keep them there and limit their ability to escape it.

Gender is central to these dynamics, **shaping and exacerbating experiences of poverty**. On the one hand, gender inequalities can aggravate existing forms of exclusion: where poverty exists, they deepen exclusion and limit access to resources, protection and opportunities. On the other hand, poverty also manifests differently along gender lines. Gendered norms and roles, including the unequal distribution of unpaid domestic labour, create specific pathways into and through poverty. A gender-neutral approach to poverty eradication risks overlooking the specific mechanisms through which poverty is produced and reproduced, while a gender equality framework that does not adequately address poverty risks leaving behind those facing the greatest economic and social exclusion.

The adoption of the EU APS alongside the GES and the renewed EPSR therefore creates an important opportunity to address these dimensions. This requires adopting an intersectional perspective that considers how gender interacts with other forms of discrimination and exclusion, including those based on race, religion, sexuality, migration status, disability, age, or place of residence. This is key to understanding **why certain groups are disproportionately exposed to poverty and why existing policies often fail to reach those most affected**. Gender inequality and poverty are mutually reinforcing, creating cycles of disadvantage that are reproduced across generations.

1 European Commission (2026), A renewed commitment to a future-ready Social Europe. https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/european-pillar-social-rights-building-fairer-and-more-inclusive-european-union/renewed-commitment-future-ready-social-europe_en

2 Eurostat (2024), People at risk of poverty or social exclusion by age and sex (ilc_peps01n), Eurostat Data Browser. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_peps01n__custom_16248875/bookmark/table?lang=en&bookmarkId=f324bf0e-5b63-446f-b243-94089a70015a&c=1744619026707&page=time:2024

When referring to **"women,"** this paper includes all women, including cis and trans women. Where relevant, the analysis also encompasses others whose experiences of poverty are shaped by gendered power relations and uses the term **FLINTA** (Women, Lesbians, Intersex, Non-binary, Trans and Agender people) to capture the diversity of gender identities disproportionately affected by structural and systemic exclusion. These terms reflect a commitment to recognising the full spectrum of gender identities impacted by poverty while acknowledging the diversity of experiences within these groups and their intersection with other forms of marginalisation. **While this paper cannot address all forms of exclusion that push FLINTA into poverty and keep them there, it seeks to illuminate the systemic power relations and structural barriers that sustain gendered poverty across the European Union.**

This analysis is constrained by insufficient disaggregated and intersectional data, as well as by fragmented policy frameworks, particularly for people facing overlapping forms of marginalisation, such as racialised communities, migrants and persons with disabilities. Existing data and policies often fail to reflect lived realities, contributing to the invisibilisation of specific needs and experiences. "The missing poor" remain statistically and politically invisible, weakening the design and effectiveness of poverty reduction policies.

This invisibilisation also shapes social protection, anti-poverty, and economic policies. In turn, these policies reinforce narrow understandings of gender and exclude those most at risk of marginalisation. Without robust data that accurately capture the realities of marginalised groups, barriers to services, social protection, labour markets, housing, justice and healthcare will remain largely unaddressed.

These shortcomings reveal a persistent disconnect between the EU's commitments to equality and its approach to poverty, underscoring the urgent need for a coherent and intersectional strategy that tackles gendered poverty at its roots.

This analysis therefore aims to address the following question:

What approach should the EU take to effectively tackle gendered poverty?

This analysis is structured in two parts. The first examines the key areas where poverty and social exclusion are produced and reproduced, including wealth distribution, labour markets, unpaid labour, health, social protection and access to services, and gender-based violence. **While this list is non-exhaustive**, these domains reflect the multiple dimensions of life in which gender shapes both the risk and the experience of poverty. The second part focuses on the governance and financing architecture required to address these drivers effectively, including gender-responsive budgeting and participation frameworks capable of delivering structural and systemic change.

03. Addressing the Drivers and Root Causes of Gendered Poverty

Wealth, property and land

Access to wealth is a critical yet often overlooked dimension of poverty. The ability to **accumulate and retain assets, such as property, land, savings and pension entitlements**, constitutes a key buffer against economic shocks and a determinant of long-term and intergenerational financial security[3]. Without such assets, individuals remain trapped in cycles of basic survival, with limited capacity to build resilience or escape intergenerational poverty.

Across the European Union, women continue to face barriers to wealth accumulation that extend far beyond formal legal recognition of their rights to own land or inherit property. Indeed, while EU laws guarantee equal rights to property and ownership[4], women's persistent exclusion from opportunities to accumulate wealth and acquire land and housing remains insufficiently documented and inadequately addressed in policy responses[5].

Wealth accumulation must be understood in a broad sense, encompassing not only land and home ownership but also financial assets, access to credit, savings, and pension entitlements. FLINTA are more likely to have limited ownership and control over these resources, leaving them with fewer financial buffers, less economic independence and greater exposure to poverty, particularly in situations of separation, widowhood or economic hardship. This is evident in situations where widows are dispossessed by in-laws, tenants face eviction during pregnancy, or marginalised groups, such as Roma women, are displaced from informal settlements. Households with limited asset bases are more likely to remain trapped in poverty, while those with accumulated assets are better equipped to absorb economic shocks and invest in future opportunities[6].

Technical and procedural barriers further constrain women's ability to claim and retain ownership rights. These include inconsistencies with family law[7]. For example, under Croatian law, acquiring property through a sale or inheritance does not automatically result in the person being registered as the owner: ownership must be entered in the land registry based on documents meeting specific requirements. Although spouses generally have equal shares in matrimonial property, registration of those rights requires and, in some circumstances, a certified statement from the other spouse.[8].

Additionally, in agriculture, formal equality in inheritance does not necessarily translate into equal access to land. Across the EU, women working on family farms may remain unregistered as workers or lack formal ownership and succession rights. This is highlighted in the European Parliament's 2026 report

3 European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). "Financial independence and gender equality." EIGE. https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/financial-independence-and-gender-equality-joining-dots-between-income-wealth-and-power

4 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), Article 17 – Right to property, EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. https://fra.europa.eu/en/eu-charter/article/17-right-property

5 Ibid

6 Ibid

7 Wilson, Kalpana. 2010. "Picturing gender and poverty: from 'victimhood' to 'agency'?" In Handbook on gender and poverty, Sylvia Chant (Ed.). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

8 Government of the Republic of Croatia, Registration of ownership rights. https://www.gov.hr/en/registration-of-ownership-rights/1306

on women's entrepreneurship in rural areas, which calls on Member States to **remove practical barriers to women's land ownership and succession** and specifically notes that spouses working on farms may not be adequately protected in cases of **divorce, separation or the death of a family member**[9]. Women may also face explicit or implicit pressure to renounce inheritance claims in favour of male relatives[10]. Such practices are sustained not only through community enforcement mechanisms but also through internalised social norms, which reproduce gendered patterns of asset ownership across generations.

Women's reduced access to stable and adequately paid employment, combined with a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic work, limits their capacity to accumulate assets over time. As a result, older women are significantly more likely to have lower levels of wealth and are disproportionately exposed to poverty in later life[11].

Recommendations

- Call on EIGE to conduct an EU-wide study on gendered asset and property ownership. The study should adopt an intersectional lens to examine the persistent barriers faced by FLINTA and marginalised groups in accessing property.
- Ensure the full implementation of the Financial Literacy Strategy, with particular attention to people experiencing poverty, marginalised groups, and FLINTA in all their diversity.

Labour market participation and employment

Employment does not always provide a sustainable route out of poverty. In 2024, 8.2% of workers[12] lived in households at risk of poverty. This failure is deeply gendered: women and gender-diverse people are disproportionately channelled into forms of work that do not provide economic security or access to rights, thereby reinforcing their exposure to poverty.

Indeed, women are overrepresented in precarious forms of employment, including part-time work, low-intensity jobs, informal work and platform-based labour[13]. Workers in these forms of employment are often excluded from contributory social protection systems or, even where they are formally covered, generate lower contributions and reduced entitlements due to fragmented careers, shorter working hours and unstable contracts. For those facing intersecting forms of discrimination, these vulnerabilities are further compounded by unsafe working conditions, including harassment and violence, as well as limited access to complaint and redress mechanisms. As a result, employment itself can become a site of poverty production rather than protection.

Case study: Subcontracting, migration, and exploitation – the case of the Batignolles strike

Intersecting forms of exclusion based on gender and migration status are particularly visible in sectors characterised by subcontracting and weak regulation. The 2019–2021 strike of hotel housekeepers at the Ibis Batignolles in Paris illustrates how structural marginalisation can translate into systemic exploitation.

The workers involved, predominantly migrant and racialised women, were employed through a subcontracting company and subjected to

9 European Parliament (2026), European Parliament resolution of 30 April 2026 on women's entrepreneurship in rural and island areas and outermost regions (2024/2124(INI)), P10_TA(2026)0158. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-10-2026-0158_EN.html

10 Reporting Diversity Network (2026), "Women continue to give up their property: the spiral of emotional and social pressure," 27 July 2026. https://www.reportingdiversity.org/women-continue-to-give-up-their-property-the-spiral-of-emotional-and-social-pressure/

11 European Commission. EU pension adequacy report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2024.

12 This means that their yearly disposable income was below 60% of the national household median income level.

13 Eurostat (2025), Gender statistics, Statistics Explained. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Gender_statistics

significantly poorer working conditions than directly employed staff. They faced **excessive workloads** and demanding cleaning targets, alongside **low pay, limited recognition**, and **exposure to harassment**. Many workers also reported having limited access to information about their rights, reinforcing their dependency and limiting their ability to speak out[14].

Their mobilisation, supported by trade unions, resulted in significant improvements, including wage increases, reduced workloads and better working conditions. However, the case also highlights broader problems with subcontracting models that can enable **unfair treatment and weaken employer accountability**. The concentration of marginalised women in these roles further reinforces their invisibility and limits access to rights. This example underscores that labour market discrimination is not incidental but embedded in business practices that rely on and perpetuate the exploitation of marginalised groups.

In 2021, 67.7% of women in the EU were employed, compared with 78.5% of men[15]. These disparities are significantly wider for marginalised groups: only 55.3% of women born outside the EU are employed[16], just 16% of Roma women are in employment, and only 51% of trans people have access to employment[17]. Persons with disabilities also face systemic exclusion, with an employment rate of 51% compared with 75% for those without disabilities. Women with disabilities experience further compounded disadvantages[18].

This employment gap is rooted in gendered social norms and institutional practices that shape labour market outcomes over the life course. From an early age, gendered socialisation influences educational pathways and career expectations, contributing to persistent labour market segregation. Women remain concentrated in sectors such as childcare (93% women), health and social services (86%), and domestic work (95%), while being underrepresented in higher-paid sectors such as construction, engineering, and manufacturing (28%)[19]. Even within mixed sectors, women are more likely to occupy lower-paid, less secure roles, including administrative or support functions, rather than technical or decision-making positions.

At the same time, sectors predominantly staffed by women are structurally undervalued. Despite their essential contribution to the functioning of society, these sectors are characterised by low pay, limited career progression and weaker labour protections[20]. For example, more than half of workers in health services fall within the lowest-paid categories of the labour market. Domestic work illustrates the intersection of gender, migration, and precarity: 55% of domestic workers have a migration background[21], 69% work part-time[22], and 82% are concentrated in the lowest income brackets[23]. This systematic undervaluation contributes directly to in-work poverty and long-term economic insecurity.

Case study: From School to Work: How Education Shapes Gendered Poverty

Labour market segregation is deeply rooted in education systems, where gendered norms and expectations shape life trajectories from an early age. Despite women's educational attainment now

14 Franceinfo (2021), « Témoignages : les femmes de chambre de l'hôtel Ibis Batignolles racontent leurs 22 mois de lutte contre le patronat ». https://www.franceinfo.fr/economie/emploi/metiers/restauration-hotellerie-sports-loisirs/temoignages-les-femmes-de-chambre-de-l-hotel-ibis-batignolles-racontent-leurs-22-mois-de-lutte-contre-le-patronat_4639771.html

15 European Commission. "Gender statistics." Eurostat. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Gender_statistics

16 De Michelli, B. & Capesciotti, M. (2020), Gender Policy and indicators report, Working, Yet Poor Project, Deliverable D2.2. https://workingyetpoor.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/D.2.2_Gender_Policy_and_indicators_report.pdf

17 Ibid

18 European Disability Forum (EDF). Human Rights Report 2023: The Right to Work. Brussels: European Disability Forum, 2023. https://www.edf-feph.org/publications/human-rights-report-2023-the-right-to-work/

19 Council of the European Union (2017). Gender segregation in education, training and the labour market: Report by EIGE. https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-12709-2017-ADD-2/en/pdf

20 Ibid

21 De Michelli, B. & Capesciotti, M. (2020), Gender Policy and indicators report, Working, Yet Poor Project, Deliverable D2.2. https://workingyetpoor.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/D.2.2_Gender_Policy_and_indicators_report.pdf

22 Ibid

23 Ibid

equalling or surpassing that of men in the EU, these gains do not systematically translate into better working conditions, recognition or remuneration in the labour market[24].

Boys are significantly more likely to pursue STEM fields, while girls are overrepresented in fields such as humanities, care, and education. These patterns reflect persistent gender stereotypes that shape aspirations and opportunities yet remain insufficiently challenged within education systems. They also have direct implications for women's economic security: STEM-related fields tend to offer higher-paying and more stable employment opportunities, while sectors and occupations dominated by women are generally less well remunerated[25]. Policy responses often focus narrowly on increasing women's participation in male-dominated sectors, particularly STEM, without addressing the structural undervaluation of feminised sectors. This approach risks reinforcing existing hierarchies rather than transforming them[26].

Education systems can also act as sites of exclusion, particularly for those at the intersection of multiple forms of marginalisation. Migrant children, for example, may face barriers due to inadequate access to language support or curricula not adapted to their needs, a situation exacerbated by anti-migrant policies and austerity measures affecting education budgets. School environments may also reinforce gendered and racialised norms through disciplinary practices, curricular restrictions, and rules policing students' appearance. In France, for instance, the 2023 enforcement of dress codes targeted girls' bodies through simultaneous measures: prohibitions on religiously inspired clothing such as abayas[27] and restrictions on clothing perceived as "indecent," such as crop tops. These policies disproportionately affected girls from migrant or Muslim backgrounds, while reinforcing broader societal control over girls' bodies. Feminist campaigns, such as #Balancetonbahut[28], highlighted these systemic exclusions and the embedded sexism in school policies.

The labour market also systematically penalises motherhood. Women experience significant income and career losses following childbirth, commonly referred to as the "motherhood penalty." For example, the employment rate of women with low educational attainment living in households with three or more children drops to 31.3%, while men in comparable situations maintain employment rates above 70%[29]. These dynamics illustrate how gendered care responsibilities intersect with labour market participation to deepen economic disparities and reinforce poverty risks over time.

Beyond access to employment, working conditions themselves constitute a critical dimension of gendered poverty. Low wages, job insecurity, excessive workloads and exposure to harassment and violence form a continuum of exclusion that disproportionately affects women, particularly those facing intersecting forms of marginalisation. These risks are increasingly visible in sectors characterised by subcontracting and in emerging forms of work, including the gig and platform economy, where workers often lack adequate protections, collective representation and access to rights.

24 Council of the European Union (2017). Gender segregation in education, training and the labour market: Report by EIGE. https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-12709-2017-ADD-2/en/pdf

25 European Commission, Joint Research Centre (JRC), Gender gaps in education and employment. https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/projects-and-activities/gender-gaps-education-and-employment_en

26 Ibid

27 Conseil d'État (2024), Laïcité : l'interdiction du port de tenues de type abaya à l'école est conforme à la loi, 27 September 2024. https://conseil-etat.fr/actualites/laicite-l-interdiction-du-port-de-tenues-de-type-abaya-a-l-ecole-est-conforme-a-la-loi

28 The Independent (2016), Majority of French people think girls should cover up at school. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/majority-of-french-people-think-girls-should-cover-up-at-school-b697048.html

29 Eurostat (2026), Women in the EU, Statistics Explained. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Women%5Fin%5Fthe%5FEU

Recommendations:

- Ensure the swift and full implementation of the Directive on Minimum Wages by all EU Member States. Propose additional measures to promote upward wage convergence, ensuring that minimum wages are set at 60% of the national median wage and provide a decent standard of living.
- Ensure the swift, full, and gender-responsive implementation of the Pay Transparency Directive by all Member States.
- Implement targeted measures to reduce occupational segregation through education, vocational training and recruitment policies aligned with equality objectives. This could include:
  - → Integrating gender-sensitive career guidance into school curricula from an early age, including mandatory training for teachers and counsellors to actively challenge gender stereotypes in subject and career choices.
  - → Conditioning public funding for education and vocational training programmes on the inclusion of gender equality objectives, including outreach strategies targeting underrepresented groups.
- Maintain the goal of closing the gender pension gap as a central priority, in line with the Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030 and the Intergenerational Fairness Strategy. Strengthen synergies with the European Anti-Poverty Strategy and ensure that minimum pension schemes are sufficient to keep older women out of poverty by setting an adequacy benchmark linked to the at-risk-of-poverty threshold and cost-of-living indicators.
- Call on Member States to introduce mandatory parental leave for fathers that is not transferable to mothers, in order to promote a more equal distribution of childcare responsibilities.
- As part of the European Semester and Country-Specific Recommendations, call on Member States to address and eradicate in-work poverty, paying particular attention to its impact on FLINTA and marginalised groups.
- Closely monitor the implementation of the EU Platform Workers Directive, guaranteeing that platform workers are recognised as employees where applicable and enjoy full labour rights, including minimum wage guarantees, paid leave, social protection and pension entitlements.

Health and gendered poverty

Barriers to accessing healthcare both result from and contribute to women's poverty. Poverty limits women's ability to afford medical visits, treatments, medications and transport to healthcare facilities. Women with children may face additional obstacles if childcare is unavailable, and many prioritise essential household expenses over their own health needs[30]. Over time, delayed or forgone healthcare can lead to more complex medical conditions, higher costs, and further entrenchment in poverty.

Reduced access to healthcare also affects sexual and reproductive health. Many women in poverty lack the financial means, information, or support to access contraception, safe abortion, menstrual products, or other essential services. Backlash against sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and gender-affirming healthcare further exposes FLINTA individuals to unsafe conditions, social exclusion, and deepening disparities between those who can afford alternative forms of care and those who cannot[31].

Poverty also affects women's mental health. The stress of economic insecurity, including uncertainty over meals, housing, or caring for dependants, can lead to anxiety, depression and burnout[32]. Access to affordable mental health services is often limited for women experiencing poverty. Women with disabilities

30 Equinet (2021), Women in Poverty: Health and Social Services. https://equineteurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Women-in-Poverty_-Health-and-Social-Services.pdf
31 Ibid
32 Mental Health Europe (2026), Rethink to Rebuild: Towards Rights-Based and Gender-Just Mental Health Systems in Europe. https://www.mentalhealtheurope.org/report-rethink-to-rebuild-towards-rights-based-and-gender-just-mental-health-systems-in-europe/

face additional health-related costs and barriers to physically accessing adapted services, while older women with low incomes spend more years in poor health yet struggle to access preventive care, mental healthcare, and long-term care[33]. They face a higher risk of institutionalisation, yet pensions and personal resources are often insufficient to cover nursing home costs[34].

Shifts towards telehealth and online services have created further barriers for women experiencing poverty, particularly older women and marginalised communities. Limited access to devices, connectivity, digital literacy, or private communication, for example in Roma households where phones are shared, discourages the most vulnerable from seeking care[35].

The EU has taken steps to address the long-term care crisis, including the 2022 Council Recommendation on Long-Term Care and the European Care Strategy. These instruments call on Member States to improve the accessibility, affordability, and quality of care services, support informal carers, enhance working conditions for professional carers, and address workforce shortages. Ensuring accessible, high-quality care is crucial for tackling gendered poverty.

Women continue to perform the majority of unpaid domestic and care work. Recognising long-term care as a social responsibility and embedding it within social protection systems is essential for addressing gendered poverty, supporting women's participation in employment, and preventing social exclusion. Women's unpaid domestic and care labour must be valued and compensated through fair wages and social protection mechanisms. The intersection of unpaid care, low wages, and insufficient pensions directly contributes to women's cumulative disadvantage, leaving many older women financially vulnerable and at higher risk of poverty[36].

Recommendations:

- Assist Member States in developing rights-based, person-centred long-term care services across all territories through the European Semester and by allowing greater flexibility in public spending rules, ensuring services are accessible, affordable, and high-quality for all, including women with disabilities, older women, and other marginalised groups.
- Support the development of high-quality support services for informal carers, tailored to their needs. Legislation should improve the right to care leave and access to social protection. High-quality, tailored support, such as day care, respite care, and counselling, should be provided to improve informal carers' wellbeing and labour market participation, and to reduce the negative social and health impacts of caring.
- Align the EU Care Deal with the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy and the EPSR Action Plan.
- Ensure the full transposition of the Work–Life Balance Directive and the implementation of both the Barcelona targets for 2030 and the Council Recommendation on access to affordable, high-quality long-term care, while setting high standards for service quality and liveable wages for care workers.
- Mainstream the objectives of the EU Care Strategy, notably adequacy, availability, and quality of service provision, into EU economic governance by integrating measurable care targets into the European Semester and country-specific recommendations.
- Revise the Directives on Public Procurement to ensure that price alone is not decisive, prioritising value over cost and giving greater weight to quality, social, and environmental considerations.

33 European Disability Forum (EDF) (2024), Empowerment and Leadership: Third EDF Manifesto on the Rights of Women and Girls with Disabilities. https://www.edf-feph.org/publications/empowerment-and-leadership-third-edf-manifesto-on-the-rights-of-women-and-girls-with-disabilities/

34 Ibid

35 Equinet (2021), Women in Poverty: Health and Social Services. https://equineteurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Women-in-Poverty_-Health-and-Social-Services.pdf

36 European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) (2026), Sharing care, closing gender gaps: CARE Survey 2024. https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/sharing-care-closing-gender-gaps-care-survey-2024

- Monitor and evaluate Member State progress in implementing the EU Child Guarantee, the Work-Life Balance Directive, and the European Care Strategy through the Social Scoreboard, using data disaggregated by gender and other intersecting characteristics to ensure policies reach the most marginalised groups.
- Ensure that healthcare and social services remain accessible in person alongside digital or telehealth options, preventing the exclusion of women and FLINTA people who face barriers such as limited access to devices or connectivity and low levels of digital literacy.

Distribution and valuation of unpaid work

Unpaid labour, particularly domestic and care work, is essential to the functioning of households, labour markets, and the broader economy, yet it remains systematically undervalued and absent from conventional economic measures. Across the European Union, tasks such as childcare, care for older people, domestic work, and community support are performed predominantly by women[37]. Despite their central role, this labour is largely invisible in economic statistics and excluded from contributory social protection schemes, leaving women structurally unprotected and economically vulnerable.

The devaluation of unpaid work reinforces gendered poverty and creates economic dependence, leaving women reliant on partners, family members, or social assistance for income and access to benefits[38]. Women who perform the majority of domestic and care tasks often face reduced opportunities to accumulate wealth, access social protection benefits such as pensions, or exercise economic autonomy. They are more likely to work part-time, interrupt their careers, or engage in low-intensity or precarious paid work to balance care responsibilities across the life course.

Patriarchal gender norms entrench these patterns: 44% of Europeans still associate care responsibilities primarily with women, and women spend roughly twice as many hours per day on childcare as men[39]. This invisibilisation normalises the idea that women's work does not require compensation or legal protections.

Attempts to externalise domestic labour through paid contractors or public services often shift exploitation onto marginalised women, particularly migrant or low-income women, who are overrepresented in low-paid, unstable, and undervalued care-sector jobs. Even when public services take on care responsibilities, they cannot fully address the extent of the domestic and caregiving labour expected of women. As noted in *Qui gardera les enfants ? from Un Podcast à Soi*, wealthier households frequently externalise care work to poorer women, highlighting how unpaid and underpaid domestic labour reproduces both gender and class inequalities[40].

> **"Not all women have the same stance on the gendered division of labour or on the domestic burden that falls on their shoulders. (...) What is the paradox of equality? To achieve professional equality with men, women exploit other women.[41]"**

37 Ibid
38 Ibid

39 European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication (2017), Special Eurobarometer 465: Gender Equality 2017. https://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2154_87_4_465_ENG
40 ARTE Radio (2018), Qui gardera les enfants ? (5) – Nounous et travailleuses domestiques, Un podcast à soi, épisode 5. https://www.arteradio.com/son/qui_gardera_les_enfants_5
41 Joseph, Rose Myrlie (2018), interview for ARTE Radio, Un podcast à soi, episode 5, "Qui gardera les enfants ?" Original transcript. "Toutes les femmes n'ont pas du tout la même position face à la division sexuelle du travail, face à cette charge domestique qui leur tombe sur le dos. (...) Le paradoxe de l'égalité ? Pour parvenir à l'égalité professionnelle avec les hommes, les femmes exploitent d'autres femmes.»

Recommendations:

- Address the gendered and intersectional risks of poverty, including in-work poverty and pension poverty, through adequate minimum wages and minimum income, social protection, collective bargaining, and targeted measures to tackle non-take-up of benefits. Call on Member States to integrate these risks into National Anti-Poverty Strategies, with specific targets for reducing in-work poverty and pension poverty among women and marginalised groups.
- Integrate recognition of unpaid labour into the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, ensuring that contributions from this labour are reflected in social protection design and monitoring.
- As part of the EU Care Deal to be released in 2027, establish guidance for Member States on systematic pension-crediting mechanisms that count periods of unpaid work towards social protection and pension entitlements.
- Embed the economic valuation of domestic labour into EU statistical and monitoring frameworks to ensure the visibility of unpaid domestic and care work.

Access to social services and social protection

Social protection systems are intended to provide income security and access to essential services across the life course. However, contributory social protection, which is linked to employment, is largely designed around uninterrupted, full-time careers. Women's employment trajectories, shaped by part-time work, career interruptions, lower wages, and extensive unpaid work, do not align with these models. As a result, women accumulate fewer social security contributions over their lifetimes, which directly limits access to pensions, healthcare, and other contributory benefits. In the EU, women's pensions are, on average, 25% lower than men's, with significantly wider gaps in several Member States[42]. Older women consequently face a higher risk of poverty: across the EU, women aged 65 and over are 5–6 percentage points more likely to live in poverty than men[43].

Base coverage schemes exist in some Member States, but they often fall short of ensuring decent living standards. Certain groups are disproportionately excluded from contributory social protection. Single parents, over 80% of whom are women, often cannot meet contribution requirements due to interrupted or part-time careers[44]. Migrant women, women with disabilities, and those in precarious or informal employment may be entirely excluded from contributory schemes. Roma women frequently face insecure housing and limited access to essential services, further compounding vulnerability.

Access to essential services, including affordable housing, energy, and care, is also a key determinant of women's exposure to poverty. Rising housing costs, energy prices, and territorial disparities in service availability intensify risks for low-income households, particularly single-parent families. For women who combine low-paid employment with domestic labour, insufficient social protection and inadequate access to essential services reinforce economic dependence and limit the ability to accumulate wealth or secure decent living conditions.

In this context, social protection systems and essential services remain insufficiently responsive to women's realities, leaving many women unprotected and vulnerable.

42 Eurostat (2026), Women's pension 25% lower than men's in 2024, News article, 25 February 2026. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20260225-1

43 Eurostat, People at risk of poverty or social exclusion (T2020_50).

44 European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) (2016), Poverty, gender and lone parents in the EU: Review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/mh0216841enn.pdf

Recommendations:

Guaranteeing access to essential services

- Exempt social and green investments from the 3% deficit-to-GDP ratio set out in the Stability and Growth Pact and the Excessive Deficit Procedure, with no exceptions, and enshrine this Anti-Poverty Golden Rule in the EU Treaties.
- Ensure that national implementation of the Council Recommendation on minimum income is gender-responsive and supports the needs of women living in poverty, especially lone mothers, racialised women, migrant women, and women with disabilities.
- Develop EU minimum quality and affordability standards for housing, including strengthened monitoring of housing exclusion indicators.
- Address structural causes of energy poverty, such as market deregulation, and adopt stronger measures to combat it, including targeted subsidies, energy vouchers, and an EU-wide ban on energy disconnections.
- Ensure full implementation and adequate funding of the European Care Strategy to expand affordable childcare and long-term care services.

Tackling child poverty and intergenerational poverty

- Strengthen implementation of the European Child Guarantee, ensuring effective access to healthcare, education, childcare, housing and nutrition for children in vulnerable situations.
- Strengthen the role of EU-level and national Child Guarantee coordinators by tasking them with ensuring policy coherence with the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy and the renewed EPSR Action Plan.
- Reinforce the integration of objectives set out in the EU Child Guarantee into the European Semester, with specific recommendations for children and households facing intersecting forms of discrimination.
- Ensure adequate and sustained funding of at least €20 billion for the implementation of the European Child Guarantee within the next MFF budgetary cycle, with **at least 10%** **earmarked** for Member States where child poverty and social exclusion exceed the EU average.

Preventing digital exclusion and discrimination in welfare systems

- Ensure offline access to essential services. As more services move online, the EU APS and the Gender Equality Strategy must ensure that digital provision is accompanied by accessible, affordable, high-quality in-person services and easy-to-access assistance.
- Ensure digital welfare systems comply with accessibility standards and are inclusive for persons with disabilities, older persons, and digitally excluded populations.
- Introduce binding safeguards against algorithmic bias and discriminatory profiling in social protection administration.
- Conduct EU-level assessments of AI and automated decision-making tools used in welfare systems to ensure compliance with fundamental rights.

Gender-based violence

Violence against women is a widespread human rights violation that cuts across all social, economic and cultural contexts. However, exposure to violence and access to protection are shaped by intersecting forms of discrimination, including race and ethnicity, migration status, age, disability, class, and sexual orientation. These intersecting forms of exclusion not only influence the violence experienced but also shape survivors' ability to secure economic independence and exit abusive situations.

Intimate partner violence is frequently identified as one of the strongest contributors to women's homelessness, while, conversely, insecure housing can exacerbate exposure to violence[45]. For many

45 FEANTSA. "FEANTSA background paper: Women's Homelessness and GBV." FEANTSA.

survivors, limited access to safe and affordable housing significantly constrains their ability to leave abusive environments. A lack of viable housing alternatives can trap individuals in violent relationships, force them to return to abusive situations, or lead to homelessness.

These risks are particularly acute for marginalised groups. Migrant women, Roma women, single mothers, women with disabilities, trans women and their children face compounded vulnerabilities due to structural discrimination and limited access to social protection systems. In low-income households, exposure to gender-based violence can perpetuate cycles of trauma, economic instability, and intergenerational poverty by isolating women and limiting their ability to work, accumulate assets, or access contributory benefits. For migrant women, residence permits tied to a spouse through family reunification schemes can reinforce dependency, restricting their ability to leave abusive relationships and further increasing their economic vulnerability.

Trans and gender-diverse people face additional forms of violence rooted in systemic discrimination[46]. Disinformation campaigns and smear narratives that deliberately target their identities contribute to widespread stigma and social exclusion. This discrimination often translates into real-world harm, including barriers to healthcare, rejection by families and communities, bullying in educational settings, and harassment or exclusion in the workplace[47].

Economic dependence plays a central role in maintaining abusive power dynamics. Financial insecurity can significantly limit the ability to leave violent relationships, while perpetrators frequently use economic control as a tool of coercion and confinement.

A particularly pervasive dimension of gender-based violence is **economic violence**, defined as behaviour that restricts access to, control over, or use of economic resources. Although it most commonly occurs within intimate partner relationships, it can also persist after separation. Despite increasing recognition of gender-based violence as a violation of fundamental rights, economic violence remains inconsistently recognised in law and unevenly addressed across EU Member States. Under the Istanbul Convention, states are required to prevent and combat violence against women and collect disaggregated data, including on economic violence. However, implementation gaps remain significant[48]. Where economic violence is explicitly criminalised, enforcement often focuses on more visible forms, while covert forms remain difficult to identify and prosecute[49].

Perpetrators may exert **economic control** by restricting access to money, financial information, or bank accounts and by controlling household expenditures and financial decisions. **Economic exploitation** can occur when perpetrators accumulate debt in a victim's name, steal income or assets, or misuse financial resources without consent. **Economic sabotage** includes preventing employment, education, or professional development, interfering with work responsibilities, or refusing to contribute to shared care obligations. Economic violence frequently accompanies physical, psychological and sexual abuse and reinforces broader coercive power dynamics.

Its consequences extend far beyond immediate harm, directly undermining long-term economic stability. Survivors often experience job loss or interrupted education, accumulated debt, unemployment and housing insecurity. Long-term physical and mental health impacts can further limit labour market

46 United Nations Independent Expert on SOGI. Report on the impact of hate speech and disinformation targeting LGBTQ+ people. Geneva: UN Human Rights Council, 2021. https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/47/27.

47 Ibid

48 Council of Europe, Convention d'Istanbul – Lutte contre la violence à l'égard des femmes et la violence domestique. https://www.coe.int/fr/web/istanbul-convention

49 Council of Europe, Istanbul Convention – Country monitoring work. https://www.coe.int/fr/web/istanbul-convention/country-monitoring-work

participation, while separation from an abusive partner may increase the likelihood of becoming a lone parent, with heightened exposure to poverty.

Case study: The case of the criminalisation of FLINTA experiencing poverty

The criminalisation of poverty is a form of institutionalised violence that disproportionately targets FLINTA. Laws and policies intended to manage "public order" or sex work often ultimately punish the most marginalised people. For example, European anti-prostitution laws, such as "brothel-keeping" bans, have been wielded to evict tenants suspected of sex work. Trans women face this acutely: landlords and officials often assume all trans women are sex workers, meaning they may be denied housing even when merely *perceived* or *profiled* as such. Similarly, "Nordic model" laws that outlaw clients or restrictive licensing regimes push sex work underground, making it far more dangerous. In countries where sex work is legal, onerous rules, such as mandatory registration and health checks, create parallel informal markets. The result is that trans and other FLINTA sex workers, already confronting transphobia, racism, and job discrimination, are driven into unsafe, undeclared work without access to healthcare, pensions or legal protections.

These dynamics mirror the broader "poverty as crime" trend. In city after city, survival activities are being outlawed: sleeping rough, begging, or even eating on the street can trigger fines or arrest. Anti-homeless laws, from vagrancy bans to "anti-begging" ordinances, create a hostile environment that locks people in poverty. In this context, racialised minorities, Roma communities, migrants, and the undocumented are far more likely to be stopped, fined, or detained for minor infractions, while offences such as loitering or "indecency" are applied disproportionately against women in poverty.

Taken together, these factors create a vicious cycle in which constant policing and punitive public-order laws drive FLINTA to the margins and away from social protection, services and formal work.

Recommendations

- Ensure the full ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention in all EU Member States.
- Ensure the full transposition and implementation of the Directive on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (VAW Directive), guaranteeing that women experiencing poverty have adequate and unconditional access to shelters, survivor support services, legal aid, and social welfare, regardless of their residence or migration status.
- In line with objectives set out in the Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030, support Member States in developing and implementing adequately resourced National Action Plans for Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.
- Strengthen the European Semester process by developing more robust and gender-responsive Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs), beyond the currently limited indicators in the Social Scoreboard to better capture gender inequalities and address the structural links between poverty and gender-based violence.
- Introduce and enforce economic penalties on Member States that fail to adopt, implement, or comply with national legislation addressing gender-based violence, including by conditioning access to EU Structural Funds on meaningful action to combat gender-based violence.
- Provide sustainable funding and support to civil society organisations and grassroots women's organisations, which play a critical role in preventing gender-based violence, supporting survivors, and promoting socio-economic empowerment.

On the criminalisation of FLINTA experiencing poverty

- Call on Member States to repeal laws and administrative measures that criminalise survival in public spaces, including prohibitions on begging, sleeping rough, informal economic activities, and sex work, and ensure that enforcement is non-discriminatory.
- Call on Member States to abolish discriminatory public order offences (such as loitering, vagrancy, public nuisance and indecency) that disproportionately target poor women, racialised communities, Roma individuals, and migrant and undocumented women.
- Improve access to justice and legal aid, including by reforming Directive (EU) 2016/1919 to guarantee free legal assistance to all suspects and accused persons in the EU, regardless of residence or migration status.

04. Building the Funding and Governance to Deliver Change

What does the Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030 tell us about the fight against poverty?

The Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030, adopted in March 2026 within the broader Union of Equality framework alongside the Anti-Racism Strategy 2026–2030 and the LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy 2026–2030, reaffirms the importance of gender equality across EU policy areas. However, it places limited emphasis on the socio-economic dimensions of inequality and largely frames the realisation of fundamental rights as a driver of growth and competitiveness rather than an objective in itself.

Notably, the strategy lacks binding measures and flagship initiatives addressing poverty, thus relegating this issue to the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy (EU APS). This approach risks undermining policy coherence and contradicts longstanding calls from EAPN to mainstream poverty eradication across all equality frameworks and to embed an intersectional, discrimination-informed lens within socio-economic policies. As it stands, the Gender Equality Strategy falls short of adequately addressing gendered poverty.

In this context, the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy will play a critical role in bridging these gaps. It must ensure strong coordination across policy areas and establish coherent frameworks capable of addressing poverty in all its dimensions. This requires alignment with the Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030, including through the adoption of disaggregated targets to reduce poverty among the most marginalised women and gender-diverse people, in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights targets and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Aligning Funding and Governance to Address Gendered Poverty

Addressing gendered poverty requires adequate financing and coherent governance structures capable of translating policy commitments into action. Universal and contributory social protection systems, as well as policies targeting gendered inequalities, depend on sufficient and predictable financial resources. International frameworks, including the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, recognise the central role of financing in advancing gender equality and call for gender mainstreaming across public budgets and fiscal policies.

In practice, EU funding instruments and economic governance mechanisms remain fragmented and often misaligned with poverty eradication and gender equality objectives. Funding streams addressing employment, social protection, care systems and social inclusion frequently operate in parallel rather than as part of a coordinated strategy[50]. Political priorities emphasising competitiveness and militarisation further divert resources from social investment, undermining efforts to tackle structural drivers of gendered poverty[51].

Gender-responsive budgeting provides a critical tool to bridge this gap by linking policy objectives for eradicating gender exclusion and gendered poverty with concrete financial allocations. It requires the systematic integration of gender impact assessments into funding programmes. This would help ensure that investments address key drivers and dimensions of gendered poverty, including labour market inequalities, unpaid care work, and limited access to essential services. In that regard, the European Commission proposal for the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework illustrates persistent gaps: social inclusion and poverty eradication remain underfunded, while competitiveness and security dominate. Indeed, the limited earmarking of 14% for social objectives within National and Regional Partnership Plans provides insufficient guarantees that resources reach the most marginalised groups.

In addition, the siloed structure of funding instruments such as the European Social Fund and AgoraEU does not adequately address the needs of women from marginalised groups. Women may experience poverty, gender-based violence, or discrimination simultaneously, yet the intersection of these vulnerabilities is not reflected in a dedicated budget line.

Greater coherence is also needed within the EU's economic governance framework. The European Semester could serve to align policy instruments such as the European Child Guarantee, the European Care Strategy, the Union of Equality Strategies, the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, and the Action Plan implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights. In practice, fiscal rules embedded in the Stability and Growth Pact continue to prioritise deficit and debt limits over social investment, leaving Member States constrained in their capacity to fund poverty reduction measures[52].

Finally, external EU funding instruments, including the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance, can support poverty reduction and gender equality reforms in candidate countries. Expanding support for statistical capacity, civil society, and institutional reforms would strengthen the monitoring and implementation of social protection and poverty reduction measures in line with EU standards.

50 European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) (2025), Towards the Eradication of Poverty: *EAPN Position Paper.* https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/POSITION_PAPER_TOWARDS_ERADICATION_POVERTY_EAPN.pdf

51 European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) (2025), *Semester Report: Spring Package 2025.* *https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/SEMESTER_REPORT_EAPN_SPRINGPACKAGE.pdf*

52 Ibid

Recommendations:

- Exempt social and green investments from the 3% deficit-to-GDP ratio set out in the Stability and Growth Pact and the Excessive Deficit Procedure, with no exceptions, and enshrine this Anti-Poverty Golden Rule in the EU Treaties.
- Integrate gender-responsive budgeting and systematic gender impact assessments across EU funding instruments. Call on Member States to mainstream gender in national public budgets.
- Ensure that the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework prioritises social investment, gender equality and poverty eradication through a 30% earmarking for social inclusion and poverty eradication within the ESF for 2028–2034.
- Strengthen gender mainstreaming in the MFF through a horizontal principle on gender equality, accompanied by technical guidance for Member States on evaluating the gender-responsive use of funds.
- Align the MFF to reach the most marginalised women and ensure that ESF+, ERDF, AMIF, AgoraEU, and other EU funds prioritise actions for Roma women, migrant women, women with disabilities, trans women, and homeless women. Link access to EU funds to the development and implementation of National and Local Anti-Poverty Strategies.
- Mobilise EU funds in the post-2027 MFF (ESF+, ERDF and InvestEU) to combat severe material deprivation and support affordable housing specifically for women experiencing homelessness, including survivors of domestic violence, in alignment with the European Care Strategy and the Child Guarantee.
- Ensure that the ESF 2028–2034 dedicates specific funding to marginalised groups, such as women, young people, homeless people, Roma people, people with disabilities, migrants, undocumented people, single-parent families, racialised people, LGBTQIA+ people, and people discriminated against on the basis of religion or belief.
- Ensure that AgoraEU 2028–2034 secures dedicated funding for survivors of gender-based violence from marginalised communities.
- Provide adequate MFF funding to address climate poverty, with a focus on energy efficiency and housing renovation, so that people living in poverty receive sufficient support during the green transition.
- Strengthen the role of the European Semester in aligning social, equality, and anti-poverty frameworks, including the European Child Guarantee, the European Care Strategy, the European Pillar of Social Rights, and the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy.
- Expand gender-sensitive poverty reduction support within the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance, including capacity building for data collection, civil society participation, and social protection reform.

Participation, Accountability and Gendered Poverty

Civil society organisations play a critical role in identifying emerging social needs, providing frontline services, and holding public authorities accountable for social policy implementation. They also serve as key intermediaries between policymakers and communities directly affected by poverty, including women and marginalised groups whose experiences are often underrepresented. For EAPN, people experiencing poverty possess crucial expertise on the barriers they face and the policies that affect them, and their knowledge and experience must meaningfully shape the design, implementation and evaluation of social protection and poverty reduction measures.

Meaningful participation requires significant time and resources from people experiencing poverty, including alternative care arrangements and travel. Women face additional barriers[53] linked to unpaid domestic and care responsibilities, entrenched gender norms that contribute to their exclusion and underrepresentation in decision-making spaces, and exposure to harassment or violence, including online[54].

In recent years, civic space has come under increasing pressure across several EU Member States[55]. Attacks on civil society organisations have taken multiple forms, including restrictive legislation, administrative barriers, and political stigmatisation. In some cases, governments have introduced measures that increase surveillance or reporting obligations for organisations receiving external funding, constraining their independence. These pressures are particularly severe for organisations working on gender issues and sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as those supporting FLINTA communities, especially trans people[56]. At the same time, austerity measures and reduced public spending have led to declining funding opportunities and increased competition for limited resources. These trends weaken civil society's capacity to contribute to social policy development and support communities facing poverty and marginalisation, precisely when the risks of poverty and social exclusion are rising. The EU budget can play a key role in safeguarding civic space by providing direct funding channels, particularly where national authorities restrict or reduce support.

Recommendations

- Establish structured dialogue and participatory mechanisms with women from underrepresented groups, as well as civil society organisations working alongside them. These mechanisms should operate throughout all phases of policy design, monitoring and evaluation as part of key policy frameworks such as the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, the European Pillar of Social Rights, and the EU Care Strategy.
- Implement a People Experiencing Poverty Committee alongside a Civil Society Committee to shape, monitor, and evaluate the implementation of the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy, ensuring coherence with the Union of Equality Strategies.
- Call on Member States to implement the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy at national and local levels through National and Local Anti-Poverty Strategies. To ensure their effectiveness, these strategies must be adequately resourced and co-developed, implemented, and evaluated with people experiencing poverty, particularly FLINTA experiencing poverty.

53 UN Women and Inter-Parliamentary Union (2026), Women in politics: 2026. https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2026/03/women-in-politics-2026

54 UN Women Europe and Central Asia (2024), Research on the prevalence of violence against women in the Europe and Central Asia region. https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/research-tf-vaw_full-report_24-january2.pdf

55 Civil Society Europe (2025), Unprecedented Attacks on NGOs in the EU – We Call on All Democratic Forces to Act for a Strong and Independent Civil Society: Civil Society Statement. https://civilsocietyeurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/07.05-Civil-Society-Europe-NGO-Funding-Statement.pd

56 European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) (2025), EU Civil Society Strategy: EIGE's Contribution to the Call for Evidence. https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/eige-input-for-eu-civil-society-strategy_final.pdf

05. Conclusion

Europe stands at a pivotal moment in the fight against poverty. With the adoption of the first **EU Anti-Poverty Strategy (EU APS)** in May 2026, the renewed **European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) framework and Action Plan** in July 2026, and the **Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030,** the EU now has an important policy architecture through which to translate its commitment to eradicating poverty by 2050 into concrete action. Together, these frameworks create an opportunity to address poverty in all its dimensions, from material deprivation to gendered and intersecting forms of exclusion that push people into poverty, keep them there, and limit their ability to escape it. **The challenge now is to ensure that these frameworks reinforce one another rather than operate in parallel.**

Poverty is not simply a lack of resources; it is embedded in economic, social and political systems that reproduce disadvantage along gendered, racialised, and other intersecting lines. Eradicating poverty therefore requires **coherent, intersectional and participatory approache**s that address both the conditions that produce poverty and the unequal distribution of resources, rights and power that perpetuates it.

Effective poverty eradication also demands robust multilevel governance. Policies critical to eradicating poverty in its gendered dimensions, such as social protection, housing, healthcare, education and employment, are largely implemented at national, regional and local levels. Without clear coordination mechanisms across these levels, EU commitments risk remaining aspirational. Currently, there is no requirement for Member States to adopt comprehensive National or Local Anti-Poverty Strategies, and there are no minimum standards for their design or implementation. This fragmented landscape risks leaving women and marginalised groups behind, as their specific needs are often overlooked in policy design and service delivery.

To succeed, the EU's new policy architecture must be underpinned by strong governance, meaningful participation by people experiencing poverty, and gender-responsive, intersectional data. It must ensure adequate financing, coherent implementation across Member States, and alignment between social, equality, and anti-poverty policies, while embedding mechanisms that translate EU-level commitments into concrete action at national and local levels. Only through such coordinated, multilevel approaches can the EU fully address the gendered dimensions of poverty and ensure that no one is left behind.

06. Notes

European Anti-Poverty Network

The European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) is an independent network of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and groups involved in the fight against poverty and social exclusion in the Member States of the European Union, established in 1990.

www.eapn.eu