

# Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men

## Opinion on Women and Poverty

*The Opinion of the Advisory Committee does not necessarily reflect the positions of the Member States and does not bind the Member States*

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# Introduction

The objective of this Opinion of the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men is to support the European Commission's work on the first-ever **EU Anti-Poverty Strategy**<sup>1</sup> and to help situate poverty and housing challenges within the **EU Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030**<sup>2</sup>.

Poverty is not only an **economic condition** but also a **form of social vulnerability**. Among those most affected are women, single parents, older people, the long-term unemployed, people experiencing mental health conditions or cognitive impairments, persons with disabilities, members of minorities, or those fleeing conflict.

The concept of the **“feminisation of poverty”** highlights that women constitute a segment of the population which is particularly vulnerable with respect to exposure to poverty. It emphasises that while both men and women face the risk of poverty, women are more affected by it.

This phenomenon results from a **combination of economic and societal structures**, including persistent gender stereotypes, traditional gender roles, disparities in employment rates, gap in employment hours and the gender pay gap resulting into gender pension and gender wealth gap, insufficient work–life balance measures, disproportionate caregiving responsibilities, and other forms of gender-based discrimination that primarily affect women. These dynamics collectively not only undermine women's equal participation in the labour market but also reinforce their economic vulnerability in later life. Addressing these barriers is therefore essential to reducing gendered poverty risks and ensuring equal economic security across the life course.

## Key Issues to Address

Throughout Europe, women are disproportionately affected by poverty due to entrenched structural gender inequalities that influence employment, social protection, caregiving responsibilities, health, and access to housing. According to Eurostat, in 2024, 93.3 million people in the EU were at risk of poverty or social exclusion; this was equivalent to 21.0% of the EU population. The risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU was higher for women than men (21.9% compared with 20.0%) showing the feminisation of poverty<sup>3</sup>. Over one-fifth (21.9%) of the EU population living in households with dependent children was at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2024<sup>4</sup>.

The labour market remains both horizontally and vertically segregated. Industries with a predominantly female workforce, such as education or cleaning, are typically undervalued and underpaid and women have more often non-permanent or part time contracts, while

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<sup>1</sup>[https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/first-eu-anti-poverty-strategy-enters-public-consultation-phase-2025-07-28\\_en](https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/first-eu-anti-poverty-strategy-enters-public-consultation-phase-2025-07-28_en).

<sup>2</sup>[https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/14611-Gender-Equality-Strategy-2026-2030\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/14611-Gender-Equality-Strategy-2026-2030_en).

<sup>3</sup> EIGE describes the term as “Increasing incidence and prevalence of poverty among women compared to men, as a result of structural discrimination that affects women's lives and is reflected in lower salaries, lower pensions, fewer benefits, etc.”

<sup>4</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Living\\_conditions\\_in\\_Europe\\_-\\_poverty\\_and\\_social\\_exclusion#:~:text=Highlights,21.0%25%20of%20the%20EU%20population](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Living_conditions_in_Europe_-_poverty_and_social_exclusion#:~:text=Highlights,21.0%25%20of%20the%20EU%20population) .



furthermore being underrepresented in senior leadership and company boards. As a result, women's access to stable income, career progression, and financial independence is significantly limited. In many countries, the low involvement of men in care and domestic work, combined with a lack of affordable childcare, further restricts women's ability to fully participate in the labour market or in public life while also caring for children or other relatives. The gender pay gap contributes to the gender pension gap, which stood at 24.5% in the EU in 2024<sup>5</sup>.

Women are also disproportionately affected by economic vulnerabilities. They are more likely to be single parents, earn lower incomes, and rely on social housing - trends compounded by gender-based violence, caregiving responsibilities, and age-related poverty. Women also tend to be more affected by energy poverty. Migrant women, Roma and Sinti women, women with disabilities, women in the LGBTIQ+ community, and older women face **intersecting forms of discrimination** that deepen their exclusion.

According to the WHO and the World Bank, adolescent pregnancy is a global phenomenon with clearly known causes and serious health, social and economic consequences to individuals, families, and communities<sup>6</sup>. Ensuring free access to sexual and reproductive health services, including low-threshold access to safe abortion as a common health intervention<sup>7</sup> is important to ensure favourable health outcomes, and mitigate known adverse economic and social consequences of unwanted pregnancy. Access to essential services such as healthcare, mental health support, and social protection is also more difficult for women living in poverty. Women in especially vulnerable situations – such as single mothers, older women, women with a migration background, and women with disabilities – face even greater challenges.

The challenges faced by women in poverty cannot be fully understood or effectively addressed without considering multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Women experiencing poverty often face multiple, overlapping disadvantages related to gender, ethnicity, age, disability, migration and LGBTIQ background. In addition, women encounter specific factors that increase their risk of poverty, including lower participation in the labour force, persistent wage gaps, greater responsibility for unpaid household and care work, and a higher likelihood of single parenthood or caring for dependents. These factors contribute to a higher prevalence of poverty and social exclusion among women, particularly affecting older women, single mothers, and those with lower educational attainment.<sup>8</sup>

The feminisation of poverty is also intergenerational. Children raised in poverty face structural disadvantages in education, health and social participation, which perpetuate cycles of deprivation. Breaking this intergenerational cycle requires robust, universal, and gender-responsive social protection systems, including adequate minimum income schemes, housing support, child benefits and pensions. Equally important is the recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work through investments in affordable, high-quality care services.

## International and EU regulation

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<sup>5</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc\\_pnp13/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ilc_pnp13/default/table?lang=en)

<sup>6</sup> [Adolescent pregnancy, The Social and Educational Consequences of Adolescent Childbearing - World Bank Gender Data Portal | World Bank Gender Data Portal](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Abortion](#)

<sup>8</sup> <https://nso.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2024-Gender-Analysis-based-on-sex-disaggregated.pdf>.



**The United Nations** plays a significant role in addressing the feminization of poverty, particularly through key international agreements. The most important is CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women). CEDAW calls for the removal of structural barriers perpetuating women's economic inequality, including ensuring equal access to education, employment, social protection, and adequate housing, and addressing the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work. It recognizes poverty as both a cause and consequence of gender discrimination and urges governments to implement gender responsive social and economic policies to empower women and break the cycle of poverty.

Other relevant international instruments include the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.

Within the **Council of Europe** framework, the revised **European Social Charter** guarantees social rights such as equal pay, the right to work and vocational training, social protection, housing, and protection against poverty and exclusion. It places special emphasis on persons in vulnerable situations, including women, and obliges states to ensure equality not only in opportunities but also in outcomes. The Charter acknowledges that economic insecurity disproportionately affects women – especially single mothers, older women, and those in precarious employment. Addressing the structural causes of women's poverty is essential to achieve genuine equality and ensure women's economic self-sufficiency.<sup>9</sup>

The Istanbul Convention complements these efforts by tackling gender-based violence, a key factor exacerbating women's economic insecurity and poverty. By promoting prevention, protection, and support measures, the Convention helps to break the cycle of violence and poverty, contributing to women's empowerment and social inclusion.

### **Addressing the Feminisation of Poverty in the EU**

The fight against the feminisation of poverty in the **European Union** is anchored in primary law. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union enshrines the principle of equality between women and men (Articles 8, 153 and 157 TFEU) and obliges the Union to eliminate inequalities and promote equality with regard to labour market opportunities and treatment at work and with regard to equal work or work of equal value. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union further guarantees the right to equality between women and men in all areas (Article 23), as well as protection against poverty and social exclusion (Article 34).

Building on these foundations, the EU has adopted a series of legislative measures to tackle structural gender inequalities that contribute to women's higher risk of poverty. The Recast Directive<sup>10</sup> prohibited sex discrimination regarding employment and occupation. The Pay Transparency Directive<sup>11</sup> addresses a key driver of the gender pension and poverty gaps by requiring pay transparency and granting workers the right to information, with the aim of closing the gender pay gap. The Work–Life Balance Directive<sup>12</sup> introduces rights to parental leave, carers' leave, and flexible working arrangements, helping to address gender inequalities in

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<sup>9</sup> See the review of the European Committee of Social Rights on Social Rights and Cost of Living Crisis: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-social-charter/-/the-european-committee-of-social-rights-publishes-its-review-on-social-rights-and-cost-of-living-crisis>

<sup>10</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2006/54/oj/eng>

<sup>11</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2023/970/oj/eng>

<sup>12</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2019/1158/oj/eng>



unpaid care work and supporting women's participation in the labour market. The Minimum Wage Directive sets a framework to ensure that minimum wages are fair and sufficient to provide workers with a decent standard of living, thereby contributing to social cohesion and reducing in-work poverty. The Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence<sup>13</sup> ('VAW Directive') requires Member States to provide free of charge specialist support measures for victims of sexual violence, female genital mutilation, and helpline advice and counselling. With regard to shelters, the Directive explicitly indicates<sup>14</sup> that where shelters are not free of charge and Member States request a contribution from victims when hosted in shelters or interim accommodation, the contribution should be affordable and not hinder victims' access to shelters or interim accommodation. These support measures could prevent victims from falling into poverty.

At the policy level, the Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025<sup>15</sup> sets out the Union's agenda for eliminating gender inequalities, explicitly recognising that gender gaps in pay, employment, working time and pensions expose women, particularly older women, to a higher risk of poverty. This approach is reinforced by the European Pillar of Social Rights, which establishes principles on equal opportunities, fair working conditions, social protection and inclusion. In line with this framework, the European Child Guarantee, the European Care Strategy, the Recommendation on Early Childhood Education and Care: Barcelona targets for 2030 and the Recommendation on access to affordable, high quality long-term care address structural inequalities in access to care. The first EU Anti-Poverty Strategy will play a crucial role in shaping the policy direction and priorities for promoting gender equality and social inclusion in the years ahead.

Addressing the feminisation of poverty also requires an intersectional approach, which the EU pursues through its broader equality frameworks – union of equality. The LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020–2025<sup>16</sup>, the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020–2025<sup>17</sup>, the EU Roma Strategic Framework on Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2020–2030<sup>18</sup>, and the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030<sup>19</sup> all recognise that structural discrimination and exclusion aggravate the risk of poverty. Women belonging to these groups face compounded disadvantages, which EU policies aim to address in a coordinated and cross-cutting manner.

Finally, the Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025, adopted by the Commission, recognises the need to address the higher proportion of women in poverty. Indeed, gender gaps in employment, pay, working time, and pensions are associated with a higher risk of poverty among women, particularly in older age. Furthermore, poverty makes women more vulnerable to gender-based violence and can force them to remain in unsafe situations. The European Commission has launched its Roadmap for Women's Rights to mark International Women's Day, outlining a long-term political vision for advancing women's rights. Building on progress made under the Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025, the plan aims to strengthen gender equality in the EU and globally. It reaffirms the Commission's commitment to empowering women and girls and guides future actions in the upcoming Gender Equality Strategy.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/1385/oj/eng>

<sup>14</sup> See recital 67.

<sup>15</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0152>

<sup>16</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0698>

<sup>17</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0565&qid=1768310828854>

<sup>18</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0620>

<sup>19</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0101>



## Housing

Although housing is recognized as a fundamental human right under international human rights law, as well as under the constitutional law of many EU Member States, equal access remains elusive – particularly for women. Housing insecurity and homelessness are deeply gendered issues. Men are overrepresented in statistics on unsheltered homelessness, or street homelessness, where an individual is living outdoors, or in places not intended for regular habitation. The unique vulnerabilities women face are consequently often rendered invisible in official data and policy responses.

Traditional definitions of homelessness frequently exclude women who live in temporary, unstable, or unsafe housing situations. For example, women fleeing domestic violence and residing in shelters are labelled as "victims" rather than homeless, and those couch-surfing with friends or relatives due to financial hardship are often not counted at all. These forms of "hidden homelessness" mask the real scale of women's housing insecurity.

The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified these risks, limiting access to shelters, increasing energy costs and housing debts, and worsening conditions in overcrowded, unsafe accommodation. Due to financial challenges women face worse housing conditions regarding isolation, heating, cooling; more often they rent which may reduce their decision-making on improving their housing situation; if they are owners, they might have more difficulties in funding investments needed for modern and energy- and cost-efficient heating, cooling, etc. As many women lost income and job stability during the crisis, they became more susceptible to eviction and long-term homelessness.

As the cost of living rises across Europe, women are disproportionately affected compared to men due to the combined impact of the gender pay gap, the gender pension gap, income insecurity, and unequal care responsibilities and discrimination. Women face a higher risk of not finding adequate housing or must limit their housing options to less accessible, potentially unsafe areas with fewer public transport and care service options. According to Eurostat, the EU is facing a continued upward trend in housing costs. Between 2010 and the fourth quarter of 2024, house prices in the EU increased by 55.4% and rents by 26.7%.<sup>20</sup> The lack of affordable housing is a major driver of homelessness, negatively impacting health and well-being, creating unequal living conditions and opportunities, and leading to higher healthcare costs and reduced employability.

Addressing housing insecurity in Europe requires policy frameworks that recognize and respond to women's lived realities – especially those facing multiple forms of marginalization. In particular, victims of gender-based and domestic violence are often unable to leave abusive relationships because of lack of shelters or other forms of affordable accommodation.

## Employment and Economic Empowerment

Despite decades of progress, women continue to face significant barriers to their economic self-sufficiency and thus to equality. Gender segregation in the labour market, limited access to affordable education and care services, difficulties in achieving work-life balance, and unequal sharing of household responsibilities all prevent women from full economic self-

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<sup>20</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20250408-1>.



sufficiency. Social norms and traditional expectations about “women’s work” versus “men’s work” further reinforce these disparities.

Women remain underrepresented in high-growth sectors like ICT and STEM while overrepresented in lower-paid sectors such as care, education, and health, leading to horizontal segregation of the labour market and contributing to persistent gender pay and pension gaps. Women remain underrepresented in executive and leadership roles across both the private and public sectors. The proportion of women on the boards of the largest listed companies in EU Member States reached 32.2% in October 2022<sup>21</sup>.

Women entrepreneurs continue to face significant challenges: women-led businesses face greater challenges in accessing funding, navigating bureaucracy, and securing investment. Only 2% of venture capital in Europe<sup>22</sup> goes to women-led businesses, and just 10% of women-led startups receive funding<sup>23</sup>. Barriers in digital and green transitions are also significant, and excessive bureaucracy further complicates matters, particularly for women balancing business and family responsibilities. This context makes it more difficult for women to become entrepreneurs and start their own businesses<sup>24</sup>.

The feminization of poverty encompasses a wide range of interrelated issues, including women’s ability to freely choose whether to have children, as well as the structural barriers and potential discrimination that mothers disproportionately encounter in the labour market. While the free choice of maternity should be fully protected and supported—particularly for women in vulnerable situations—this choice often comes at a high social and economic cost. Furthermore, many women continue to face a motherhood penalty, revealing itself in discrimination in accessing employment, difficulties in maintaining stable work, and limited prospects for career advancement. These barriers not only undermine gender equality but also perpetuate intergenerational cycles of disadvantage.

Persons in vulnerable situations including Roma and Sinti women, migrant women, women with disabilities, queer women, older women, and women in rural areas – face compounded challenges due to multiple discrimination. Although women in the EU are generally better educated than men, this advantage rarely translates into equal opportunities in leadership or decision-making roles, resulting in underutilized talent.

The COVID-19 pandemic intensified existing gender inequalities. Closures of schools and early childhood education facilities, combined with remote work, placed an additional burden on women, who often had to manage household responsibilities, care for children and/or elderly relatives and or other dependent adults, and maintain professional duties simultaneously. Women employed in low-paid or feminized sectors – such as commerce, tourism, and domestic work – faced higher rates of job loss, income reduction, and increased care responsibilities. Single mothers were particularly vulnerable. In contrast, women working in healthcare were generally able to maintain employment as essential workers but were more exposed to health risks, including COVID-19 infection.

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<sup>21</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-11/Gender\\_Balance\\_on\\_Corporate\\_Boards\\_2\\_.pdf.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-11/Gender_Balance_on_Corporate_Boards_2_.pdf.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> [European Women in VC | Empowering diversity in Venture Capital](#)

<sup>23</sup> <https://eit.europa.eu/news-events/news/only-15-seed-funding-goes-women-led-deep-tech-start-ups-reveals-new-study>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.smeunited.eu/publications/eu-gender-equality-strategy-post-2025>



Addressing these structural and emerging vulnerabilities requires targeted policies to promote gender equality in employment, reduce pay gaps, ensure affordable, accessible care services, strengthen social and economic support for motherhood and tackle multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, particularly for women in marginalized groups. Only through comprehensive measures can women achieve true economic self-sufficiency and participate fully in the labour market. Such measures should also promote women's equal participation in decision-making and leadership positions across economic, political and social spheres and should also cover actions that promote men to take equal responsibility for care work (including non-transferable parental leave), raise awareness of men on how to prevent discrimination and sexual harassment, to educate men how to stop violent behaviour towards women and minorities.

## Care

Unpaid care and domestic work continue to fall disproportionately on women, due to and reinforcing traditional gender roles and limiting women's participation in the labour market. Data from EIGE show that 56% of female parents spend at least 5 hours a day on childcare, compared to 26% of male parents<sup>25</sup>. The unequal distribution of care responsibilities reduces women's opportunities for full-time, stable, and adequately paid employment and contributes to persistent gender gaps in income, pensions, and might hamper career progression. The care burden carried disproportionately by women is also linked to increased mental stress and negative health outcomes, highlighting the intersection of economic inequality and wellbeing.

The Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 and the European Care Strategy (2022) underline the importance of recognizing, reducing, and redistributing unpaid care work. These frameworks call on Member States to invest in affordable, accessible, and high-quality childcare and long-term care services, strengthen work–life balance through flexible and family-friendly working arrangements, and ensure adequate, non-transferable paid leave for both women and men. The effective implementation of the Work–Life Balance Directive is central to these efforts, as it provides individual rights to paternity leave, parental leave, carers' leave, and flexible working arrangements, supporting equal sharing of care responsibilities between women and men. Equally important is addressing the gender stereotypes that sustain the unequal distribution of care work. The CERV programme highlights this as a priority, promoting a gender-responsive approach to tackle the root causes of the gender care gap. This includes encouraging family-friendly practices in companies, supporting the take-up of rights under the Work–Life Balance Directive by both women and men, preventing and protecting against discrimination during or after pregnancy or following family leave, and raising awareness of the value of care work, including the skills it requires. Challenging traditional gender roles and stereotypes is therefore a crucial complement to expanding care services and leave rights, ensuring that the redistribution of care responsibilities becomes a practical reality.

At the national level, these EU commitments are reflected, for example, in the gender equality strategies of several Member States, which typically prioritize measures such as improving work–life balance, expanding and professionalizing childcare and long-term care services, introducing or strengthening non-transferable parental leave, and promoting flexible working

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<sup>25</sup>[https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/better-work-life-balance-bridging-gender-care-gap?language\\_content\\_entity=en](https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/better-work-life-balance-bridging-gender-care-gap?language_content_entity=en).



arrangements. These national strategies translate EU objectives into concrete policies that encourage both women and men to share care responsibilities equally and enhance the social recognition of care work.

## **Health including Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights**

Access to sexual and reproductive health care services, information, and education is essential for women's autonomy, well-being, and economic empowerment. Restrictions on these rights—including limited access to contraception, safe abortion, maternal health services, or age-appropriate and evidence-based comprehensive sexual education—can have long-term social and economic consequences, particularly for women from vulnerable groups. Ensuring full access to sexual and reproductive health services enables women to make informed choices about their bodies, careers, and family life, thereby promoting gender equality and reducing the risk of poverty and social exclusion.

There is a strong connection between poverty and health. People living in poverty often have limited access to healthcare, nutritious food, and safe living conditions, which can lead to various health problems. Women are more often at risk of poverty and often may have fewer financial resources, making them particularly vulnerable to the health impacts of poverty.

Poverty further exacerbates barriers to sexual and reproductive health and rights, limiting women's access to essential services, their ability to make informed choices, safeguard their health, and break the cycle of economic disadvantage. Period poverty, in particular, hampers girls' and women's participation in education and employment, reinforcing existing inequalities and restricting opportunities for empowerment.

At the same time, psychosocial risks (PSRs) at work are major contributors to illness and absenteeism, disproportionately affecting women. Around 80% of workplaces report PSRs, with up to 60% of lost working days linked to them. Stress, anxiety, and depression caused or worsened by work affect over a quarter of workers, with 61% of female managers reporting sleep problems due to these risks.<sup>26</sup>

## **Gender-Based Violence**

Women and girls living in poverty, or at risk of poverty, face a heightened risk of gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual violence, which severely limits their access to education and the labour market and undermines their economic self-sufficiency. Women with low income, women living in rural areas and homeless women are recognised as groups at heightened risk of violence against women or domestic violence for which the VAW Directive requests targeted support<sup>27</sup>. The lack of affordable housing can trap them in abusive situations, force them to live in inadequate conditions, or increase their risk of homelessness. GBV not only violates women's rights but also has significant economic consequences: survivors often face barriers to maintaining employment, experience loss of income, incur medical and legal costs, and may be forced to leave their homes.

This creates a vicious cycle in which economic dependence and exposure to GBV reinforce each other. Women who are older, single mothers, have low education, or limited access to social protection are particularly vulnerable. Addressing GBV is therefore essential not only to

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<sup>26</sup> <https://osha.europa.eu/en/themes/psychosocial-risks-and-mental-health>

<sup>27</sup> See Article 33 and corresponding recital 71.



protect women's safety but also to promote economic empowerment, reduce gendered poverty, and foster greater equality and social inclusion.

Poverty is a driving factor for women's sexual exploitation in which women's vulnerability is exploited in the form of trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation. The lack of exit policies makes it difficult for women to have real choices which maintain them in the poverty trap<sup>28</sup>.

Particular emphasis should be placed on programmes that support women affected by gender-based violence in breaking the cycle of abuse through economic independence and holistic empowerment. Gender-based violence not only causes deep personal and social harm, but also reinforces structural inequalities, including income disparities and barriers to long-term financial security. Preventive measures are crucial in protecting women and children from future violence and addressing the root causes of economic vulnerability. Targeted projects can help women access secure, long-term employment with a living wage, thereby promoting gender equality, social inclusion and the sustainable prevention of violence.

Breaking the cycle of poverty also requires targeted efforts to promote the economic empowerment and social inclusion of women and girls in vulnerable circumstances. Accessible, affordable and high-quality education and training are essential to provide women with opportunities for decent work and economic self-sufficiency. Employment policies must prioritise inclusion and equal access, particularly for groups at heightened risk such as homeless women, migrant women and Roma and Sinti women. Comprehensive access to healthcare, care services, and social benefits is indispensable to support women in overcoming vulnerability and building resilience.

A comprehensive policy response at both EU and national levels is therefore needed. This response must address the structural causes of women's poverty while at the same time ensuring immediate and tangible improvements in women's lives. Combating female poverty is not only a question of social justice and human rights, but also a prerequisite for sustainable and inclusive economic and social development.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

### Recommendations for EU Institutions

- Ensure that all Member States transpose fully and timely the **Work-Life Balance Directive**, the **Women on Boards Directive**, the **Gender-Based Violence Directive** and the **Pay Transparency Directive**.
- **Mainstream gender equality into the EU poverty strategy** as a horizontal principle as well as through targeted measures to address the feminization of poverty and into the strategy's implementation.
- **Mainstream gender in the upcoming EU plan on affordable housing**, with measures targeting specific groups of women with a multiple and intersectional lens (single-parent families, women living with disabilities, women living in rural or isolated areas, homeless

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<sup>28</sup> More information can be found: the European Parliament resolution of 14 September 2023 on the regulation of prostitution in the EU: its cross-border implications and impact on gender equality and women's rights (2022/2139(INI)) [EUR-Lex - 52023IP0328 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)



women, women victims of gender-based violence, migrant and refugee women and Roma women)

## Recommendations for EU Member States

- **Mainstream gender equality** into all national strategies, policies and measures designed to prevent or alleviate poverty. Ensure that they target specific groups of women with a multiple and intersectional lens.
- Conduct educational campaigns from primary school onward to **challenge gender stereotypes** and promote equal sharing of caregiving and domestic responsibilities, also known as mental load.
- Foster inter-ministerial **collaboration and partnerships** with civil society organisations to protect women in vulnerable situations from poverty.
- Ensure that maternity is a truly free choice, particularly for women in vulnerable situations, by expanding access to comprehensive social, economic, and health services that enable informed and autonomous decisions regarding motherhood.
- Combat the motherhood penalty through robust labour market protections, including anti-discrimination measures, secure and decent work conditions and effective pathways for career continuity and advancement.
- Reform the **social housing system** to prioritise individuals and families in vulnerable situations, including single-parent households or victims of domestic violence.
- Promote and support the development of balanced and sustainable solutions to improve the long-term affordability of private rental housing for low-income families, including, where appropriate, targeted subsidies or other support measures, and by sharing good practices and knowledge among Member States
- Cap **water and electricity prices** for households during economic or social crises to maintain access to essential services.
- Ensure that all people, especially in vulnerable communities, have **access to free and quality education** from early childhood through adulthood. Include mechanisms for the early detection of school dropout, with particular attention to situations of heightened vulnerability, social exclusion, minority group membership, and the risk of child or early marriage. Provide scholarships and financial aid to ensure students from disadvantaged families can continue their studies.
- Conduct **educational campaigns** to raise awareness of domestic and gender-based violence.
- Ensure women have **access to concrete information**, including helplines, emergency shelters, legal assistance, and integrated care facilities.
- Provide rapid, coordinated, and personalised **financial, administrative and social support** to enable victims of domestic violence to leave abusive situations safely and quickly.
- Guarantee sufficient **emergency shelter** capacity, ideally integrated into **comprehensive centres** offering crisis intervention, temporary accommodation, social counselling,



psychotherapy, legal support, gynaecological services, evidence handling, and interview facilities.

- Implement gender-responsive **tax reforms**. Subject menstrual products to a **0% VAT rate**. Ensure that married couples or those in civil unions are assigned **individualised withholding tax rates** rather than a joint rate, promoting fair and equitable taxation.
- Alleviate period poverty by providing **free menstrual products to women in vulnerable situations**. Ensure these products are readily accessible at key public places, such as schools, community centres, shelters, and healthcare facilities, to improve access and reduce the stigma associated with menstruation.
- Provide free access to **gynaecological consultations, examinations or procedures (including abortion)** to all women, with targeted strategies for women in vulnerable situations (young women and girls, migrant and refugee women, women with disabilities).
- Provide **free access to various types of contraception** on prescription and the emergency contraception (the ‘morning-after pill’) at pharmacies with no up-front costs.
- Provide free access to health promotion and disease prevention programmes to all women
- Support highly vulnerable women during and after childbirth by ensuring sufficient number of emergency shelter places and perinatal care for women in precarious situations following maternity discharge.
- Guarantee enough affordable, locally accessible, and time flexible **early childhood care and education (ECCE) services** that align with maternity/parental leave, ensuring no interruption in care and preventing a childcare gap.
- Guarantee affordable and locally accessible **long-term care** services for older persons and persons with disabilities to enable women – who most often provide care – to re-enter the labour market.
- Support **caregiving by relatives** for older persons, the chronically ill, and persons with disabilities – that is mostly carried out by women, through **financial, administrative and social support**.
- Develop a system that automatically manages **alimony payments**, ensuring timely collection, immediate detection of missed payments, and rapid initiation of recovery procedures to prevent income insecurity for single-parent households.
- Ensure that primary caregivers are not penalised in the **pension system** by considering caregiving as work (for example, by counting periods of maternity and parental leave toward pension entitlements and valuing them at the national average wage).
- Expand **unemployment benefit coverage**, including subsidies for those who do not meet contributory requirements, mostly women.
- Support **extracurricular education and skills training for women** of working age, in particular for persons in vulnerable situations such as migrant and refugee women, Roma women, and older women, with a focus on emerging and traditionally male-dominated fields like STEM, IT, and AI. Consider introducing the right to free education and training during working hours which is key to women.
- Introduce or strengthen **employment-based benefits and leaves** such as maternity leave, paternity leave, adoptive leave, parental leave and leave to take care of dependants



(e.g. compassionate care leave). Ensure that maternity benefits are sufficiently high to provide a dignified standard of living, including for single parents and individuals living in regions with higher costs of living.

- Make sure **allowance for adults with disabilities** is calculated solely based on the beneficiary's income, not the couple's combined income.
- Specifically address the situation of homeless persons.
- Ensure the existence of adequately funded exit policies and strategies for women in prostitution.

### Joint Recommendations for EU Institutions and Member States

- Implement **gender-responsive budgeting** in fiscal measures that directly or indirectly address poverty.
- Collect and maintain **sex- and age-disaggregated data** with regards to poverty, including the root causes, consequences, risks, impacts and measurement of poverty (exploring possibilities of assessment and accounting for intra-household inequalities), and economic activity to inform evidence-based policy and targeted interventions, considering routine and special EUROSTAT surveys (e.g. SILC)
- Develop data gathering on poverty to understand better the intrahousehold inequalities in income and resources and the challenges of economic independence of women.
- Finance **studies and research** on the root-causes of gender inequalities, women's poverty, with a multiple and intersectional lens.
- Invest in **positive narratives and institutional accountability** to ensure the prioritisation of norms and policies mindful of gender equality and to prevent the upholding of harmful social norms and gender stereotypes limiting women's voice, agency, decision-making and meaningful participation.
- Ensure that **social protection systems** are inclusive and effectively reach all persons in vulnerable situations, including children, women, older people, persons with disabilities, and population living in rural, remote and depopulated areas and communities.
- Ensure that those in most vulnerable situation have **free or subsidized access to essential services** such as healthcare, education, housing, food, clean water, and energy, to meet basic needs and prevent extreme deprivation.
- Make the fight against the feminisation of poverty a core **priority of foreign, trade and development policies**, in addition to domestic policy.
- Implement and enforce **equal pay policies** to ensure the same pay for same work or work of equal value for women and men. Strong legal frameworks, effective enforcement mechanisms, and awareness-raising among employers and workers are essential to achieving real progress.
- Identify root causes of **psychosocial risks** at workplaces and strengthen gender-responsive workplace health promotion.
- Introduce **reproductive health leave** for employees to allow for their management of reproductive health needs, including conditions like menstruation, endometriosis, menopause, fertility treatments, pregnancy loss, and abortions.



- Encourage **active fatherhood**, shared caregiving arrangements, and equitable participation in everyday family responsibilities as a foundation for gender equality.
- Strengthen **non-employment-based benefits and leaves** such as parental leave.
- Address the **undervaluation of feminised sectors** (health, education, social work).
- Address **territorial inequalities** by promoting specific measures for women in rural remote and depopulated areas and communities, who often face more limited access to labour market and business opportunities.
- Formalise work and improve working conditions for **domestic workers**.

## Good Practices

### Housing

#### Vulnerable Applicants Prioritisation

FR: The French “**cotation**” **system for social housing allocation** prioritises applicants according to their social, economic, and personal circumstances. This system greatly enhances access to housing for women, particularly single mothers and women who are victims of violence. Such targeted support helps to reduce gender-based inequalities in housing access.

FR: Since 2023, France has further facilitated **access to social housing for women who are victims of violence**. As part of the application process, these women can now provide, as supporting documentation, a statement prepared by a social worker or an accredited association confirming their situation. This measure lowers administrative barriers and ensures quicker and safer access for women facing urgent situations of violence.

#### State Subsidies

MT: The **Housing Benefit Scheme** provides monthly subsidies to tenants renting from the private sector. The amount of the subsidy is determined on a case-by-case basis, considering the applicant’s income and the rent they pay.<sup>29</sup>

MT: The **Energy Benefit** in Malta is designed to help low-income families manage rising water and electricity costs. Eligibility is determined either through an income means test or by qualifying for social support. In addition, households where the beneficiary is over sixty years of age receive an annual **Gas Rebate** of €40, while those under sixty receive €30 per year. Both the Energy Benefit and the Gas Rebate are applied directly as deductions on the water and electricity bill.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> <https://housingauthority.gov.mt/scheme/housing-benefit-scheme/>.

<sup>30</sup> <https://socialsecurity.gov.mt/en/information-and-applications-for-benefits-and-services/family-benefits/energy-benefit/>.



## Price Caps

MT: Since 2021, the Maltese Government has implemented a **fixed energy price policy**, protecting households and businesses from fluctuations in electricity and fuel costs.<sup>31</sup>

## Employment and Economic Empowerment

### Female Employment Rate

FR: The French Ministry for Gender Equality has expanded **specialized employment services within its national NGO network** (Centres for information about women's rights – CIDFF) to support vulnerable women in rural or isolated areas who are furthest from the labour market. By the end of 2023, 83 of the 98 centres had such services in place, with full coverage planned by 2027. This measure strengthens women's access to employment opportunities and economic independence across the country.<sup>32</sup>

MT: The Maltese **In-Work Benefit**, paid quarterly, is designed to support couples and single parents who are employed and have dependent children under the age of 23 living with them.<sup>33</sup>

UN Women: Developed in 2021 by UN Women and the International Labour Organization, the **guide to public investments in the care economy** provides a policy tool to estimate care deficits, investment costs, and economic returns. It allows for an estimation of the economic and social returns (decent job creation directly in care sectors and indirectly in related sectors, narrowing of gender gaps in employment and earnings, self-financing potential of care services investments through increased tax revenues, earnings generation, distribution of earnings and poverty alleviation).<sup>34</sup>

UN Women: Launched in September 2021 by the UN Secretary-General, the **Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions** brings together Member States, UN entities, international financial institutions, development banks, social partners, civil society, and the private sector. The initiative represents the UN system's collective response to overlapping crises that risk reversing development gains. Its objective is to advance the Sustainable Development Goals by promoting the creation of decent jobs – particularly in the green, digital, and care economies – and by extending social protection to those currently excluded.<sup>35</sup>

### Economic Empowerment

ES: Spain's **Minimum Vital Income**, created by Royal Decree-Law 20/2020, provides a guaranteed minimum income for people and families at risk of poverty or social exclusion. As part of the Social Security system, it helps cover essential needs while also supporting social and labour market inclusion. Alongside this national benefit, the autonomous communities of Spain manage their own **Regional Insertion Incomes**, which complement the system with additional support depending on local rules and resources.

ES: In Spain, the sustained increase of the **Minimum Interprofessional Wage (SMI)** by more than 54% over the past eight years has become a key policy tool to combat the feminization

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.centralbankmalta.org/site/Reports-Articles/2024/RB-2024-Article-4.pdf?revcount=9285>.

<sup>32</sup> <https://fncidff.info/emploi-formation-et-creation-dentreprise/>.

<sup>33</sup> <https://socialsecurity.gov.mt/en/information-and-applications-for-benefits-and-services/work-incentives-and-unemployment-benefits/in-work-benefit/>.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/04/policy-tool-care-economy>.

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.unglobalaccelerator.org/>.



of poverty. The measure has had a strong gender impact, as women are overrepresented in the lowest wage brackets, particularly in caregiving, cleaning, and domestic work. Around one in four female workers previously earned the minimum wage or less, compared to one in ten men. By raising wages, the reform has helped reduce the gender pay gap, improve the living conditions of many women, and lower the risk of poverty, especially in single-mother households.

ES: The **Royal Decree 902/2020 on equal pay between women and men** is a key instrument in tackling gender-based economic inequality. It sets out measures to ensure equal pay for work of equal value, promoting wage transparency and accountability within organisations. By enabling the identification and correction of pay disparities, the decree strengthens women's financial empowerment and supports their economic independence. It also addresses structural wage discrimination, helping to reduce poverty and social exclusion that disproportionately affect women.

FR: From September 2025, married and civil union couples in France will by default be assigned **individualised withholding tax rates** instead of a joint rate. This reform will distribute the couple's total tax obligation according to each partner's actual income, addressing a system where over 80% of couples currently face the same rate despite often significant income disparities. The change is particularly important for women, who are more frequently the lower earners and thus disproportionately penalized under the current system. By ensuring that each partner is taxed fairly, the measure strengthens gender equality and economic justice within households.<sup>36</sup>

FR: Since October 2023, the **allowance for adults with disabilities** (*Allocation aux adultes handicapés* - AAH) is **calculated solely based on the beneficiary's income**, not the couple's combined income. This change, increasing allowances by an average of €350 for 120,000 people, strengthens the economic independence of women with disabilities and reduces their vulnerability to financial dependence or domestic violence.<sup>37</sup>

UN Women: Launched in 2021 by UN Women, the **Generation Equality Action Coalition on Economic Justice and Rights** aims to secure economic justice and rights for women and girls by 2026. It focuses on expanding gender-responsive care services and decent work, reducing poverty, and closing labour force participation gaps. The coalition promotes equal access to land, financial services, and business ownership. It also supports gender-responsive macroeconomic policies and social protection systems to lift millions out of poverty. By addressing structural barriers, the initiative advances gender equality and inclusive economic participation.<sup>38</sup>

### Working Conditions

DE: In order to strengthen the economic self-sufficiency for both women and men, the coalition agreement provides for **tax incentives** for extending working hours, measures to strengthen **working time flexibility**, an increase or further development of the **tax relief** for single parents, and also more **work incentives** for older people.

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/actualites/A18226>.

<sup>37</sup> <https://handicap.gouv.fr/deconjugalisation-de-laah-les-reponses-aux-questions-que-vous-vous-posez>.

<sup>38</sup> <https://forum.generationequality.org/>.



ES: Spanish Royal Decree-Law 16/2022, improves the **working and social security conditions of domestic workers**, aligning them with those of other employees and eliminating unjustified disparities. The reform strengthens labour rights by formalizing employment, ensuring social security coverage, and promoting fair treatment and dignity at work. By reducing job precarity in this sector, the decree addresses the economic vulnerability and social exclusion that disproportionately affect women, supporting their financial independence and contributing to greater gender equality.

### Education and Career Support

DE: Germany promotes **gender-sensitive economic education** e.g. with the project 'Economic Self-Sufficiency Life Map – Mapping your path to economic self-sufficiency – plan ahead and calculate the impact of key life decisions' (<https://www.lebenskarte.info/>) that continually encourages people to make new decisions in favour of their economic self-sufficiency.

FR: France has implemented measures to support the professional and economic integration of **migrant and refugee women**, promoting their empowerment and independence. Initiatives include the “Experience without Borders” project<sup>39</sup>, which helps recognize migrants’ skills and qualifications, civil society organizations run women-focused projects, such as SISTECH<sup>40</sup>, supporting refugee women in digital careers, and SINGA<sup>41</sup>, helping migrants and refugees develop and successfully launch their entrepreneurial or nonprofit projects.

## Care

### Childcare and Parental Support

AT: The Austrian **Early Childhood Intervention Programm** “Frühe Hilfen” supports pregnant women and families with children up to the age of three who need help. It offers home visits and supports access to specific services needed by carers or children. A significant proportion of the families supported are those at risk of poverty, single mothers and mothers with a migration background. In addition, women with mental health problems and women who have experienced violence are also reached quite effectively.

CZ: In 2025, Czechia reformed the **calculation of maternity benefits for subsequent children**. From July 2026, parents who do not meet the current (and stricter) insurance thresholds will still qualify for maternity benefits if insured for at least 540 days within the last four years. The measure addresses the impact of long maternity and parental leaves in the country, during which some women’s employment contracts expire. It also supports those combining care with agreements on work outside employment, the self-employed and foreign workers. By recognising fragmented career paths linked to caregiving, the reform advances gender equality, though it can be used only once.<sup>42</sup>

DE: In Germany, there are a range of measures to ensure that employment is worthwhile and to achieve **economic self-sufficiency** for both women and men – even during **periods of care work**: For example, by continuously investing in reliable, quality **childcare infrastructure**

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<sup>39</sup>[https://www.rhone.gouv.fr/contenu/telechargement/51899/285692/file/CP\\_290622\\_Exp%C3%A9rience\\_Sans\\_Fronti%C3%A8res.pdf](https://www.rhone.gouv.fr/contenu/telechargement/51899/285692/file/CP_290622_Exp%C3%A9rience_Sans_Fronti%C3%A8res.pdf).

<sup>40</sup> <https://sis.tech/>.

<sup>41</sup> <https://wearesinga.org/qui-sommes-nous/>.

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.senat.cz/xqw/webdav/pssenat/original/116383/97661>.



(e.g. with the Childcare Quality Act), by strengthening **family benefits** such as parental allowance, which promotes both gainful employment and equal sharing of family tasks or with the Family Caregiver Leave Act for a better **reconciliation of family, care and work**.

FR: In France, the **childcare complement** (*complément du mode de garde – CMG*) paid by social services helps families cover the cost of employing a childminder for child under 6, ensuring they do not pay more than for daycare. Since 2023, single-parent families can benefit from the component until the child's 12th birthday, easing the financial burden of childcare and supporting their ability to remain in or return to employment.<sup>43</sup>

FR: France plans to create 1,000 new crèches for professional inclusion (*crèches à vocation d'insertion professionnelle – AVIP*) by 2027. These **daycare centres reserve places specifically for single-parent families** to support access to employment or vocational training. The initiative targets young parents who face barriers to entering the labour market, predominantly benefiting single mothers, and aims to reduce gender inequalities in professional opportunities.<sup>44</sup>

MT: In Malta, eligibility for Social Security **child-rearing credits** has been expanded to cover not only parents who interrupt employment to raise children, but also those who had children before entering the labour market. This change particularly benefits women, who are more likely to experience interrupted or delayed labour market participation due to caregiving responsibilities.<sup>45</sup>

### Alimony

CZ: Since 2021, single parents raising children whose other parent fails to pay court-ordered child maintenance, and who initiate enforcement proceedings, have been eligible to apply for substitute child maintenance.

FR: In France, the Family Support Allowance (*Allocation de Soutien Familial – ASF*) provides **financial assistance to single parents** raising children **without alimony**, a situation that disproportionately affects women. In 2023, the benefit was increased by 50%, helping to reduce gender inequalities in income security.<sup>46</sup>

FR: France's Alimony Collection and Intermediation Agency (*agence de recouvrement et d'intermédiation des pensions alimentaires – ARIPA*), created in 2017, strengthens financial security for separated parents. Since 2021, social services have been able to offer separated parents the option of having alimony collected directly from the debtor parent and transferred monthly to the creditor parent. This system helps prevent unpaid alimony, allows for quicker detection of missed payments, and enables the immediate launch of recovery procedures. Since January 2023, the measure has become systematic for all **alimony payments** established under a divorce decree.<sup>47</sup>

### Pension

CZ: In Czechia, a *child-raising bonus* was introduced, providing a fixed amount added to the contributory part of the pension for those who were the primary caregivers. This measure

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F345>.

<sup>44</sup> <https://solidarites.gouv.fr/les-creches-vocation-dinsertion-professionnelle-avip>.

<sup>45</sup> <https://finance.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Budget-Speech-2024.pdf>.

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F815>.

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F36407>.



helped to decrease the gender pension gap, which stood at 20% in 2022 and fell to 12.5% in 2025.

Further reforms were adopted in 2025 to better recognise unpaid care work and reduce gender-based economic inequality. For parents on maternity or parental leave, pension entitlements for the first two children will be calculated based on the national average wage until the child turns three, benefiting especially mothers with lower earnings. The existing individual wage-based calculation will remain in place and be used if it results in a higher entitlement.

The reform also introduces *optional pension credit sharing* between spouses, allowing couples to combine social security contributions accumulated during marriage. This measure aims to reduce income disparities in retirement, particularly for women who took career breaks for caregiving. The changes will take effect in January 2027.<sup>48</sup>

MT: Since 2015, individuals in Malta who did not accumulate enough contributions to qualify for a pension have been supported through a **bonus scheme**. This measure benefits more than 16,000 people, the majority of whom are married women, thereby addressing long-standing gender disparities in pension entitlements.<sup>49</sup>

## Health including Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

### Period and Medical Items Poverty

AT: Starting in 2026, menstrual and contraceptive products will be VAT-exempt in Austria<sup>50</sup>.

CZ: Starting in 2026, individually packaged **menstrual products** will be **freely accessible to students** in bathrooms at Czech primary and secondary schools. The measure aims to reduce absenteeism, enhance self-confidence, and prevent social exclusion. By tackling stigma and shame associated with menstruation, it further supports student wellbeing and ensures more equal participation in education.<sup>51</sup>

FR: Since 2020, France supports specific initiatives aimed at distributing **free menstrual products to vulnerable women**<sup>52</sup> (including women in precarious situations, incarcerated women, and young women and girls). It also distributes free menstrual products in universities and now fully reimburses reusable menstrual protection for all young women under the age of 26. Overall, since 2021, nearly €13 million has been allocated annually to various initiatives combating menstrual precariousness.

MT: As of January 2025, products for **female sanitary protection and certain medical items essential for cancer treatment** are subject to a **0% VAT rate**.<sup>53</sup>

MT: In September 2024, a pilot project was launched to provide **free menstrual products in secondary schools**. So far, over 900 students across three schools benefited from the

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.mpsv.cz/duchodova-reforma-pro-rodinu#oceneni-vychovy-deti---rodinny-vymerovaci-zaklad>.

<sup>49</sup> <https://finanzi.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Budget-Speech-2025.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> [fname\\_1685631.pdf](#)

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[https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=1172317244937694&id=100064782876353&mibextid=wwXlfr&rdid=NJ12psbLLMVyOeDU#](https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1172317244937694&id=100064782876353&mibextid=wwXlfr&rdid=NJ12psbLLMVyOeDU#).

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.egalite-femmes-hommes.gouv.fr/promouvoir-la-sante-des-femmes-et-laces-aux-droits>.

<sup>53</sup> [https://mtca.gov.mt/docs/default-source/documents/business-tax/vat/vat-guidelines/guidelines-on-certain-zero-vat-rated-supplies.pdf?sfvrsn=2acc84f7\\_1](https://mtca.gov.mt/docs/default-source/documents/business-tax/vat/vat-guidelines/guidelines-on-certain-zero-vat-rated-supplies.pdf?sfvrsn=2acc84f7_1).



project, reducing the financial burden on families for the purchase of these essential products.<sup>54</sup>

### Medical Care and Contraception

AT: From June 2024 until December 2026 a pilot project for free contraception and free psychosocial and medical contraception consulting is carried out in Vorarlberg, a federal state in the west of Austria. This project is led by the NGO “femail” and funded by the government. Within the project duration young girls and women from the age of 14 have the possibility to choose their preferred contraceptive method. The project is scientifically supervised and evaluated by the Austrian National Public Health Institute (GÖG) to generate data and information for a possible continuation.

FR: Since January 2022, women under the age of 26 have **free access to medical consultations, examinations or procedures**, as well as to various types of **contraception** on prescription at pharmacies, with no up-front costs.<sup>55</sup> Since January 2023, **emergency contraception**, or the ‘morning-after pill’, has been available in pharmacies to all minors and adults without a prescription or any up-front costs. Since January 2023, **male condoms** have been available free of charge to all young people aged 18 to 25.

### Motherhood

FR: Two key measures aim to support highly vulnerable women during and after childbirth. First, the Solidarity Pact 2023–2027<sup>56</sup> ensures the continued availability of 1,500 **emergency shelter places** for women in precarious situations following maternity discharge. Second, specialized **Health Care Beds** (*Lits Halte Soins Santé – LHSS*)<sup>57</sup> **for perinatal care** have been developed to provide medical accommodation for homeless women and their infants under three who require care. With proven benefits, especially in relieving pressure on maternity wards due to the lack of adequate post-discharge solutions, the program was officially expanded nationwide by a decree on December 3, 2024.

## Gender-Based Violence

### Legal and Information Services

AT: Nationwide, the federal government established **free-of-charge legal and psychosocial court assistance** in criminal proceedings, which guarantees a high standard of victim protection. Eligible victims are not only adult victims of violence (including technology-facilitated violence and terrorism) but also **minors who have witnessed acts of violence in their immediate social environment**, as well as **relatives** of victims who have been killed and relatives who witnessed criminal offenses.

AT: Since 2023, an agreement between the federal government and the regional governments on the **increase in sheltered housing** is in place. Under this agreement, a total of **€ 12 million** from the federal women’s budget will be made available by the end of 2027 to establish nationwide at least 90 additional places for women victims and 90 for their children.

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<sup>54</sup> <https://tvmnews.mt/en/news/menstrual-products-provided-for-free-in-three-schools-as-part-of-pilot-project/>.

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.egalite-femmes-hommes.gouv.fr/promouvoir-la-sante-des-femmes-et-lacces-aux-droits>.

<sup>56</sup> <https://solidarites.gouv.fr/le-pacte-des-solidarites-lutter-contre-la-pauvrete-la-racine>.

<sup>57</sup> [https://www.financement-logement-social.logement.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/15\\_fiche\\_pratique-les\\_lits\\_halte\\_soins\\_sante\\_lhss\\_-mai\\_2021\\_cle787939.pdf](https://www.financement-logement-social.logement.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/15_fiche_pratique-les_lits_halte_soins_sante_lhss_-mai_2021_cle787939.pdf).



AT: Long-term government funding for **Violence Protection Centers** has been substantially increased by over 50% in 2021. Furthermore, **Counselling Centers for Violence Prevention** have been established throughout Austria since 2021 and are also fully government funded. Following a police barring and mobile protection order, perpetrators of domestic violence are obliged to contact a Counselling Center for Violence Prevention and complete a total of six hours of counselling. Since July 2022 also courts may order mandatory violence prevention counselling for perpetrators in **cases of civil protection orders**.

FR: Since 2020, the Ministry of Gender Equality has run over 70 **targeted outreach programs for socially or geographically isolated women** affected by gender-based violence.<sup>58</sup> These include helpdesks operated by civil society organisations in public places (such as malls, pharmacies, townhalls or other local services) or mobile units – buses<sup>59</sup> travelling from village to village with trained staff providing advice and informing women of their rights.

FR: The French Ministry of Gender Equality supports the Cimade association<sup>60</sup> in a nationwide initiative to **protect foreign women victims of violence, including Roma women**. Cimade assists them in navigating administrative and legal procedures, provides accompaniment across the country, and trains professionals while developing outreach at all levels. The project also liaises with authorities and raises awareness of the specific challenges faced by foreign and Roma women, strengthening their protection, access to justice, and visibility.

UN Women: UN Women maintains a **Global Knowledge Platform to End Violence against Women**, designed to strengthen knowledge sharing and coordination among stakeholders for a more effective response to gender-based violence. The platform brings together data on prevalence, information on government and UN actions, and evidence-based policy and programming guidance. It is composed of three complementary resources: the Global Database on Violence against Women, the Virtual Knowledge Centre to End Violence against Women and Girls, and the Inventory of United Nations Activities to End Violence against Women.<sup>61</sup>

DE: The most recent and most encompassing legislation is the Violence Support Services Act, which was adopted in February 2025. It creates the framework for a reliable support system and ensures for the first time that women affected by violence have a legal entitlement to protection and counselling (from 2032). This means, women affected by violence are given access to low-threshold services and shelters and support will be provided free of charge.

UN Women: Launched in 2017 with an initial investment of over 500 million USD from the European Union, the **Spotlight Initiative**<sup>62</sup> is the United Nations Secretary-General's High Impact Initiative to end violence against women and girls (EVAWG). It is recognised as one of the 12 High-Impact Initiatives<sup>63</sup>, driving progress across the sustainable development goals, and represents a global effort to address violence against women and girls at scale.

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<sup>58</sup> <https://www.egalite-femmes-hommes.gouv.fr/aller-vers-les-femmes-au-plus-pres-des-territoires>.

<sup>59</sup> <https://france3-regions.franceinfo.fr/normandie/eure/ce-van-itinerant-offre-ecoute-et-accompagnement-aux-victimes-de-violences-intrafamiliales-3107191.html>.

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.lacimade.org/>.

<sup>61</sup> <https://evaw.unwomen.org/>.

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.spotlightinitiative.org/who-we-are>.

<sup>63</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/SDGSummitActions/HII>.



## Financial Support

FR: Since December 2023, victims of domestic violence are eligible to receive one-time financial assistance to facilitate a rapid departure from their home, secure temporary shelter, and cover urgent expenses. The **universal emergency assistance** (*Aide universelle d'urgence – AUU*) is disbursed within 3–5 days, with a minimum amount of €240 determined according to income and number of children under 21. Applicants must hold legal and stable residency in France, which includes provisional residence permits.<sup>64</sup>

DE: The above-mentioned Violence Support Services Act creates a framework for a reliable public financing of the support system by the Länder. The federal government is contributing approx. EUR 2.6 billion to the funding for the period from 2027 to 2036.

## Housing Support

FR: Over the past five years, the number of **emergency shelter places** in France dedicated to protecting women victims of violence has more than doubled – from 5,000 in 2017 to nearly 11,300 by the end of 2024. In addition to the dedicated shelters, women are also accommodated through the general emergency housing system for immediate protection. In 2021 alone, the state funded over 1.6 million overnight stays outside the dedicated shelters, distributed across various housing types.<sup>65</sup>

## Integrated Support Services

AT: The **Coordination Center for Female Genital Mutilation** (FGM) was established in 2021, as a central point of contact for affected individuals and institutions providing support to women and girls nationwide. This Center was set up at the Women's Health Center FEM Süd and is funded by the government. Key goals of the Coordination Centre are education and prevention workshops, targeting also men and boys.

AT: The **ÖIF Women's Centres** (Frauenzentren) are important support centres for migrant women in Austria, offering free and confidential counselling, workshops, and seminars on topics such as education, work, health, self-determination, and violence prevention. They also act as an information bridge by connecting women with relevant partner organizations and further support services.

CZ: With financial support from the Government Office of the Czech Republic, the NGO proFem operates PORT, the first comprehensive centre for survivors of sexual violence in Czechia. PORT provides crisis intervention, temporary accommodation, professional social counselling, individual and group psychotherapy, legal advice and representation, gynaecological services, evidence collection and preservation, and interview facilities. Services are offered in Czech, English, and Ukrainian, ensuring accessible support for diverse communities.<sup>66</sup>

FR: Launched in 2022, the **"New Start Pack"** (*le Pack nouveau départ – PND*) aims to help victims safely leave abusive partners by providing rapid, coordinated support and personalised assistance. This includes expedited access to social rights, housing, psychological support,

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<sup>64</sup> <https://www.egalite-femmes-hommes.gouv.fr/aide-universelle-durgence-et-pack-nouveau-depart>.

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.info.gouv.fr/organisation/delegation-interministerielle-a-l-hebergement-et-a-l-acces-au-logement/laction-pour-les-victimes-de-violences>.

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.profem.cz/cs/vzdelavani/a/centrum-port-a-inovace-sluzeb-pro-obeti-sexualniho-nasili>.



and social and professional reintegration through local and social services. The program is currently being piloted in five regions, with plans for nationwide rollout.<sup>67</sup>

## Strategic Documents

### Employment

CZ: In December 2022, Czechia launched the **Action Plan for Equal Pay 2023–2026**, its first dedicated policy to tackle the gender pay gap. The plan outlines concrete measures to reduce wage disparities, enhance transparency in remuneration, and strengthen women's ability to claim equal pay. It also targets structural inequalities in sectors where women are overrepresented and promotes fairer career progression. By fostering equitable pay practices, the plan seeks to boost women's economic independence and reduce gender-based financial vulnerability across the labour market.<sup>68</sup>

ES: The **Annual Plan for the Promotion of Decent Employment in Spain**, approved each year by the Government in collaboration with the Autonomous Communities, sets priorities and objectives for active employment policies, including training, guidance, job placement, and support for entrepreneurship. Aligned with the **Spanish Strategy for Active Employment Support**, the plan aims to promote decent, inclusive, and quality employment. A key focus is the integration of gender equality across all employment measures, ensuring that women have equitable access to opportunities and support in the labour market.

### Gender-Based Violence

AT: In 2024, the **"Violence protection strategy for coordination and networking with a focus on counselling for women affected by violence in Austria"** was developed to strengthen the existing counselling network to further improve accessibility of the support system for victims. Furthermore, a comprehensive **National Action Plan against gender-based violence** was adopted by the federal government during the "16 days against VAW" 2025.<sup>69</sup>

CZ: In August 2023, Czechia adopted the **Action Plan for the Prevention of Domestic and Gender-Based Violence 2023–2026**. The plan aims to improve access to specialized services, expand hotlines, enhance perpetrator therapy, and train professionals in contact with victims. By strengthening protection and support, the plan seeks to reduce violence, prevent recurrence, and promote gender equality.<sup>70</sup>

MT: Malta's **Unite. Engage. Elevate. National Strategy on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence 2023–2028**<sup>71</sup> aims to protect victims' rights, including those of people in vulnerable situations such as LGBTIQ+ people, persons with disabilities, and migrants. It plans to identify and remove barriers to accessing social benefits and housing, and to strengthen a coordinated, well-funded multi-agency approach. This includes evidence-based policies that address links between violence, other social issues like substance abuse and mental health, and multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

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<sup>67</sup> <https://www.egalite-femmes-hommes.gouv.fr/aide-universelle-durgence-et-pack-nouveau-depart>.

<sup>68</sup> <https://vlada.gov.cz/cz/ppov/rovne-prilezitosti-zen-a-muzu/aktuality/tz-nova-smernice-o-transparentnosti-odmenovani-posili-vymahatelnost-prava-na-rovnou-odmenu-a-pomuze-snazit-mzdovou-diskriminaci-zen-201893/>.

<sup>69</sup> <https://www.coordination-vaw.gv.at/nachrichten/nationaler-aktionsplan.html>

<sup>70</sup> <https://www.vlada.cz/cz/ppov/rovne-prilezitosti-zen-a-muzu/aktuality/vlada-posili-boj-proti-domacimu-a-sexualnimu-nasili-207665/>.

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.stopviolence.gov.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/VIOLENCE-STRATEGY-ENG.pdf>.



## Roma Minority

AT: The strategy for promoting the inclusion of Roma in Austria places a special focus on empowering Roma women and girls to participate in society on their own terms. The aim is to enable Roma women to participate equally in all areas of society through various measures, to inform them about their rights and how to enforce them, to ensure their access to institutions of the majority society, and to raise their awareness of equality issues. To achieve this goal, the strategy relies on preventative work and counselling services that specifically address the (cultural) needs of Roma women<sup>72</sup>.

CZ: Czechia's **Strategy for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation of Roma 2021–2030**<sup>73</sup> includes measures to address structural anti-Roma discrimination, with a focus on the most vulnerable groups, including women, and target domestic and gender-based violence within Roma families and communities, recognising that Roma women living in poverty often rely on family or community networks and face restrictive gender roles, which can normalize abuse and reinforce vulnerability. It also supports research on multiple forms of discrimination against Roma women. Complementing this, the **Gender Equality Strategy 2021–2030**<sup>74</sup> includes a measure to promote employment opportunities for Roma women, advancing both gender equality and inclusive economic participation.

FR: In France, the **National Plan to Combat Racism, Anti-Semitism, and Discrimination 2023–2026** has, for the first time, officially recognized anti-Gypsyism as a specific form of racism. The plan provides training for professionals in education, culture, and social work to combat racist and anti-Gypsy stereotypes and identifies relay persons in slums and informal settlements to help victims file complaints.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> <https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/themen/volksgruppen/roma-strategie/eu-rahmen-fur-nationale-strategien-zur-integration-der-roma.html>

<sup>73</sup> <https://vlada.gov.cz/cz/pracovni-a-poradni-organy-vlady/zalezitosti-romske-komunity/uvod-5779/>.

<sup>74</sup> <https://vlada.gov.cz/cz/ppov/rovne-prilezitosti-zen-a-muzu/aktuality/vlada-dnes-schvalila-aktualizovanou-strategii-rovnosti-zen-a-muzu-na-leta-2021-2030-215755/>.

<sup>75</sup> [https://www.dilcrah.gouv.fr/files/2023-12/Plan-national-de-lutte-contre-le-racisme-lantisemitisme-et-les-discriminations-liees-a-lorigine-2023-2026-Janvier-2023\\_1.pdf](https://www.dilcrah.gouv.fr/files/2023-12/Plan-national-de-lutte-contre-le-racisme-lantisemitisme-et-les-discriminations-liees-a-lorigine-2023-2026-Janvier-2023_1.pdf).