



Final working group report:

Poverty, social inclusion and gender in the European Social Fund



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The European Community of Practice on Gender Mainstreaming (2010-2014) was a community dedicated to integrating the gender dimension into the European Social Fund (ESF) programmes (2014-2020) in relation to the EU 2020 strategy. The goal was that gender mainstreaming shall be an integral part of future ESF management – from planning, programming, implementing to monitoring and evaluation. The network was funded by the European Commission. Find out more on www.gendercop.eu

INTRODUCTION

Poverty is a complex and multidimensional problem manifesting itself in various ways, such as lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure a sustainable livelihood; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or no access to education and other basic services; increased morbidity and mortality of illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; and unsafe environments. It is at once a cause and an effect of social discrimination and exclusion.

Gender differences and inequalities – including those between women and men – are a major feature of social exclusion and poverty.

Although differences vary from country to country, at global level women remain poor in relation to men. In fact 25.4% of women in the EU's 27 countries are considered at risk of poverty compared to 23.2% of men.ⁱ

The factors of inequality and increased risk of women's poverty occur at different stages of life – from the start of professional activity to pension upon retirement. Women usually have a lower employment rate; greater exposure to low pay and lower average earnings; and lower pensions and benefits where eligibility is earnings-related or based on individual record of employment. This is because women more often interrupt their employment or work reduced hours to attend to family care responsibilities.

Female poverty has been worsened by the economic and financial crisis, but that is not its only cause. The feminisation of poverty should be viewed as the consequence of various structural factors including stereotypes, existing gender pay gaps, barriers caused by the lack of reconciliation between family life and work, the longer life expectancy of women and, in general, the various types of gender discrimination, which mostly affect women. Thus, gender inequalities in employment combined with insufficient social welfare systems produce a situation of feminisation of poverty.

Poverty and social exclusion are major obstacles to the achievement of the **Europe 2020 objective of inclusive growth**.ⁱⁱ

The new EU regulations are designed to reflect the priorities of the **Europe 2020 strategy**, which has a strong focus on tackling poverty and social exclusion. In fact, it is stated that at least 20% of all ESF funding should be earmarked for reaching the poverty target for Europe in 2020.

The continued existence of women's poverty and the greater risk of social exclusion it entails has long been a concern of the European Union. That is why throughout the **Integrated Guideline 10 of the Europe 2020**,ⁱⁱⁱ Member States are encouraged to adopt a range of measures supporting gender equality to protect women from poverty and ensure income security, especially for single-parent families or elderly women.

As a main instrument for supporting jobs, helping people get better jobs and ensuring fairer job opportunities for all EU citizens, ESF has declared the importance of promoting gender equality, equal opportunities, and non-discrimination; enhancing social inclusion; and tackling poverty in its mission for the period 2014–2020 in **Article 2^{iv} of the Regulation**.

The importance of tackling poverty and social exclusion together with the promotion of gender equality are also pointed out in the **Common Provision Regulation in Article 7**, which

states that the Commission and Member States shall ensure the integration of the gender perspective as well as gender equality in the entire programming cycle (from programming through implementation to evaluation), and in **article 9^v** by saying that ESI funds shall support, as thematic objectives, the promotion of social inclusion and the fight against poverty and all forms of discrimination.

THE MAIN GENDER ISSUES RELATED TO POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

The situation of women and men in such areas as labour market participation or social exclusion is constantly changing over the years, depending on the overall economic conditions at the EU and national levels.

However, it should be stressed that significant differences still exist between women and men and affect various aspects of their lives. The major problem is that women, and (single) mothers in particular, are still much less likely to be gainfully employed.

According to Eurostat data, the average level of employment in the EU for the third quarter of 2013 was 75% for men and 63% for women.¹

Such large differences in employment also influence disparities in areas such as wages, economic independence, access to pension, etc. Unequal access to employment also has a significant impact on the probability of falling into poverty.

As the data show, this risk applies mainly to women, for whom the indicator is 25.2% while for men it is 23%. The risk of poverty increases significantly with age, and for women 75+ is 20.1% compared to 16.9% for men.²

The factors of inequality and increased risk of women's poverty are several, and they occur at different stages of life – from the start of professional activity to the amount of pension after retirement.

Data collected in eight EU countries from the survey carried out by the Working Group on Poverty, Social Exclusion and Gender Equality, as well as a review of the main documents at European level, suggest that the main problems in this area are as follows:

1) Family care burden / work–life balance

The employment of women is affected in several ways by parenthood. Motherhood is negatively correlated with employment rate in the vast majority of the European Union's 27 Member States and, on average, the difference between the employment rates for women with and without children under twelve is greater than 10 percentage points.³

¹ *Boosting equality between women and men in the EU – key actions and figures*, European Commission, March 2014 – http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/documents/140303_factsheet_progress_en.pdf

² *Progress on report of equality between women and men in 2012. A Europe 2020 initiative*, European Commission, 2013 – http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/documents/130530_annual_report_en.pdf

³ European Commission (2014), *Use of childcare in the EU Member States and progress towards the Barcelona targets*.

It is a fact that women spend more time than men on domestic and care work. They often work part-time to combine paid work with family responsibilities, resulting in fewer career opportunities and lower earnings. Moreover, if women's paid and unpaid working hours are summed, they are significantly longer than men's, even if men work longer hours than women in the workplace.

In many EU countries there is a fundamental problem with access to solutions for childcare (nurseries, kindergartens) and care for dependents. The data for the whole EU show that in the case of children under three years old, 30% are in the care of nurseries, and 84% are in childcare (with a very large variation in this between different countries).

Taken together, this means that people with a greater family care burden (such as single parents, or households with a large number of children, and/or who need to care for elderly people) are at high risk of poverty and social exclusion.

2) Gender pay gap

The gender pay gap (GPG) is *the difference between men's and women's pay, based on the average difference in gross hourly earnings of all employees*. In some cases this difference is based on direct discrimination, when some women are paid less than men for doing the same job, but more frequently women earn less than men for performing work of equal value because of an undervaluing of their work and, as a reinforcing factor, the segregation of the labour market. **The EU average GPG is estimated to be around 16%**, with considerable differences between MS.⁴ It has been defined as *unadjusted* – not taking into account differences in individual characteristics (education, experience, hours worked, type of job) – so it must be viewed in conjunction with other indicators related to the labour market.

In most EU countries, women at the very beginning of their professional career have a lower salary than men. The most significant differences are noticed at the highest positions, where the number of women is by far the least. The second factor in such large wage differences is women with at least one child.

A direct consequence of the lower salary is a lower pension. Risk of poverty increases with age – especially in retirement, when women receive on average 39% lower retirement benefits than men.⁵

3) Economic crisis

The current economic crisis has undoubtedly had an impact on the unequal situation of women and men in the EU labour market.

The differing gender impacts of the crisis remain a relevant dimension; it has been remarked that the crisis first had a (negative) impact on men and that women felt the effects of the

⁴ In the new Eurostat estimates (based on the Structure of Earnings survey), it appears that there are considerable differences between the Member States in this regard, with the gender pay gap ranging from less than 10% in Slovenia, Malta, Poland, Italy, Luxembourg and Romania, to more than 20% in Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Germany and Austria, and reaching 30% in Estonia (v. DG Justice website)

⁵ *Progress on report of equality between women and men in 2012. A Europe 2020 Initiative*, European Commission, 2013.

crisis at a later stage. The explanation for this is that the industrial sector was affected first, and that the service sector, with its overrepresentation of female workers, was hit later. Now women are increasingly feeling its consequences (working part-time, under precarious conditions, with higher risk of redundancies, etc.) and they will suffer the consequences longer. In particular, cuts in public expenditures that affected existing family-related benefits in most countries have had substantial gender effects.

Regarding the impact of the crisis on the labour market participation of women, the 2013 “Employment and Social Developments in Europe Review” confirms that the crisis saw a contraction of some gender gaps historically faced by women and that this is largely the result of male-dominated sectors being hit most hard by the crisis.

Single mothers have been especially hard hit by the economic and financial crisis. In addition to the existing gender gap, single mothers are handicapped by the difficult choice they often have to make between taking on a job and caring for their children. Moreover, in general single mothers have a lower educational level than their married counterparts. This is especially problematic for young unqualified single mothers, because they also lack practical work experience. Additionally, the majority of jobs that are available for them are part time and underpaid, which makes it very difficult to develop a balanced lifestyle for the sake of their children and to be upwardly social mobile. A cycle of poverty is close at hand, in the sense that their children have fewer resources to succeed in education, and thus have fewer opportunities to enter the workforce at a competitive level.

4) Working poor

This category applies to persons who are employed, but whose salary is not sufficient to satisfy basic needs. The indicator “in-work poverty risk” was added to European social indicators in 2003.⁶ In 2012 this indicator for 28 EU countries was 9.2 % and every year it is higher (e.g. in 2010 it was 8.4%). Men are more affected by this phenomenon than women (9.7% of men, 8.5% of women).⁷ Of course the gender distribution of this phenomenon varies in different countries; for example in Spain it primarily affects women. There are also countries in which this phenomenon is gender neutral.

Such in-work poverty is linked to low pay, low skills, precarious employment, and part-time work, which often is involuntary. Other relevant variables are the type of household in which workers are living and the economic status of the other household members. Having only a single earner in the household no longer suffices to stay out of poverty. The number of working poor has increased as a result of the economic crisis and is connected to the wage cuts, reductions in working time and rise in unemployment that have occurred in a number of European countries.⁸

The “feminisation of poverty” means that poverty and the risk of falling into poverty are increasing among women and are more severe than among men. This is critical, especially for women with special needs such as the disabled, elderly, single parents with children and no partner to raise them with, and especially single mothers and widows.

⁶ *In-work poverty in the EU*, Eurostat, 2010 - http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-RA-10-015/EN/KS-RA-10-015-EN.PDF

⁷ <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/refreshTableAction.do?tab=table&plugin=1&pcode=tesov110&language=en>

⁸ *Working poor in Europe* – European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2010

Single parents are a major risk group; across Western industrialized countries single mother households have a much higher poverty rate than two-parent households.

5) Violence against women

Gender-based violence is a violation of the fundamental rights and freedoms of the victims; it harms their health and well-being and limits their participation in society.

Gender-based violence can be defined as *violence directed against a person because of that person's gender (including gender identity/expression) or as violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately.*

Gender violence is certainly a cause of social exclusion, both because victims of gender violence tend to exclude themselves – first from social life and then from the workforce – and because it makes them very weak from an economic point of view and therefore at high risk of poverty.

The violence experienced by women is very important factor for remaining in poverty. According to research by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, **33% of women** have experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15.⁹ Women who are victims of violence have serious difficulties in professional work. Many of them have low self-esteem, suffer from depression, and have anxiety attacks. They are much less efficient in their work than they could be. Domestic violence is also responsible for numerous delays and absenteeism, which may lead to redundancies and financial dependence on others.

THE BURNING ISSUES

The general framework in which the economic crisis' gender issues become relevant is *poverty* resulting from the *economic crisis*, especially in the form of *in-work poverty*. The consequences of the **economic crisis** had a specific impact on women; although in the initial phases men were hit harder than women (due to the greater presence of men in the sectors most affected), "the ongoing process of fiscal consolidation is increasingly involving job cuts in feminized areas such as public social services and education. This diminished the prospects of a swift recovery for female employment in several countries".¹⁰ "The *Joint Employment Report* adopted by the Council in 2010 did identify women among the groups at risk in a period of rising unemployment and recognized the negative impact of the crisis on gender equality policies."¹¹

"The austerity measures being implemented across the EU will have a particularly damaging impact on women, who dominate the public sector both as employees and as beneficiaries of services",¹² increasing in this way the risk of being in poverty and a member of the **working poor**. Nevertheless, "the incidence of *in-work poverty* remains higher for men [...]"

⁹ *Violence against women: an EU-wide survey. Main results report*, FRA, 2014 -

<http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/vaw-survey-results-at-a-glance>

¹⁰ European Commission (2013), *The impact of the economic crisis on the situation of women and men and on gender equality policies*, p. 15.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 18

¹² European Parliament (2011), *Report on the face of female poverty in the European Union*, p. 5.

Despite women's over-representation among part-timers, the low-paid and temporary employees, in-work poverty affects some women in these groups rather than all of them."¹³ This is especially true in the case of **single parent** households; "the housing crisis in some countries is seriously affecting the lives of the most vulnerable households, including **single mothers** and low-income households (among whom women are over-represented). Homelessness and long-term homelessness have increased during the crisis and this is a gendered phenomenon in several countries."¹⁴

INDICATORS

It is crucial to monitor these problems and to have the necessary information to implement interventions to tackle them. The indicators needed for this purpose can be the following:

- A.1 At-risk-of-poverty rate by age and sex
- A.2 At-risk-of-poverty rate by type of household and sex, including at-risk-of-poverty rate of single parents with dependent children
- A.3a Inactivity by age and sex; share of women and men who are inactive by age
- A.3b Inactivity by age and sex; share of inactive women and men who are not looking for a job for family care reasons.

The following indicators are related to the implementation of Operational Programmes of ESF

- Number of projects that deal with poverty or social exclusion
- Number of projects that deal with poverty
- Number of people involved in projects that deal with poverty or social exclusion (by sex)
- Number of people involved in projects that deal with poverty (by sex)

13 European Commission (2013), *The impact cit*, p. 16.

14 *Ibid*, p. 13

RESOURCES (study reports, data...)

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<https://www.european-agency.org/country-information/finland/national-overview/development-of-inclusion>

Ilpo Airio , Change of Norm? In-Work Poverty in a Comparative Perspective

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Oxfam (2011), Gender and the Economic Crisis <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/gender-and-the-economic-crisis-121671>

Parental leave policies and economic crisis in the Nordic countries. Seminar report

<http://www.thl.fi/thl-client/pdfs/c2223657-48f5-4e25-a9db-c532a15d6bcd>

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Tackling child poverty and promoting the social inclusion of children www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net

Teoksessa Ivan, Harslof & Rickard, Ulmestig (toim.) *Changing social risk in the Nordic countries.* Palgrave Macmillan (forthcoming).

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[Violence against women: an EU-wide survey. Main results report,](#)

Working poor and poverty in Finland

<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/ewco/studies/tn0910026s/fi0910029q.htm>,

RECOMMENDATIONS

EU CYCLE

Analysis

To perform research and analysis with a focus on the feminisation of poverty, pointing out how poverty affects women and men and assessing the effects of the global crisis on European women, including effects on the labour market, education and training, birth rates, health, social protection, pensions, social services, and access to decision-making positions. All this is to be done by:

- providing gender-disaggregated data and information
- adopting new poverty indicators to assess the impact of cohesion policies on women and poverty by reconsidering gender gaps in particular.

Setting Objectives

In order to set gender-sensitive objectives it is important to:

- focus on women's financial independence as a way to combat poverty; to support initiatives geared toward raising the level of financial literacy; to support female representation in key financial bodies;
- to support the creation of ESF equality bodies and support structures to assist with ESF programming, implementation and evaluation.

Implementation

At European level it is important to implement:

- measures to avoid and prevent the dismissal of workers during pregnancy and motherhood in order to prevent discrimination against pregnant women on the labour market (awareness campaign);
- to establish a transparent regulatory framework for atypical forms of employment in order to ensure proper working conditions and decent pay for women and men.

Monitoring

To monitor steps undertaken to end women's and children's poverty you should:

- provide and use systematic gender-disaggregated data and information;
- adopt new poverty indicators to monitor the impact of cohesion policies on women and poverty by reconsidering in particular gender gaps and lowpaid indicators.

Evaluation

To evaluate steps undertaken to end women's and children's poverty you should:

adopt gender-sensitive indicators; promote research and analysis regarding the feminisation of poverty and the effects of the global crisis on European women, including effects on the labour market, education and training, birth rate, health, social protection, pensions, social services, and access to decision-making positions; encourage the adoption of gender

budgeting and more innovative methods of analysis and evaluation of poverty that can point out the gender dimension, such as those based upon the capabilities approach.

NATIONAL POLICY CYCLE AND IMPLEMENTATION

Analysis

To develop gender sensitive analysis and research regarding poverty, social exclusion and the economic crisis in order to have complete information about how women and men are affected by poverty and economic crisis. To do this you may need: gender-disaggregated data and information; gender sensitive indicators (also innovative ones).

Setting Objectives

- to build policy responses on gender-sensitive analysis of the labour market, systematic gender impact assessments and evaluations
- to ensure that combating the feminisation of poverty is set as an objective
- to ensure that cuts in public expenditures do not degrade or eliminate services like child and elder care, and to channel social expenditures to prioritize quality services, especially care services
- to focus on women's financial independence as a way to combat poverty
- to include ESF equality bodies and support structures

Implementation

to encourage national policies to protect women, in particular from the risk of poverty; to ensure income security for one-parent families or elderly women also by providing resources for measures to improve education and training with a view to improving labour market access; to combat unemployment for the benefit of women, including those with precarious and insecure contracts.

to adopt measures to promote reconciliation of work and private life by strengthening the social protection system and improving quality child care facilities.

to adopt additional support measures, especially for working mothers who are members of single-parent families, either by making it easier to access employment or finding forms for flexible working hours at jobs; to develop actions to facilitate single parents' and teenage mothers' entry into and return to the labour market; to provide affordable quality childcare facilities.

to take measures to avoid and prevent the dismissal of workers during pregnancy and motherhood by adopting measures to prevent discrimination against pregnant women on the labour market (awareness campaign)

to take the gender dimension into account in the writing of calls for proposal, also by including gender among the evaluation criteria.

Monitoring

To monitor steps undertaken to end women's and children's poverty you should:

- provide and use systematic gender-disaggregated data and information;

- adopt new poverty indicators to monitor the impact of cohesion policies on women and poverty by reconsidering in particular gender gaps and lowpaid indicators.

Evaluation

To evaluate steps undertaken to end women's and children's poverty you should:

adopt gender-sensitive indicators; promote research and analysis regarding the feminisation of poverty and the effects of the global crisis on European women, including effects on the labour market, education and training, birth rate, health, social protection, pensions, social services, and access to decision-making positions; encourage the adoption of gender budgeting and more innovative method of analysis and evaluation of poverty that can point out the gender dimension, such as those based upon the capabilities approach.

PROJECT CYCLE

Analysis

At project level it is important that gender-specific facts and figures are used in the analyses to underline the gender dimension of poverty.

Setting objectives

It is essential to describe how evidence coming from the gender analysis has been taken into account in choosing project contents and defining goals and objectives.

Implementation

To take into account gender-balanced participation and foresee adequate measures to guarantee women's participation in the project activities, such as: child care; money to pay care services (for example vouchers).

GOOD PRACTICES

Sweden

Development of an empowerment and inclusion model (ESF)

with meeting places for deprived women

Space for meetings 2020 – ABF and Sensus (voluntary organisations that offer adult education courses) in cooperation with member organisations and official agencies will develop models for combating poverty and social exclusion. There will be 12 meeting places throughout Sweden. The target groups are homeless people, drug addicts and former addicts, socially excluded men and women, long-term unemployed immigrants, young people with low or no education, the long term unemployed, the long term sick, and unemployed single parents. The project will develop models for empowerment and inclusion, tools for creating structure and security in daily life, adult education for the target groups and networking with actors within the job market. The project will have 1200 participants within the project period and promote learning and experience exchange with trans-national partners. The aim is to reduce poverty and social exclusion, the number of people with an income under 60% of median income, and costs for society.

Italy

Multidimensional Analysis of a Capability Deprivation Model (Macad) developed from Isfol

A tool to assess the intervention on poverty in a gender perspective using the capability approach

MACAD measures the degree of deprivation suffered by an individual as observed in the following six life domains:

- 1. Living in a house means being able to afford expenditures and manage the house;*
- 2. Generating Income means being able to manage and improve income sources*
- 3. Being part of a community means being able to have social relations with friends and neighbours and to participate in community life;*
- 4. Developing skills (or improving education) means being able to improve one's educational and/or professional level;*
- 5. Being healthy means being able to take care of one's own health, and not engaging in dangerous or risky behaviour*
- 6. Expressing emotions and affectivity means being able to express positive and negative emotions, having empathy, being able to cope with difficult situations, and being able to feel hopeful.*

Autonome Province of Trento, Italy

Anti-Crisis Plan

Two kinds of measures

1) emergency measures (2008)

e.g. support for families (help with loan payments, limiting costs for care services such as kindergartens, nursing homes, etc.)

2) countercyclical measures (austerity measures) – (or Anti-crisis plan – 2009)

Including: income support actions, poverty fighting and employment promoting measures

To mention → measures to promote women's employment

vouchers for private care services (in case of lack of places in the public ones)

maintenance of affordable tariffs for public services (nursing home, school canteen)

This way, "more women can work even just for a part of the day".

Footnotes

i <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do>

ii The aim is to ensure economic, social and territorial cohesion such that the benefits of growth and jobs are widely shared and people experiencing poverty and social exclusion are enabled to live in dignity and take an active part in society. The number of Europeans living below the national poverty lines should be reduced by 25% lifting over 20 million people out of poverty.

AT EU LEVEL, THE COMMISSION WILL WORK: to transform the open method of coordination on social exclusion and social protection into a platform for cooperation, peer-review and exchange of good practice, and into an instrument to foster commitment by public and private players to reduce social exclusion, and take concrete action, including through targeted support from the structural funds, notably the ESF; to design and implement programmes to promote social innovation for the most vulnerable [...], to fight discrimination (e.g. disabled) and to develop a new agenda for migrants [...]; to undertake an assessment of the adequacy and sustainability of social protection and pension systems, and identify ways to ensure better access to health care systems.

AT NATIONAL LEVEL, MEMBER STATES WILL NEED: To promote shared collective and individual responsibility in combating poverty and social exclusion; To define and implement measures addressing the specific circumstances of groups at particular risk (such as one-parent families, elderly women, minorities, Roma, people with a disability and the homeless); to fully deploy their social security and pension systems to ensure adequate income support and access to health care.

iii **Guideline 10:** Promoting social inclusion and combating poverty Member States' efforts to reduce poverty should be aimed at promoting full participation in society and economy and extending employment opportunities, making full use of the European Social Fund. Efforts should also concentrate on ensuring equal opportunities, including through access to affordable, sustainable and high quality services and public services (including online services, in line with guideline 4) and in particular health care. Member States should put in place effective anti-discrimination measures. Equally, to fight social exclusion, empower people and promote labour market participation, social protection systems, lifelong learning and active inclusion policies should be enhanced to create opportunities at different stages of people's lives and shield them from the risk of exclusion. Social security and pension systems must be modernised to ensure that they can be fully deployed to ensure adequate income support and access to healthcare — thus providing social cohesion — whilst at the same time remaining financially sustainable. Benefit systems should focus on ensuring income security during transitions and reducing poverty, in particular among groups most at risk from social exclusion, such as one-parent families, minorities, people with disabilities, children and young people, elderly women and men, legal migrants and the homeless. Member States should also actively promote the social economy and social innovation in support of the most vulnerable.

iv Mission The ESF: **Art. 2 .1, 2.3, 3, 4, 7, 8**

v **Art 7. Promotion of equality between men and women and non-discrimination.** The Member States and the Commission shall ensure that equality between men and women and the integration of gender perspective is promoted in the preparation and implementation of programmes. The Member States and the Commission shall take appropriate steps to prevent any discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation during the preparation and implementation of programmes.

Article 9. Thematic objectives. (9) promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination

Art. 110 The monitoring committee shall examine in particular: (f) actions to promote equality between men and women, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, including accessibility for disabled persons

Art. 111. The annual implementation reports submitted in 2017 and 2019 shall set out and assess the information.... (i) progress in the implementation of measures to address the specific needs of geographical areas most affected by poverty or of target groups at highest risk of discrimination or exclusion, with special regard to marginalised communities including, where appropriate, the financial resources used.