



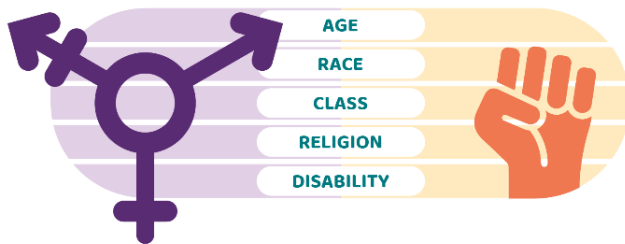
**RESISTIRÉ**

Reducing gendered inequalities  
caused by COVID-19 policies

# Addressing Poverty and Social Exclusion: A Feminist Perspective

**Recommendations to policymakers to mitigate the gendered  
impacts of Covid-19 based on RESISTIRÉ findings**

## ENSURING A FEMINIST, INTERSECTIONAL, HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH



With multiple crises impacting the global economy, more and more people are being pushed or pushed harder into poverty. According to the UN (2022),<sup>1</sup> COVID-19 caused the first increase in poverty rates in decades. Lockdowns introduced at different phases

of the pandemic led to job losses and consequent losses of income, accommodation, and financial independence. It has been shown that groups at various intersections of inequality and particularly gender, class, age, and nationality were made even more vulnerable and pushed into deep poverty during the crisis.

Civil society organisations (CSOs), feminist organisations, and other initiatives played a key role in reaching out to the margins and supporting vulnerable groups who fell through the cracks of social protection schemes. Their creative strategies for fighting poverty along intersecting inequalities should be harnessed in the future to ensure a feminist and human rights approach.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations (2022). *The sustainable development goals report 2022*. United Nations.  
<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2022.pdf>

## > Recommendations for Policymakers

### Addressing poverty and social exclusion through a human rights approach

**Adopting a holistic and human rights approach to address poverty and social exclusion is crucial for fighting poverty and creating a more just and equitable society.** As underlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG1), ending poverty and social exclusion requires efforts at both the national and the European level. The short- and long-term impacts of the pandemic support the adoption of a rights-based European Poverty Strategy backed by European funds.<sup>2</sup> In line with the recommendations delivered by the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights (2022),<sup>3</sup> RESISTIRÉ recommends that policy makers:

- Address poverty through a **human rights-based approach** to build resilience among communities before a crisis takes place, following the guiding principles adopted by the UN Human Rights Council (21/11) in 2012.
  - **Render social protection schemes inclusive and accessible to all.** While avoiding legal exclusions, efforts should be directed at reducing the 'non-take-up' of social protection among eligible groups by reducing bureaucracy and eliminating any other barriers, including the digital gap, stigmatisation, and institutional discrimination;
    - Adopt policies with a **gender+ approach**, ensuring that those groups that are at a higher risk of poverty, such as women, youth, and migrants, have effective access to social protection.
    - **Foster a broad ecosystem of services** that guarantee access to health, food, education, housing, socialisation, and political representation. This requires that policies be built through **multi-sectoral collaboration**. When making decisions about suspending or closing these services in times of crisis, it is essential to also keep in mind secondary

<sup>2</sup> Malgesini, G. (2021). *The impact of Covid-19 crisis on people experiencing poverty and vulnerability*. EAPN. [https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/EAPN-EAPN\\_REPORT\\_IMPACT\\_COVID19-4554.pdf](https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/EAPN-EAPN_REPORT_IMPACT_COVID19-4554.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> UN Human Rights Council. (2022). *Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights on non-take-up of rights in the context of social protection, Olivier De Schutter*. 19 April 2022. A/HRC/50/38.

consequences and long-term consequences,<sup>4</sup> especially for those groups that are at a higher risk of poverty, such as women and youth, including LGBTQI+ youth.

- **Prepare crisis intervention plans**, which set out in advance what urgent actions need to be taken in order to protect people at risk of poverty, such as: **eviction bans** due to non-payment of rents and mortgages, **energy bill payment** support, and continued **provision of free school meals**.

## Improving outreach and activating local communities to build resilience

For a change of paradigm to be effective, cooperation should be established between local authorities and communities to improve outreach strategies, **address emerging needs**, and **identify crisis-specific risk-factors**:

- To reach out to the most vulnerable communities, local authorities should establish **cooperation with the local stakeholders, CSOs, and communities** that are best placed to engage with people on the margins and identify their changing needs.
- When setting up policies that impact the most vulnerable, it is **essential to involve those CSOs that interact with vulnerable groups at risk of poverty in the policy-making and decision-making process, and make sure to include diverse and intersectional voices**. It is essential to adopt a gender+ perspective to ensure those groups who are at a higher risk of poverty can benefit from support.
- CSOs play an important role in fighting poverty. **Increasing public funding to support their activities** and **reducing the bureaucratic burden** would allow them to sustain their work and reach the most vulnerable groups. Nonetheless, CSOs should not be confined to the role of service providers and should not be substitutes for the relevant authorities who are responsible for providing services.

<sup>4</sup> Cibin, R., Ghidoni, E., Stöckelová, T., & Linková, M. (2023). *RESISTIRE D2.3 Summary report mapping cycle 3*. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7708631>

**LOCAL AUTHORITIES | CSOs & COMMUNITIES**



## Improving intersectional data collection

Policy actions should be informed and evidence-based, which is why it is crucial to formulate research questions that address different and intersecting inequality grounds. The COVID-19 pandemic showed that the groups affected most can also be the ones that are the most difficult to reach. The collection of data on these groups was affected by the pandemic. For instance, restrictive measures meant that many surveys had to be conducted online, and many people in these groups had limited access to the internet, so data on their situation were not collected.<sup>5</sup> Analyses of different RAS (Rapid Assessment Surveys) show that to ensure that data collection is carried out with a conscious intersectional approach, it should be designed in a way that is **as accessible and inclusive as possible and engages with different stakeholders** (e.g. CSOs, authorities involved in service delivery).



<sup>5</sup> Harroche, A., Still, A., Tzanakou, C., Rossetti, F., Lionello, L., & Charafeddine, R. (2023). *RESISTIRE D3.3 Summary report on mapping quantitative indicators - cycle 3*. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7708668>

## > Recommendations for Civil Society Organisations

### Investing in digital skills and increasing digital literacy

CSOs and initiatives had to move some of their operations online during the crisis to continue their work safely and effectively, and this allowed them also to increase their contact with different stakeholders and beneficiaries. In the process, they also increased their digital literacy. This is an improvement they can benefit from in the management of future crises as well as in their daily operations. To this end, it is imperative for CSOs to commit to continuous learning and to upskilling their staff members in digital knowledge.

### Engaging beneficiaries as active agents

The CSOs involved in RESISTIRÉ's research pointed out that engaging beneficiaries in their larger work **improves the quality of their response** to poverty that results from multiple axes of inequality and vulnerability as well as crisis conditions. The representatives of the CSOs also highlighted the significance of **participatory processes** and creating space for beneficiaries to become active agents. This also helps in moving away from the charity mindset. One example mapped by RESISTIRÉ was a [neighbourhood platform](#) created in a low-income district in Madrid (Spain), in which 800 neighbours became involved in several food banks and support groups. Stress was also placed on the importance of involving stakeholders in **advocacy work**.

## Maintaining networks of solidarity and collaboration



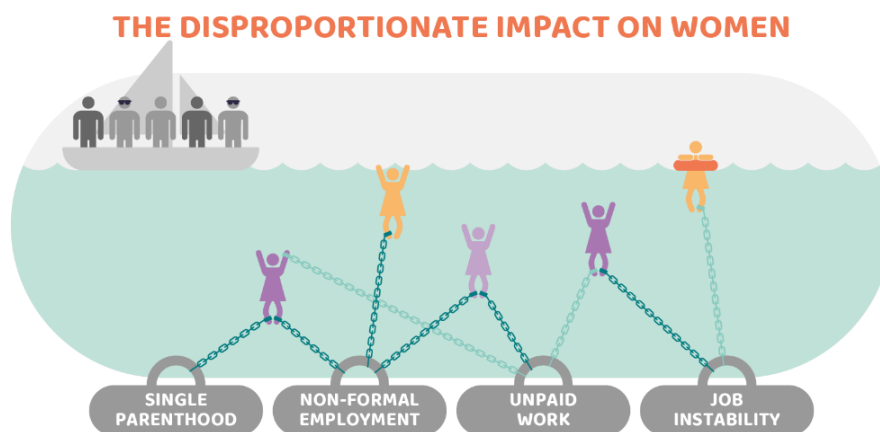
### SOLIDARITY & COLLABORATION

In an effort to address the inequalities that emerged and were exacerbated during the pandemic, respond inclusively to the needs of people in poverty, and manage the crisis, initiatives had to **mobilise networks of solidarity and collaboration with other CSOs, private companies, local authorities, local people, and others.** This involved collaborating with already established networks and alliances, as well as mobilising solidarity, cooperating with other stakeholders, and developing skills to assess the impact of collective action. It is crucial to keep these networks alive and find ways to sustain and foster long-term solidarity and collaboration.

## › Problem Statement

The pandemic deepened existing inequalities and disproportionately affected women, particularly those from marginalised communities. A feminist approach recognises the intersectionality of gender with other social inequalities based on race, class, ethnicity, and disability, among others, and understands that addressing poverty requires an understanding of the unique challenges faced by different groups of women.

According to EAPN data in Spain, for example, 13.1 million people are at risk of poverty or exclusion due to the COVID-19 crisis. The ILO (2021)<sup>6</sup> has confirmed that ‘women have suffered disproportionate job and income losses because of their over-representation in the hardest-hit sectors’, and the job growth observed in 2021 would be insufficient to bring women’s employment back to pre-pandemic employment levels. The reduction in women’s paid work has also been connected to an increase in their share of unpaid work, as Mascherini and Nivakoski (2021) have suggested.<sup>7</sup> Another factor that is associated with an increased risk of poverty is single parenthood. Poverty rates have been found to be particularly higher for single mothers in OECD countries compared to single fathers.<sup>8</sup> While emergency social protection measures were effective at ensuring an income for large portions of the population during the lockdowns and the resulting economic crisis, many of the most disadvantaged groups of people fell through the cracks in the system. Atypical workers and people in non-formal employment were among those excluded from protection mechanisms.



<sup>6</sup> ILO (2021). *Building forward fairer: Women’s rights to work and at work at the core of the Covid-19 recovery*. ILO. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---gender/documents/publication/wcms\\_814499.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---gender/documents/publication/wcms_814499.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Mascherini, M., Nivakoski, S. (2021). Gender differences in the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on employment, unpaid work and well-being in the EU. *Intereconomics. Review of European Economic Policy*, 56(5), 254-260.

<sup>8</sup> Zigel, H., Hübgen, S., Nieuwenhuis, R. (2021). Diverging trends in single-mother poverty across Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom: Toward a comprehensive explanatory framework, *Social Forces* 101(2), 606–638. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soab142>



## > Insights from RESISTIRÉ

### Segmented approaches to poverty

Tackling poverty and unemployment was an issue addressed in the majority of National Recovery and Resilience Plans, but the **gender+ dimension of poverty is almost entirely absent.**<sup>9</sup>

Even prior to the pandemic, **women were at a higher risk of poverty**, as they tend to be employed in low-income and precarious sectors, and the gender care gap often hinders their participation in the labour market. **Children and parents in single-headed households** faced an increased risk of food deprivation as a result of their increased risk of poverty and job loss. National Surveys mapped by RESISTIRÉ found that 'the greatest impacts on women's income and employment were primarily linked to women's increased caring duties due to offices and schools closing. This increase was steeper among lone parents, but also applied to families with both parents at home'.<sup>10</sup>

**Young people aged 16-24** also reported more difficulties making ends meet, probably because they were more likely to be working in precarious jobs and in sectors that were unable to operate during the pandemic (e.g. retail and service industries). Regardless of age, women reported more financial difficulties, which may be linked to a gender gap in pensions.<sup>11 12</sup> A French survey on poverty levels found that women and young people were the two groups most likely to restrict the amount and quality of the food they eat because of income loss.<sup>13</sup>

In many countries, measures were gradually introduced to mitigate the effects of workplace closures, mobility restrictions, and rising unemployment, but they often targeted specific sectors and segments of the population, whereas **workers in non-formal or atypical employment fell through the cracks** in the system.<sup>14 15</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Cibir, R., Ghidoni, E., Aristegui-Fradua, I. E., Marañon, U. B., Stöckelová, T., & Linková, M. (2022). *RESISTIRE D2.2 Summary report on mapping cycle 2*. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6536060>

<sup>10</sup> Stovell, C., Rossetti, F., Lionello, L., Still, A., Charafeddine, R., Humbert, A. L., & Tzanakou, C. (2021). *RESISTIRE D3.1 Summary report on mapping of quantitative indicators - cycle 1*. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5541035>

<sup>11</sup> Stovell et al. (2021).

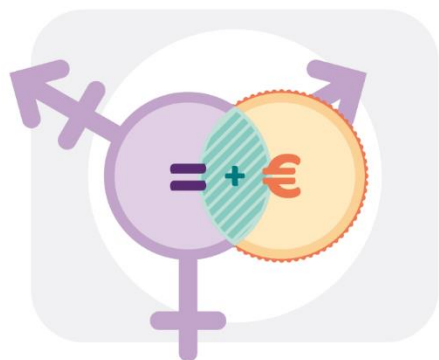
<sup>12</sup> European Commission (2020). *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025* (No. COM(2020) 152). European Commission.

<sup>13</sup> Stovell et al. (2021).

<sup>14</sup> Cibir, R., Stöckelová, T., Linková, M. (2021). *RESISTIRE D2.1 - Summary Report mapping cycle 1*. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5361042>

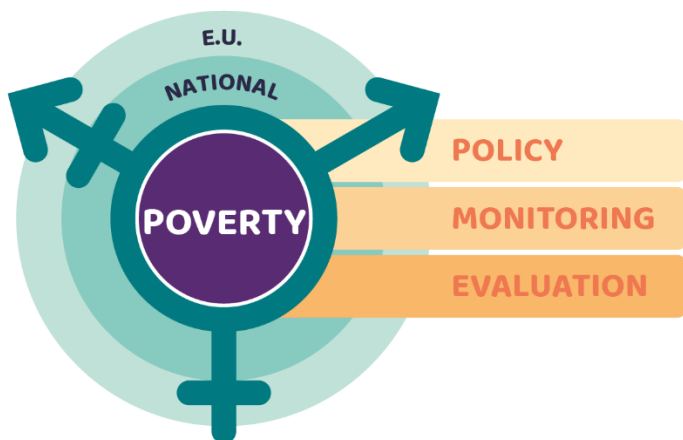
<sup>15</sup> Stovell et al. (2021).





Migrant women working in the care sector, undocumented migrant workers, sex workers, and workers in other informally organised sub-fields ended up in an extremely vulnerable position as a result of the pandemic. Excluded from social protection, these groups resorted to the help of civil society initiatives, which saw an increased demand for basic products such as food, hygiene products, medicines, and support to pay the rent. In some cases, the national authorities provided special funding for non-profit organisations and municipalities working on the provision of basic needs to vulnerable groups, but these were temporary and exceptional.

## The role of social protection in addressing poverty



Some national recovery plans contain measures to improve and expand social housing (Italy, Slovenia), increase and adjust social security benefits (Croatia, Estonia), improve the Minimum Income Scheme (Spain, Romania, Greece, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania), and promote lifelong education and the re/upskilling of long-term unemployed persons (Czech Republic, Ireland, Croatia, Belgium). Moreover, recovery plans promised to tackle

socioeconomic inequalities in access to education by supporting schools in disadvantaged territories (Portugal, Czech Republic, Germany), targeting low-income, single-headed families and migrant and Roma families (Spain), equipping schools with digital infrastructure and tools (Poland), and distributing these tools among students (Ireland, Austria).

However, CSOs have argued that such measures are still insufficient and not properly funded. It is important that in the current implementation phase, gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation is carried out, particularly to understand the gender+ impact of these plans and who was left out of them.

## Access to education and health for the most vulnerable

People living in poverty and social exclusion often experience **lower accessibility to quality health services and adequate accommodation and inequality in their educational process**. While limited information is available on the inequalities in access to healthcare that occurred during the pandemic, data collected through RESISTIRÉ indicate that difficulties were faced particularly by groups at the intersection between socioeconomic disadvantage and gender, migrant background, age, and sexual orientation (see Factsheet No. 14 on Access to Health Services for Vulnerable Groups). The lockdown and the closure of schools forced activities to be moved online, and children from low-income families faced several barriers in their home-schooling experience, ranging from the lack of an adequate space to study, due to overcrowded houses, to the lack of a computer or an internet connection (see Factsheet No. 11 on Developing Resilient Education Systems).

## The role of CSOs in reaching out to the most marginalised groups: addressing needs and making them visible



**CSOs: REACHING THE MARGINALISED**

CSOs have been facing increasing demands for basic needs (including food, medicines, housing, hygiene products) from people already living in a precarious situation, but also from people who experienced financial difficulties for the first time due to the pandemic. While struggling with limited funding, an increasing workload, changing restrictions, and bureaucratic barriers, CSOs managed to address these needs, fill the gaps left by insufficient social protection measures, and organise **quick and flexible responses**, such as collecting essential goods and food and distributing them to

disadvantaged people and their children. They were also able to do crowdfunding to make up for the lack of economic income for sex workers, artists, domestic workers, and small businesses, and they carried out research and assistance activities relating to situations of poverty and respect for human rights. Societal initiatives also included mutual aid platforms to help people in isolated situations obtain access to goods and services.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Cibirin et al. (2023).

CSOs played a key role in **reaching out to and recording the experiences** of the most marginalised groups, thereby making their situation more visible. The limited amount of data available for conducting an intersectional analysis is a problem that was repeatedly highlighted during our research, which points to the importance of oversampling certain groups but also of engaging stakeholders like CSOs or public authorities to help increase the engagement of hard-to-reach groups, such as people living in poverty (see Factsheet No. 20 on More Representative European Data for Better Intersectional Analysis).



## > Better Stories

In RESISTIRÉ we use 'Better Stories', a concept borrowed from Dina Georgis<sup>17</sup>, to refer to promising practices that identify how a given societal situation can be ameliorated to improve existing practices.



TURKEY

**In Turkey, the 'Deep Poverty Network'** was founded as a research and reading group to investigate the deepening of poverty, give visibility to its multidimensional nature, develop a rights-based approach to poverty, and monitor the human rights of the socioeconomically marginalised. The conditions of poverty exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic downturn led the initiative to broaden its activities, mainly by providing food support to families who had limited access to food during the pandemic. With its effective advocacy work on poverty as a basic human-rights issue and widespread rights-based solidarity campaigns during the pandemic, it has become the most visible civil society initiative on poverty in Turkey. Current activities include (1) research and advocacy; (2) in-kind support via solidarity campaigns; and (3) social work through neighbourhood and home visits to monitor daily living conditions and needs and to facilitate social service support (from municipalities or public institutions). The initiative's database currently contains 1000 families; 200-300 of them are monitored regularly, 60 of which are led by single women.



SPAIN

**In Spain, the 'Lehen Urratsa' programme** was launched by the Basque government after the lockdown to support people accommodated in emergency shelters as part of their process towards social integration. Within this programme, the Bizitegi organisation provided housing in hostels together with socio-educational support to homeless women. In August 2021, the organisation decided to rent a **hostel where homeless women share the space with tourists**. In the hostel, several activities for socialisation were proposed: a workshop on creative reading and writing; a workshop with a nurse (answering questions about health issues); and the practice of psycho-drama (role-playing to work on conflicts). Leisure activities are also run by volunteers. Other services include legal counselling with a volunteer (especially on how to apply for residence permits/asylum, etc.). This initiative has proven particularly beneficial for homeless

<sup>17</sup> Georgis, D. (2013). *The better story: Queer affects from the Middle East*. State University of New York Press.

women, as it offers them a space to interact with people who see them as their equals, without being identified with their condition.



ITALY

**In Italy, Association 21 Luglio launched a programme to reduce food deprivation among Roma children aged 0-3.**

At the beginning of the pandemic, the association started a monitoring activity that it carried out through phone interviews to assess the impact of the lockdown on the Roma people living in the five mono-ethnic informal encampments in the City of Rome. The results of this monitoring activity showed that the Roma people were neglected by the public authorities and their living conditions further declined during the state of emergency. The association particularly focused on the problem of food deprivation among children

aged 0-3 and implemented a strategy to help families. The strategy relied on fundraising and the work of volunteers.

## > About RESISTIRÉ

This factsheet is based on data collected in RESISTIRÉ's third research cycle, which ran from December 2022 to February 2023. In this research, 30 national researchers worked with the consortium to map policies, societal responses, and qualitative and quantitative indicators relating to the pandemic in EU-27 countries (except Malta), along with Iceland, the UK, Serbia, and Turkey. This research activity was accompanied by workshops and interviews with gender equality experts whose input informed the main findings from expert consultations.

RESISTIRÉ is an EU-funded Horizon 2020 project, the aim of which is to 1) understand the impact of COVID-19 policy responses on behavioural, social, and economic inequalities in the EU-27 (except Malta), Serbia, Turkey, Iceland, and the UK on the basis of a conceptual gender+ framework, and 2) design, devise, and pilot policy solutions and social innovations to be deployed by policymakers, stakeholders, and actors in different policy domains.

Find out more about the project and discover all other outputs at <https://resistire-project.eu>.



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