

Poverty, gender and lone parents in the EU



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Review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

Almost one in four people in the EU lives at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Lone parents are especially vulnerable compared to the general EU population. Almost half (48%) of lone mothers and a third (32%) of lone fathers are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Women in particular are affected as they make up almost 85% of all one-parent families in the EU.

Lifting people out of poverty

The eradication of poverty and social exclusion is an integral part of the Europe 2020 Strategy. This commitment aims to lift at least 20 million people out of poverty by 2020. However, Member States face challenges in meeting this target. The number of people living in poverty has increased by an additional 4 million over the last 5 years.

Women in general are at a higher risk of poverty. Over the course of their lives they receive a lower income than men, are more likely to work in low-paid and insecure jobs or take career breaks due to caring responsibilities at home. As a result, they are exposed to a higher risk of poverty or social exclusion, especially when they are the sole earners.

EU policies such as the Social Investment Package, the Employment Package and the European Social Fund acknowledge that lone parents are highly vulnerable to income poverty and material deprivation. However, there is no single EU instrument that tackles the problem in a comprehensive way.

What does it mean to be poor in the EU?

Poverty among women and men goes beyond a lack of resources for survival and extends to the deprivation of civil, social and cultural activities as well as opportunities for political engagement and social mobility. Within the Europe 2020 framework, the concept of at risk of poverty or social exclusion (ARPOE) is connected with at least one of three conditions:

- being at risk of poverty;
- being severely materially deprived;
- living in households with very low work intensity.

Household structure affects the risk of poverty or social exclusion

Household composition has a direct impact on poverty. Two working adults living together, for instance, may pool their resources and better protect themselves and their children against poverty, particularly if one partner loses work unexpectedly. Lone-parent families have only one income to rely on. Changes in the household — for instance, the breakdown of a relationship or a death in the family — can therefore play a role in driving individual members into poverty.

In general, having a child or children impacts the expenses a family has to face and therefore, and its risk of poverty.

A lone parent is defined as a parent raising one or more dependent children, being without a partner in the same household. There are 9.2 million lone parents in the EU and just under half of them live in poverty.

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Further information

Press release: Almost 23 million children in the EU are poor - For every additional child, a woman's risk of falling into poverty increases →

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