



In Britain and across the EU, women seek fairer deal

Women in the UK and across Europe can be more susceptible to poverty than men, but single mothers, older women and immigrant women are particularly vulnerable.¹ It has been fifteen years after the signing of the Beijing Declaration on the rights of women, and we still have a long way to go.

Women are more likely than men to have poor housing, to neglect their health and struggle to find child-care services. Financial precariousness can cause women to stay with violent men and force others into prostitution and human trafficking. "Gender neutral language can mask the fact that more women than men are poor," says Leanda Barrington-Leach of the European Women's Lobby. "A third of single parents experience poverty, and of those single parents 80-90 percent are women. The same goes for older people. Women tend to live longer and they don't have as much savings and security backup as men, so they are often poorer."

The EU has a number of anti discrimination directives which aim to uphold the principle of equal opportunities for men and women, and offer Member States a framework for action. This includes developing a plan to encourage "active inclusion" national policies, and to promote across Europe the exchange of good practices. The implementation of Europe's equality and anti-discrimination laws ultimately aim to offer women a level playing-field.

However, in most EU member states, 17% of women experience poverty compared to 15% of men. Among single parents 35% live in poverty. The provision of child-care is often inadequate, and maternity leave is not fairly shared between genders with the result that women lose earnings over this period.

Women in seven EU countries earn 20% less than men in equivalent jobs. The pay gap between men and women throughout their working lives inevitably leaves women with smaller pensions. Currently, 36.8% of women between the ages of 55 and 64 are employed, compared to 55% of men, and European women are four times more likely than men to have part-time jobs, fixed-term contracts or no contracts at all. As a result, some 35% of women aged over 65 risk poverty, compared to 16% of older men.

¹ Oxfam International/European Women's Lobby, An Invisible Crisis, March 2010



In all age groups, women face a much higher risk than men of poverty after a separation, divorce or death of their partner. Furthermore, women in all the more vulnerable groups like those with disabilities, immigrants, ethnic minorities or those living in rural areas are more likely to experience poverty than men.²

The economic crisis is likely to see figures for unemployment increase sharply, particularly among public sector workers where women are heavily represented. Funding for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and equality bodies is already being cut in some EU countries, like Ireland. Women will have fewer places to turn to for assistance.

“It is still too early to see the gender dimension of the recession,” says Barrington-Leach. “At first it seemed to mainly affect men in the car and construction industries, but women are being hit in different ways as they are more economically vulnerable to start off with. Plans for recovery from the recession also offer an opportunity to improve women’s economic lot.”

For more information

[The European Strategy for Equality between Women and Men](#)

[European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

² European Women’s Lobby EY2010 Briefing, February 2010