



EUROPEAN WOMEN'S  
**LOBBY**  
EUROPEEN DES FEMMES

17 October 2013

**The Feminisation of Poverty and Social Exclusion in the European Union**  
in the context of the  
International Day for the Eradication of Poverty 2013

**Poverty and social exclusion in Europe: predominately a female face**

**Poverty and social exclusion severely impede upon women's empowerment and economic independence, preventing them from participating in all areas of life.** This represents a failure of society as a whole. The consequences lead to severe gender inequalities, inadequate incomes, poor housing, poor access to health, including reproductive health, and other social services, poor work options and opportunities, as well as male violence against women. Fleeing male violence is one of the pathways to **homelessness** for women and their children, which in some countries is on the increase. Poverty and social exclusion are also among the factors that propel women and girls into prostitution and trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation both within EU Member States and on an international scale. **Equality between women and men is compromised if the gendered nature of women's poverty and social exclusion is ignored.**

Women are at risk of poverty across the board, but particularly so when other factors intervene. Whether one considers race/ethnicity, age, disability, class or geographical origin, women are among the most socially marginalised groups. **Women are part of every group at risk of poverty and social exclusion, and in most cases, they are affected more strongly.**

Income poverty continues to be measured in terms of household earnings, on the assumption that equality is inherent within the household, obscuring gender inequalities within these units. **Poverty indicators must be measured per person rather than per household** and take into account real and pervasive inequalities between women and men, both within the household and in socio-economic structures and systems that generate and perpetuate poverty.

**Austerity measures** that are being implemented across Europe is putting extensive pressure on public expenditure leading to drastic cuts in public spending in vital areas such as health and education. Such policies are detrimental to women and directly impact on women's poverty and social exclusion. Recognizing that the levels of poverty, particularly income-related poverty, would be far higher without the European social model embedded in traditional social security protection systems, **the EWL calls for the**



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**strengthening of social security systems and this is mirrored in the European semester architecture and social score board to ensure that these collective mechanisms of solidarity are maintained and reinforced.**

**Austerity measures** represent a short term vision with long term – even irreparable – impact, causing distress and erosion of rights that will take years to repair. And they are not working. Three years of austerity measures have left a trail of hardship and a loss of hope and confidence in our political leaders opening the door for populist nationalist forces that will not only undermine but have the potential to destroy our European values, putting democracy itself at stake.

In order to fulfil the EU's commitment to “make a decisive impact on poverty”, **a systematic gender impact assessment which reveals the root causes of women's poverty and social exclusion is crucial. The recent EU Employment and Social Situation Quarterly Review contains no data broken down by gender.** How will the **social score board** ensure that women's risk of poverty and social exclusion is effectively monitored and addressed? This demonstrates that there are **real problem with data** and particularly timely data that reflects the fast moving changing environment and the correlation between macro-economic decisions and the impact on poverty and social exclusion.

Europe's role on the international scene must also ensure that a gender dimension is included in the future post **2015 Millennium Development Goals**, and in assessing progress achieved on gender equality in light of the **20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action**, also in 2015.

Poverty and social exclusion are **violations of human rights. Women's rights are human rights.** The EWL expects that the Europe 2020 Strategy and subsequent processes will have a decisive impact on gender equality, the empowerment of women, and the right for all women in Europe, regardless of their age, ability/disability, ethnic or migrant origin, social or geographical origin to live a dignified life in a Europe free of poverty and social exclusion.