# Poverty: a gender perspective

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The European Parliament adopted by 325 votes to 104, with 206 abstentions, a resolution on poverty: a gender perspective.

Parliament recalled that the latest Eurostat data show that the number of women in poverty remains permanently higher than that of men, with currently some 64.6 million women as against 57.6 million men. Women were particularly affected by the risk of poverty in the EU-28 in 2014, with the rate standing at 46.6% before social transfers and 17.7% after such transfers. Regardless of how specific the groups at risk are, such as elderly women, single women, single mothers, lesbians, bisexual women, transgender women and women with disabilities, poverty rates among migrant women and women from ethnic minorities are the same throughout the EU. Furthermore, single-parent families are at greater risk of poverty or social exclusion (49.8 % compared with 25.2% of average households with dependent children, with, however, differences between Member States.

**Poverty and work-life balance**: Parliament considered that Member States should prioritise the issue of reconciling private and professional life by introducing family-friendly working arrangements, such as adaptable working hours and the possibility of teleworking. It also noted that the lack of affordable high-quality childcare, care for dependent persons and the elderly, and in particular of crèches, nursery schools and long-term care facilities, contributes to social exclusion, the gender employment gap, the pay gap and the related pension gap.

Parliament also recalled that the **austerity policies** requested by the Commission and implemented by the Members States, in addition to the economic crisis of the past few years, have widened inequalities and affected women in particular. Parliament called on the Member States and the Commission to develop and use the available policy and financial instruments, including the Social Investment Package (the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI).

**Parental leave and maternity leave**: Parliament called on the Commission, in close coordination with the Member States, to undertake a **comprehensive legislative initiative with a view to meeting the needs of mothers and fathers concerning the different types of leave**, namely maternity, paternity, parental and carers' leave, in particular in order to help men play an active role as fathers, enabling a fairer distribution of family responsibilities and thus allowing women equal opportunities to participate in the labour market. It called on the Member States to envisage legislation to safeguard or enhance maternity, paternity and parental rights. It underlined the fact that in 2010 only 2.7 % of persons using their right of parental leave were men, which points up the need for concrete action to ensure parental leave rights.

Parliament reiterated its disappointment at the withdrawal of the maternity leave directive and called on the Commission to put forward a **new proposal** and a mandatory right to paid paternity leave.

**Poverty and work**: Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States to implement policies to promote the employment of women and the integration into the labour market of socially marginalised groups of women. It called particularly for the development of affordable and high-quality public care services, adaptable but not precarious working-time arrangements that benefit both women and men.

It stressed the crucial importance of: **reforming macroeconomic, social and labour market policies** by aligning these with gender equality policies in order to guarantee economic and social justice for women and reconsidering the methods used to determine the poverty rate and developing strategies to promote the fair distribution of wealth.

Noting that women are more often employed in precarious and low-paid work and on non-standard employment contracts, Parliament called on Member States to step up their efforts to combat undeclared work, precarious jobs and the abuse of atypical forms of contract, including zero-hour contracts in some Member States.

Members pointed out that there are new categories of women in poverty, consisting of young professional women, especially in certain Member States whose tax policies do not take into account the difficulties encountered by these categories, and which therefore condemn a large proportion of young female graduates to a precarious working life and an income that rarely manages to rise above the poverty line (the '**new poor**').

**Gender pay gaps**: once again, Parliament called on the Commission to revise the existing legislation in order to **close the gender pay gap and reduce the pension gap** between men and women. It recalled that the gender pay gap stands at 16.3 %, and the atypical and uncertain forms of work contracts (zero-hours contracts, temporary work, interim jobs, part-time working) also affect women more than men.

It welcomed the fact that the Commission considers 'equal pay for work of equal value' to be one of the key areas for action in its new strategy for gender equality. It called, therefore, on the Commission to adopt a Communication for a 'New Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Rights post 2015', so that the objectives and policies included can be effectively implemented.

**Pensions**: Parliament called on the Commission to carry out an impact assessment of minimum income schemes in the EU, and to consider further steps that would take into account the economic and social circumstances of each Member State. It called once again on the Member States to introduce a **minimum national pension** which cannot be lower than the risk-of-poverty threshold.

It should be noted that retired women are the most vulnerable group and often live in or are at risk of poverty. It called on the Member States to **reform pension systems with the aim of always ensuring adequate pensions for all** with a view to closing the pension gap. It also called on the Member States to consider providing shared pension rights in cases of divorce and legal separation, in line with the principle of subsidiarity. It emphasised that the Court of Justice of the European Union has made it clear that occupational pension schemes are to be regarded as pay and that the principle of equal treatment therefore applies to these schemes as well.

**Poverty: general recommendations**: Parliament made a series of recommendations for fighting poverty amongst women:

- develop support schemes and social pricing for the most deprived in society, particularly in regard to water and power supplies;
- combat gender stereotypes, empowering women and girls in the social, economic, cultural and political fields;
- actively promote a positive image of mothers as employees and to combat the phenomenon of the 'motherhood penalty' as identified by a number of research studies;
- ensure that the structural and investment funds, are used to improve education and training with a view to improving labour market access and combating unemployment, poverty and social exclusion of women;
- incentivise the achievement of equal representation in areas where there is a gender imbalance;

- take urgent measures in the **field of migrant education** both at EU and national levels, bearing in mind that education is key to integration and employability;
- ensure that all young people have access to high-quality free public education at all ages, including early childhood;
- ensure equal treatment legislation to combat poverty resulting from marginalisation and discrimination affecting sexual and gender minorities;
- take additional measures to support divorced women prone to discrimination and poverty;
- include gender-specific considerations when designing a guideline reference budget;
- sign and ratify the Istanbul Convention, and asks for an urgent initiative in order to establish an EU directive on combating violence against women;
- present a **European strategy against gender-based violence**;
- improve the quality of life of women in rural areas;
- provide the support necessary to ensure that all women can enjoy the right to culture, sport, and leisure, paying particular attention to women living in poverty;
- take specific measures to help disabled women;
- provide more ambitious action to tackle energy poverty;
- strive towards establishing a **European Child Guarantee** that will ensure that every European child at risk of poverty has access to free healthcare, free education, free childcare, decent housing and adequate nutrition;
- collect gender-disaggregated statistics and to introduce new individual indicators in respect of women and poverty.

At the same time, Parliament asked the Commission and Member States to create stakeholder engagement processes that promote and facilitate the direct engagement of persons at risk of poverty and social inclusion, particularly women and girls, in policy-making on social inclusion at all levels. NGOs which operate successfully in areas afflicted by extreme poverty should be mobilised as should social partners (trade unions and employers) and civil society. Lastly, Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States to implement gender budgeting as a tool.