

Recommendations

On the basis of the main findings of the report, the following recommendations can be made:

Increase equal economic independence of women and men

Gender inequalities in the labour market systematically undermine women's economic independence. Employment rate of women is below men's employment rate in all EU Member States. Compared to men, women are more likely to be economically inactive or work in part-time or temporary employment, predominantly due to care responsibilities. The entrenched occupational segregation by gender further disadvantages women. Women's access to certain occupational sectors is limited. They remain overrepresented in others, usually less paid or having limited career opportunities or slow earnings progression. These lifelong inequalities in the labour market have a detrimental effect on women's activity rate, working hours and income, which lead to gender pay gap and gap in pension and increased risk of poverty and social exclusion, especially among lone mothers and older women. Therefore, employment per se does not ensure economic independence and is no longer the only way out of poverty.

EU policies favour job creation as the main course for poverty reduction. Less attention is paid to quality and stability of employment. This approach does not provide an appropriate solution for individuals across the life-cycle and in particular for women and men who seek to reconcile family and professional life. The rise of the dual-earner households led to higher work intensification and greater demands for work-life balance. It plays a prominent role in supporting equal economic independence of women and men. Work-life balance should combine different policies, including the investment in public services and infrastructure that would secure the provision of accessible and affordable high-quality care and health services, or transportation, the entitlement to paid care leaves with effective job guarantees, especially for carers of children, elderly and other dependent relatives. More equal sharing of care and household responsibilities should be encouraged through incentives for men to take up care leave and use quality flexible work arrangements.

The quality of work also concerns skills and competences, notably their under-utilisation in work. For example, migrant women are more likely to have a tertiary education than migrant men, but they are often underemployed and their skills and qualifications are not fully utilised. Therefore, the future Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals, to be developed by the European Commission as part of a new Skills Agenda for Europe, could open new possibilities for economic independence of such vulnerable groups. Improvement of working conditions, the quality and stability of work should become immediate policy focus areas of the EU and the Member States.

Adjust social protection systems in line with the current challenges and new forms of employment

Social protection systems serve their purpose only if they are adjusted to tackle new challenges such as ageing of the population, changing family structures, new migration flows as well as

diversification of forms and conditions of employment. The social protection systems and anti-poverty policies in particular have to guarantee sufficient economic protection not just for traditional forms of gainful employment over the life-course, but in particular, develop compensation mechanisms for those, carrying out unpaid caring work, non-standard or precarious employment or those affected by career interruptions caused by care responsibilities. For example, the evidence that fewer women than men with disabilities receive disability benefits can be partly explained by the fact that the benefits are based on labour market participation or on disabilities which affect predominantly those employment sectors where women are underrepresented (such as construction). Therefore, the lower level of employment of women and the gender segregation of the labour market might limit women's access to disability benefits. Or the effect of low participation of Roma women and men in employment often results in limited access to social insurance, welfare benefits and services. Such gaps in social protection system reduce effectiveness of poverty reduction and would benefit from targeted measures of the future European Pillar of Social Rights.

Women are more likely to be engaged in non-standard working arrangements, such as part-time or temporary employment, partially due to traditional division of care and family responsibilities. National social protection systems should seek to eradicate the causes and effects of life-long gender inequalities. They shall adopt a gender equality perspective in order not to exacerbate gender differences in work and care that further disadvantage women. Gender-specific targets and measures if integrated in the future European Pillar for Social Rights could contribute to closing gender gaps in healthcare and sickness benefits, pensions, unemployment and disability benefits as well as access to social services. The monitoring of progress could become a regular part of the European Semester framework for steering and monitoring EU countries' economic and social reforms to reach the Europe 2020 targets.

Foster synergies within and across policies through the adoption of an intersectional approach

The causes and experiences of poverty greatly vary across different groups of women and men, such as lone parents, Roma people, migrant population, people with disabilities, young and elderly. Stronger synergies between anti-poverty strategies and other economic and social policies such as employment, taxation, family and housing policies should be built. For example, when housing costs are deducted from the household income, the poverty rates are much higher in all countries. This indicates that the share of people living in financial hardship may be larger than the regular at-risk-of-poverty indicator shows. Different policies can reinforce each other, and therefore it is important for reforms to consider such complementarities. Provision of unemployment benefits can be more effective in preventing poverty when they are joined up with activation measures seeking to incentivise the individual to reintegrate into the labour market and provision of services, such as child or elderly care.

Multifaceted reality of poverty also requires complementarity between anti-poverty policies and policies targeting specific groups. The adoption of an intersecting inequalities' perspective to general provisions of social and economic policies is necessary to ensure that the most disadvantaged groups in society are reached by targeted measures of those policies. Caution should be exercised in order to prevent stigmatisation while responding to the specific needs of different groups.

Strengthen gender equality and multidimensional perspective in the monitoring of poverty and social exclusion

The household level measurement of poverty does not reveal the full gender dimension of poverty and should be complemented with economic independence indicators that are measured at the individual level, e.g. personal income from work below the national poverty line, gender pension gap, and personal savings. While family members support each other financially, it is relevant to secure the economic independence for every adult.

Poverty is defined as a complex and multidimensional phenomenon that extends from the economic conditions to the deprivation of opportunities for civil, social and political participation and social mobility. However, the current measurement considers mostly labour market participation, economic dimension and material deprivation. To address the complexity of poverty and social exclusion and the actual vulnerability of different groups of women and men in the EU (such as elderly, people with disabilities, lone parents, migrant and Roma people) it is recommended to develop further measurement of social exclusion in terms of social, cultural, and political participation.

Data collection should be adjusted to reflect the current challenges, e. g. a sharp increase in the number of refugees and asylum seekers. Some of the main challenges for refugees concern housing, participation in the labour market, access to social benefits, health services and economic means. Experiences of refugees and asylum seekers differ significantly from those of migrants and are highly gendered. Therefore, successful inclusion stands to benefit from the timely collection of gender disaggregated data on poverty and social exclusion among refugees and asylum seekers.