

# GenderWorks

We're stronger together:  
Final policy paper of the GenderWorks project  
Oxfam GB, February 2010



# **We're stronger together: Final policy paper of the GenderWorks project**

**Sue Smith, February 2010**

## **Acknowledgments**

Many thanks to all the women and men Oxfam has worked with on the GenderWorks project for such inspiration and hard work. Our particular thanks go to Gina Webhofer of WAVE, and Marco Maranza of Lamoro, for their contributions and comments.

GenderWorks is a two-year project (2007-09), funded by the European Commission under PROGRESS, to investigate women's experiences of poverty and social exclusion in Europe, and policy processes to improve their lives. Oxfam is the lead agency, with partner organisations in Italy and Austria.

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## 1. Summary

All over the world, women are poorer than men. The same is true in the UK, and in every member state of the European Union (EU). In the UK, women working part time earn 40 per cent less than men. The pensions of retired women are 40 per cent less than those of their male counterparts. Just under 17 per cent of women in the EU's 27 countries are classed as living in poverty; and Britain has the seventh-highest number of women living in poverty after Estonia, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Spain, and Latvia.<sup>1</sup> These statistics, in such a rich and developed region of the world, are shocking.

Oxfam's experience working overseas and, since 1996, in the UK, has shown us some of the most effective strategies in tackling women's poverty. These include: enabling poor women to share their experience and opinions with policy makers and to help design solutions to some of the problems they face; working with policy makers and service providers to ensure they better understand the particular needs and experience of women; and supporting policy makers to design better policies and public services to tackle poverty and social exclusion.

Building on our experience in the UK, Oxfam has been working with partner organisations in Europe to run GenderWorks, a two-year project launched in December 2007, funded by the European Commission, which aims to improve the lives of women living in poverty in the EU. We have been working in Austria with WAVE, a network of women's shelters and aid organisations for migrant and refugee women; and in Italy with Lamoro, a local development agency which focuses on helping women find jobs, and improving conditions for women at work.

Throughout the project, GenderWorks has been examining the experience of poor women, sharing learning, and using policy processes to make a difference. Training has been a key strategy in the project: training for women living in poverty to help them develop the skills and confidence to talk to decision-makers about the problems they face, and to find solutions to meet their needs; and training local policy-makers and service providers in the UK, Italy, and Austria to ensure they are aware of the different needs of women and men, and that their policies and services take these differences into account.

This paper is the culmination of the policy work of the GenderWorks project. It brings together the learning and experience gathered from training events, practice exchanges, and policy seminars in the three participating countries over the two years, as well as analysis of both EU and member state policy and practice, including their National Action Plans (NAPs), to tackle poverty.

Above all, the paper is based on the voices and experience of numerous poor women, and the organisations that work with them, who have shared their stories, struggles, energy, and creativity with us over the last two years.

This evidence and analysis has been used to make recommendations in six key areas. These are aimed at the European Commission, EU member states, and policy makers and service providers – each of which has the power to take action to tackle poverty and social exclusion in their arena.

### Summary recommendations:

GenderWorks makes the following recommendations for tackling women's poverty.

#### 1. Getting women a voice.

Policy makers at all levels should facilitate and support the voice of grassroots women in policy making. Member state policy analysis, priorities, conclusions, and recommendations must be driven by what poor women themselves are saying.

#### 2. Getting and using the right data.

We recommend that each member state introduce a chapter on women's poverty into its NAP, and fund its national equality body to produce annual digests of statistics on gender and poverty.

#### 3. Getting women into the right jobs.

Active labour market policies can only be socially inclusive if they provide tailored and flexible support to poor women, listen to them, and take their lead from what women say they need. Policies must take a holistic view of women as potential employees, which takes into account caring and family responsibilities.

#### 4. Improve the quality of services for marginalised women.

Member states must ensure that all women within their borders experience humane treatment, have access to basic services, and have enough financial support to survive, regardless of their citizenship or immigration status. Vulnerable women, such as those from minority communities or with insecure immigration status, need additional support.

#### 5. Putting violence against women into the picture.

Violence against women must be recognised as a key driver of women's poverty and social exclusion. And public services must better support women experiencing domestic violence: they must be properly resourced, workers must be trained to ask the questions which will reveal domestic violence, and appropriate support must be provided through mainstream services such as health, employment, housing, and education. The most vulnerable women, including migrant women and those with insecure immigration status, must receive additional support.

## 6. Linking women's and children's poverty.

Child poverty and women's poverty cannot be treated separately, as women are so often the main carers in every European country. The most effective way to tackle child poverty is to increase the level of basic social protection for all working-age adults, including women, with enhanced social protection for the most vulnerable women, such as young women.

We conclude with a description of the EU social inclusion process to which this project responds, and assess its progress in tackling women's poverty and disadvantage.

## 2. Background to the project

GenderWorks is a two-year project (2007-09), funded by the European Commission under PROGRESS, the EU's employment and social solidarity programme. Its aim has been to investigate women's experiences of poverty and social exclusion in Europe, share learning between partners in different member states, and use policy processes to improve women's lives. It is a partnership of Oxfam in the UK, Women against Violence Europe (WAVE) in Austria, and Lamoro in Italy. This final policy paper draws on the experience of the project in all three countries, and makes country-level and Europe-wide recommendations for action based on project learning.

**In the UK** GenderWorks has delivered training on how women can use the Gender Duty (the duty of the public sector to ensure it meets the needs of women and men) to hold public sector agencies to account and thereby ensure that public services better meet the needs of women. It has run *Policy to Practice* training courses for public agencies on how to respond to the needs of poor women. And the project has produced a toolkit, DVD, and guidelines on lobbying to assist women's groups. This work has also been accompanied by research, policy analysis, and lobbying.

**In Austria** the Women against Violence Europe (WAVE) network has collected and shared good practice examples and lessons learned about violence against women and poverty through a number of national expert meetings. It has also published a report on the issue of violence against women, and influenced the Austrian National Action Plan, and its implementation in Austria, in relation to gender mainstreaming, women's issues, and violence against women. As a network operating in both West and East Europe, it has also been able to gather and share good practice on the connections between violence against women and poverty.

**In Italy** Lamoro has focused on analysis of the Italian National Action Plan 2008. It has run training seminars

for two local municipalities in the Piedmont region on gender budgeting and social planning. It has also organised public seminars for local administrators in charge of financial planning for all the municipalities in the province of Asti, helping them to look at how to improve the lives of poor women through better policy planning and use of the public budget.

## 3. Analysis and recommendations on key policy areas

Reducing poverty and social exclusion, and promoting greater social inclusion, has been a key policy priority of the EU since 2000, with a target of achieving progress in this area by 2010. In 2006, gender was added as a dimension of the social inclusion process, underpinned by the European Commission's *Roadmap* on gender equality.<sup>2</sup>

### 3.1 Background: EU policy on women's poverty

People are said to be living in poverty if their income and resources are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living considered acceptable in the society in which they live. They may experience multiple disadvantages through unemployment, low income, poor housing, inadequate health care, and lack of access to services.<sup>3</sup>

Over the last two years, GenderWorks, as part of the European Commission's PROGRESS programme, has looked at how member states are responding to the EU's social inclusion agenda. We have asked: how far are member states' policy and practice meeting the targets and objectives set by the EU, and to what extent they are delivering on reducing women's poverty and social exclusion? This process has involved analysing the National Action Plans on social inclusion in Italy, Austria, and the UK; examining other national policy and practice; and talking to poor women and the groups which support them. For more information, see the final chapter.

The evidence clearly shows that, while the EU social inclusion agenda provides a framework for national action to tackle poverty in member states, most member states are not making sufficient progress in addressing women's poverty, particularly for the most vulnerable and marginalised women. Recommendations are given below, based on this evidence and the experience and views of poor women, as to how member states can improve their social inclusion policy in each of six key areas.

### 3.2 Getting poor women a voice

The GenderWorks project was designed using Oxfam's international development methodology, which we believe is key to overcoming poverty and social exclusion. This includes both using a rights-

based approach, and emphasising the need for the participation of poor and marginalised people (in this case, women) in the design and delivery of projects.

GenderWorks partners and others such as the Social Platform of European anti-poverty organisations, have emphasised the need for policy makers to make a sustained effort to listen to the voices of people living in poverty and social exclusion, in order to find out what they themselves identify as the key barriers in tackling the obstacles they face, and to ensure they are involved in designing solutions. The most excluded women include migrant women, women with disabilities, elderly women, and all women survivors of violence.

Ensuring that policy makers listen to the voices of poor and excluded women has a number of dimensions. Poor women need extra support to recognise that they themselves are the experts on social inclusion, and to value the expertise they have. They also need support in understanding the nature of the policy process – including where their contributions will be valuable in ‘invited spaces’,<sup>4</sup> and where they will not. Policy makers should respond to these needs by designing consultation processes that create space for poor women to feel comfortable and confident on their own terms, rather than inviting them to consultations where the agenda has already been set or solutions pre-decided.

Women’s groups, and excluded women themselves, also need support to create their own spaces, where they can invite policy makers in to listen and learn. Many poor women need practical support such as childcare and transport to be able to attend meetings and discussions. Local authorities must provide sufficient funding for women’s groups to facilitate women’s ongoing participation.

Policy analysis, priorities, conclusions, and recommendations must be driven by what policy makers hear from poor women themselves. This includes the recommendations from this project and the experience of poor women shared through other forums.

### Good practice on participation in the UK and Austria

- The UK Department for Work and Pensions modelled a participatory approach through its *Get Heard* project, as part of the last National Action Plan process.<sup>5</sup> This involved organising meetings throughout the UK, where poor and marginalised people talked directly to policy makers about their experiences. There is evidence that this had a positive impact on the wording of the final Plan.
- WAVE in Austria has also modelled the participation of excluded women. Strong cooperation between women’s organisations and relevant institutions (eg. police, youth welfare, health care, housing, local and national government) is the result of persistent work by WAVE and its allies to ensure the best service for women and children who have experienced domestic violence.
- GenderWorks’ *Making the Gender Duty Work* training in the UK has helped poor women in four different cities to value their voice and experience. Follow-up mentoring has enabled some participants to engage with service providers in education, employment training, and housing services, using the UK’s Public Sector Gender Duty as a policy lever to improve public services for women.

#### 3.2.1 Poor women advocating for change

In addition to policy makers ensuring that they listen to, and act on, the views and experience of women living in poverty, ‘participation’ must include enabling poor women to lobby and engage with policy makers and service providers themselves – to achieve policies and services that better meet their needs.

A core learning point from the GenderWorks project has been that, although national-level lobbying to tackle women’s poverty is crucial, lobbying at national level alone is not sufficient to achieve change. Whilst there may be national legislation to protect vulnerable women, practice in service delivery at local level may mean this legislation is not being appropriately implemented. Without action at both levels, there is the risk that tackling women’s exclusion will be cosmetic, and that it is only used by decision-makers to demonstrate commitment to inclusion when none exists in practice.

From the examples of lobbying developed and discussed in the course of the GenderWorks project, we also know the difficulties and barriers faced by women lobbying, and the length of time it may take to achieve change. Our experience through GenderWorks showed that, however keen they are to do such lobbying, grassroots women’s groups may not have the resources, capacity, or confidence to achieve change. This is because they are driven by the need to help women in acute distress, with lobbying being a secondary priority. Therefore the best way to ensure that national governments hear the voices of women’s



groups is to invite groups into spaces where they can set the agenda.

The following examples show how women's groups in the UK, who have received training through the GenderWorks project, have succeeded in using national-level legislation to achieve practical change in service delivery. The Gender Equality Duty created in 2007 obliges all public sector service providers to ensure that policies and services meet the needs of women as well as men, and provides an excellent tool for women's groups to advocate change.

#### Case study 1: Protecting women asylum seekers

Women Asylum Seekers Together (WAST) is a volunteer-led group, based in Manchester, which provides support to women asylum seekers and lobbies on women's asylum issues. WAST participated in GenderWorks' *Making the Gender Duty Work* training, and supported two women to attend further human rights training. As a result, one woman was able to use the Gender Duty to directly question the UK Justice Minister about women asylum seekers from Zimbabwe, and to question the length of her own wait for an asylum claim decision.

WAST also met with the Gender Equality Officer of Manchester City Council to lobby on behalf of women who are destitute because they have no access to public funds. The group brought evidence from their own research about the number of women who use or are turned away by services by virtue of their immigration status. WAST is now also part of the external scrutiny body which is supporting the review and monitoring of the Gender Equality Scheme for Manchester, in conjunction with the Gender Officer for Manchester City Council.

The national organisation Asylum Aid is using the Gender Equality Duty to ensure that childcare is provided for women attending asylum interviews, to enable them to speak openly about their experiences. The organisation has lodged a complaint with the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission about the failure of the immigration system to comply with the Gender Duty in this regard.

GenderWorks also hosted a meeting of local and national groups working on women's asylum issues, including Asylum Aid, WAST and others to discuss how to take this lobbying forward – thus linking national lobbying with local experience and evidence, and building the capacity and confidence of local women in the process.

#### Recommendations: getting poor women a voice

- Policy makers should make a sustained effort to listen to the voices of poor women. Poor women are the experts on what poverty is like, and their voice is central to tackling poverty and social inclusion.
- Poor women need extra support to appreciate how public policy-making works, including an understanding of where their input is valuable and where it is not. 'Created spaces'<sup>6</sup> are key to this, as

agendas have not already been set, and poor women can feel comfortable and confident on their own terms in this environment.

- Grassroots women's organisations often lack the resources, capacity, or confidence to push for change. Joint action with others will ensure their efforts are more effective. Lobbying at both national and local level is necessary to turn national-level legislation or policy into practice on the ground.
- Member state policy analysis, priorities, conclusions and recommendations must be driven by what poor women themselves are saying, through GenderWorks and similar women's social inclusion projects.

#### 3.3 Collection and use of gender-disaggregated data

The European Commission has critiqued National Action Plan reporting in all EU countries for its failure to systematically mainstream gender. This critique includes the failure of member states to adequately acknowledge the importance of gender-disaggregated statistics, and to use them in making policy. GenderWorks partners found this to be true of each country's National Action Plan in 2008.

While there has been an overall increase of gender-disaggregated data in some member states since the late 1990s, a number of issues still remain in relation to their use. The problem is no longer as simple as a lack of gender-disaggregated data. Esther Breitenbach noted in *Gender Audit in Scotland 2007*<sup>7</sup> that, 'since 1999 the provision of gender disaggregated statistics across a range of topics has greatly improved... facilitated by developments in information technology.'

Several steps are necessary to identify why women are at greater risk of social exclusion. Data-gathering, to create a baseline about the situation of women and men in such areas as employment, access to benefits, education and health, is the first. The second step is collation of the disaggregated data, whilst the third is analysis of the data. This means going beyond collation and comment to analyse why women and men are doing better or worse than each other. The final step is creating and implementing policy proposals based on the gender analysis.

While gender-disaggregated data is now more readily available, it is costly to produce and publish analyses of such data, and it is often too detailed and inaccessible for non-statisticians to use. This means that public sector bodies producing such analysis may question their cost-effectiveness. For example, in 2006 the UK Government discontinued publication of an annual report, *Individual incomes of Men and Women*. A discussion on gendered statistics at the GenderWorks International Practice Exchange in Glasgow in June 2009, revealed a number of problems.

Unless women's organisations are able to use the data to identify problems and lobby public authorities to address them, the simple existence of the data is insufficient. Barriers to women's organisations' use of such data include their lack of technical expertise in manipulating statistical data; and their lack of capacity and resources to analyse it themselves, or to commission others to do so.

A further problem is that revelation of the true position of women in relation to social exclusion may not appear in statistical data collections at all. The key issue we highlight here, is that if women are not in the labour market, their income, or lack of it, is not apparent. This is because most data on benefit receipt (in the UK) is available about households, but not about individuals in those households. This means that it is difficult to evidence the way in which women are socially excluded. There have been a number of small-scale academic research studies which demonstrate that the underlying assumption of statistical collection, ie. that resources are equally shared within the household, is incorrect, and therefore that women's real income may be much less than is assumed.

An example of the difficulty with the collection and use of gender-disaggregated data at local level is provided by Oxfam-commissioned research into whether and how Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets recognised differences in need between men and women.<sup>8</sup> This research was carried out by women's organisations and the Local Strategic Partnership in two areas: Thurrock in Essex, and Sunderland in the North East of England. The research revealed that the data collected on deprivation and need was not disaggregated by gender in the core areas of public service delivery (employment, education, policing, and health). The Scottish network of women's organisations, Engender, carried out a similar survey of Single Outcome Agreements in Scotland, with similar results.<sup>9</sup> The lack of data revealed represents a significant challenge for the women's organisations attempting to collect such data, but also for local authorities in comprehending why gender differences are important in understanding and responding to poverty. This gap in understanding means they are slow to respond to need, even where the data may be available.

It is very difficult for women's organisations, even if they understand this problem, to challenge current models of data collection, and successfully advocate alternative models. While gender budgeting groups across Europe continue to critique data collection and analysis as well as budgeting processes, producing, analysing, and acting on data which highlights women's continued social exclusion remains the responsibility of member states and they should aim to fulfil this responsibility effectively.

The evidence from GenderWorks is that the collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data, and its use in gender analysis, remains a significant challenge in the UK and across Europe. While the Commission has led the way in making gender-disaggregated data available in cross-Europe comparisons, and ensured analysis on a regular basis by its independent network of gender experts, there is still a big gap between what member states can do and what they are doing.

### **Recommendations: collection and use of gender-disaggregated data**

- Each member state should not only introduce a chapter on women's poverty and social inclusion in its National Action Plans, but should also fund its national gender equality body to produce annual digests of information on issues relevant to women's poverty.
- Member state governments should seek information from poor women themselves as a cross-check and baseline for the accuracy and relevance of official information.
- Whatever data is available, and however used, there should be systematic gender analysis across all areas of member states' policy.

### **3.4 Women's economic exclusion**

Gendered economic equality – ie. how well or how badly resources are shared between men and women – is as important in determining women's poverty and exclusion as the absolute level of resources. Yet levels of economic inequality remain very high throughout Europe, despite its great wealth. The World Economic Forum has highlighted that, apart from the Nordic countries, European countries are not represented in the top ten index of how well countries divide resources and opportunities among their male and female populations.

The UK comes in for particular comment for the huge discrepancy between life chances of boys and girls, which compares unfavourably with some poor African countries; and for its position as 78th on wage equality, after Egypt, Malawi, and Malaysia.<sup>10</sup> Member states should be paying more attention to the undermining effect of inequality, in addition to poverty measurements.

Women's economic exclusion in Europe is invisible because it is not recognised. Some attention is given to the position of the most marginalised women, in rhetoric if not reality. However, the persistent structural disadvantage experienced by women is incorrectly seen as a thing of the past.

The invisibility of women's economic inequality is partly explained by the way in which poverty is measured. Measurement of poverty in most European countries is



carried out against benchmarks related to household income rather than individual income, and in statistical snapshots at a point in time (often a crisis), rather than over an extended period. This is problematic for the measurement of women's poverty, which varies over their lifetime. In current measurements of employment and poverty, this variation over time is invisible

The evidence from the GenderWorks project is that tackling women's economic exclusion requires a combination of solutions, including more assets, better jobs and education, and better social protection, which together will prevent women from descending into poverty at critical points in their lives. Above all, employment and social protection policies must be super-flexible, and super-responsive to changes in women's circumstances.

### **Recommendations: tackling women's economic exclusion**

- Greater visibility for women's economic exclusion should be achieved through such tools as impact assessment, placing more emphasis on individual rather than household-based social protection mechanisms, and use of an individual lifetime perspective in addition to snapshots of household/family income.

### **3.5 Getting women into the right jobs**

Across the EU, women's employment rate has improved significantly. 'Making work pay' policies have worked for many women, although some countries, such as Italy, are still significantly behind target. However, there are considerable difficulties around the significance and quality of this employment, which remain mostly unacknowledged by member states. The gender pay gap remains a persistent issue in all countries, and there are still millions of women across Europe, mostly working part time, for whom work does not pay. These women are not paid enough, or cannot afford to pay for the care of dependants, or they have no bargaining power to alter low-quality work conditions and pay rates.

Women's income from employment is very different at different points in their lives. Statistics show us that their incomes plummet when they have a child, as they often take up part-time or less well-paid work. It may pick up again when their children are at school, but they may then join the 'sandwich generation' looking after both their children and parents, which keeps them out of the labour market or in low-paid, part-time jobs. In some member states improvements have been made to financial policies to value women's unpaid caring work; for example, in the UK, additions to National Insurance contributions for caring. The fact remains, however, that many older women plunge further into poverty when they retire on small or non-existent pensions. Because

they have not been consistently in paid employment, they have not made the necessary contributions to receive the full pension due to men who have experienced uninterrupted employment.

Most women with caring responsibilities make calculations about whether the economic and social costs involved in finding and keeping work are worth it. As a result, and out of concern for the stability and security of their families, many decide to remain on benefits. This is particularly true for single parents who, without support to fulfill their caring responsibilities, often find that paid work is simply not sustainable.

A gender perspective of employment, which takes account of women's time poverty and their caring responsibilities, is therefore essential. Lone (and other) parents should not be persuaded or forced through 'conditionality' policies into unsuitable and unsustainable jobs. Social relationships, transport, and the location of childcare should be taken into account in ensuring employment works for women.

Governments, with the encouragement of the EU, have put more emphasis on acquiring and increasing skills for paid work. However, the type of work-based, vocational, or low-level training on offer does not necessarily help women to get beyond the low-paid, low-skilled work in which so many poor women – particularly lone parents – are trapped. For Sally, a lone parent who blogs for GenderWorks, trying to move from welfare to work is a confusing struggle, which involves making hard choices about work which has to fit with her family responsibilities.<sup>11</sup>

The under-utilisation of women's skills also has a significant cost to the economy: The UK Commission on Women and Work found that the cost to the UK economy of women's skills being underused is £15-23bn.<sup>12</sup> Financial support for women, who are both in and out of work, should be increased to improve their skills and qualification levels; and the relationship between benefits and education should be reconsidered to help close the gender skills gap and improve productivity. This should include financial support for women re-entering the labour market after having children – enabling them to enter full-time courses, leading to better qualifications and pay in the longer term, rather than short-term training schemes as part of compulsory return-to-work requirements.

There are additional conceptual difficulties around how employment rates are set and measured. The employment rate target is expressed in terms of individuals, whereas poverty analysis often focuses on households and families instead. This can obscure the different positions of women and men, lone parents and couples, and diverts attention away from the gendered nature of the labour market.

### 3.5.1 Lack of adequate childcare – the biggest barrier to work

While formal childcare costs and the use of informal childcare vary from country to country, the affordability and availability of childcare remains the biggest single issue in terms of women's employment, raised repeatedly by poor women across many countries as their biggest barrier to getting and keeping work.

Whilst countries such as the UK and Austria are moving towards the Barcelona targets<sup>13</sup> on childcare, in general the provision of local, affordable, good quality childcare remains a distant goal. Civil servants and decision makers in northern Europe still fail to understand that lack of affordable childcare is the biggest single barrier to women's employment. In South and East Europe, the public provision of childcare is even less advanced, and in some countries women's need for childcare provision in order to enter the labour market remains unrecognised.

Unless greater priority is given to real options for sharing the opportunity costs of caring for children (and others), government employability and social mobility goals will be undermined by continued downward mobility for women as a result of childrearing. High quality, culturally sensitive, free or affordable childcare provision is essential not only for child wellbeing but also in helping to achieve member state goals on women's employment. Greater attention should also be given to valuing broader care responsibilities, which are so often shouldered by women, including care of their parents, relatives, or sick members of their family.

#### Recommendations: Getting women into the right jobs

- Active labour market policies can only be socially inclusive if they provide tailored and flexible support to poor women, listen to poor women, and take their lead from what women say they need. Policies must take a holistic view of women as potential employees, which takes into account caring and family responsibilities.
- Lone (or other) parents should not be persuaded into taking unsuitable jobs. Policy makers need to plan for the transitions that women need to make from welfare to work. Availability of transport facilities and the location of childcare can often determine whether or not women can make that transition.
- Free or subsidised childcare should be provided to allow women to take up jobs and training, and greater financial assistance provided for all carers so that women are not impoverished by their caring responsibilities.

- Policy assessment of women's financial assets should look at the barriers they experience in building up these assets, and how super-flexible policies could encourage their growth over a lifetime.

### 3.6 Quality services: the role of social protection

Evidence from gender expert reports across the EU is unequivocal that welfare benefits and social protection policies have assisted women to escape social exclusion, but that governments insufficiently recognise or understand this because they fail to carry out gender impact assessment. There are some exceptions – for example, in the UK, the targeting of tax credits for low-paid families indicates that the policy takes into account gender differences in the need for social protection. However, 'the focus on households as an aggregate unit means that the different opportunities and lifetime trajectories of women and men within a gender-segregated labour market are usually ignored'.<sup>14</sup>

In some member states, social security is seen as social protection for individuals over a lifetime; in others, social security payments and tax credits are instead primarily targeted at household need at a particular point of crisis. This can hinder the development of policies targeted at women because women's poverty within households remains hidden, and the highs and lows of women's income poverty and vulnerability are not measured over their lifetimes. The social security system must be shaped to respond to the different stages and transitions of women's lives, and to ensure that it protects them from poverty throughout their lives.

#### 3.6.1 Improving the quality of services for poor women

While a greater focus on setting and measuring targets (such as public service agreements and LAAs) is important in improving the quality of public services, ensuring that those services look at the different needs of women and men is still far from routine. A continued failure to do so in, for example, employment, transport, and housing, has resulted in continued and persistent barriers to quality services for women, as revealed by evidence from participants in the GenderWorks training. This failure to recognise the importance of gender differences is often the result of poor awareness among local officers in public service of how services will affect men and women differently, and a lack of understanding about how equal opportunities can be achieved in practice.

This case study from Italy illustrates how a form of gender analysis (gender budgeting) can be used to improve gender equity in local administration of services.

#### **Case study 2: Family mediation service in Vercelli, Italy**

Improvements to the family mediation services in Vercelli have been successful in ensuring that public services meet the needs of women and men.

Family mediation has developed in Italy over the last few years as an approach to help married couples who have decided to separate or divorce, but cannot reach an agreement on the financial and other arrangements. Women are largely excluded from the labour market in Italy and are responsible for providing unpaid services to their families. Their economic dependence means that such measures to support equitable settlement between separating partners are particularly significant in preventing women's poverty and social exclusion.

The introduction of a family mediation service in Vercelli

came about after Lamoro provided training for local administrators to show how gender budgeting can be a useful tool to reduce problems for couples and children after separation. Gender budgeting can demonstrate how non-financial resources (such as responsibility for care or household work) can be costed in calculations that will ensure equitable distribution of resources in the divorce or separation settlement.

After the training the following agreements were written into the local plan: greater direct involvement of families in the planning stages of family mediation services; social workers to be specifically trained in gender analysis; the monitoring and evaluation group for the project to include target families, and the identification of concrete and measurable indicators to assess the impact of the project on everyone in the family.

Now we give two further examples, from the UK and Italy, of the value of training and awareness-raising in demonstrating how policy can be used to tackle exclusion differently for men and women. The first is an example of putting gender into child poverty policy at local level. The second demonstrates how gender mainstreaming can be integrated into the local planning process in Italy.

#### **Case study 3: Gendering public services in Leeds**

One of the GenderWorks *Policy to Practice* trainings took place in Leeds, led by Leeds Equality Network (LEN). This consists of representatives from the major public service providers including health and education.

The network decided to focus on gender issues within child poverty, as it is a key government priority expressed in targets at local as well as national level. The LEN decided to break down the child poverty target into three areas which are seen as key causes – worklessness among adults, young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs), and teenage pregnancy. A gender impact assessment training for LEN officers working in each of the areas examined what gendered assumptions were being made, what gendered data was available, what analysis had been done, and what actions could be taken to ensure a gender and poverty perspective in child poverty.

For instance, during the discussion on conducting a gender impact assessment on the teenage pregnancy strategy, a number of related areas were discussed which highlighted gender differences: eg. how boys and girls used the free condom service differently and how this could be affected by who staffed the service, their awareness of gender, and where the service was delivered from. The Teenage Pregnancy Board will be developing this work further in early 2010.

The next steps for the whole process are a LEN workshop on the results of the three groups in December, and a discussion at the Child Poverty Outcome Group in February 2010. Whatever the result of the process, the lead on Leeds Council sees this as a major step forward in increasing officers' awareness of the role of gender in understanding and tackling poverty and social exclusion.

#### **Case study 4: Training public service providers to meet the needs of women, Italy**

Lamoro carried out training with administrators in Vercelli and Casale Monferrato (Piedmont region, Northern Italy) to help them plan and provide local services which more effectively meet the needs of women.

The local 'zone' plans for the delivery of services in the area mapped local services for children, adults, people with disabilities, and older people, but did not include a gender analysis highlighting differences in access to services and effectiveness in meeting need. A zone plan is the principal mechanism for the delivery of services to excluded women: it is therefore vital that it reflects and meet women's needs.

The training was therefore designed to help the administrators to identify gender issues, and to use this information in the planning of services in the zone plan. First, the training looked at a number of

methodologies and tools suitable for integrating gender and diversity in social planning; the Goal Oriented Project Planning methodology (GOPP) was chosen as the best technique. The participants were then trained in using the GOPP, and went on to use the approach to prepare a set of policy recommendations for the next zone plan.

Lamoro's experience shows how bringing together local administrators and budget-holders, and using a well-tried and tested methodology drawn from international development, can create momentum in rethinking service delivery for women. It is hoped that the next zone plans in Vercelli and Casale Monferrato will demonstrate better targeting of resources to ensure that services meet the needs of the most marginalised women (lone parents, migrant women, disabled and elderly women) based on a real understanding of those women's roles and responsibilities.

### 3.6.2 Quality services for marginalised women

Services have improved for many, but there are groups of women left well behind – those affected by domestic violence, those perceived as not legitimate citizens, and ethnic minority and migrant women experiencing racism – who still do not receive the services they need.

While Western European standards of social security and recognition of the rights of those needing the care of public services are gradually improving, this is not the case for women (or men) who, for a variety of reasons, may not be perceived as legitimate citizens. As Europe experiences recession and financial crisis, the need to protect the most vulnerable women – who may fall through the gaps in public services and experience hardship and destitution as a result – is stronger than ever. GenderWorks therefore calls on member states to provide appropriate services and support to all poor and vulnerable women within their borders, regardless of immigration status.

Women's groups in the UK, Italy, and Austria have reported on the experiences of migrant and refugee women, and conclude that services for these women, even those with secure status, also need particular attention. This includes providing support with learning the language of their new country, subsidised housing, and help to deal with problems created by lengthy qualifying periods for benefits.

For ethnic minority women, whether settled in member states or new migrants or refugees, there is also the added barrier to accessing public services of both direct and indirect racism.

Direct racism can be experienced in poor quality treatment by public services. Indirect racism may come from the way in which services are organised and delivered, where they are not designed with the needs of ethnic minority women in mind. For instance, UK community cohesion policy puts a heavy focus on faith-based solutions, and creates additional pressure on women who already feel they have to conform to the cultural norms of their community. GenderWorks partner, Southall Black Sisters, a specialist agency supporting black and minority women experiencing domestic violence, reported that this created additional pressure for already-vulnerable women to stay with a violent partner, and discouraged them from seeking support through secular mainstream services.

GenderWorks partners have shared their experiences of how the most marginalised women are affected by the quality of services they receive. In the UK, the project heard evidence of how poor women experience low quality or inappropriate services. It also encouraged a critical gender analysis among statutory service providers in its *Policy to Practice* sessions. In

Austria, WAVE lobbied on the provision of services to women experiencing violence, through its expert seminars and contacts with women's organisations liaising with service providers. The WAVE expert group has defined gaps in the social system (health care, education, and social benefits), particularly for migrant women. In Italy, Lamoro carried out training with local technicians, examining local zone plans to ensure that services meet the needs of the most marginalised women (see case study three, above).

### 3.6.3 Holding service providers to account

The 2004 EU directive banning sex discrimination in the provision of goods and services was a huge step forward, on which a number of member states have taken action; for example, in the UK with the introduction of the Gender Duty. However, the mechanisms to ensure that EU law and policy become practice are have not necessarily been implemented.

Despite the 2004 Directive, there is a continued need for lobbying on the right to decent housing, education, social, health, and employment services, to ensure that social standards are met and there is universal access to affordable, quality services. This is particularly important given that many member states are currently contracting out these services from the state to the private sector, in the name of greater efficiency. The experience of anti-poverty organisations is that it is rarely easy to make profits from poor people, whose problems are complex and long-term.

The Gender Duty should provide a tool to ensure that public services meet the needs of poor women in the UK. However, GenderWorks found that its impact has been mixed. Some women's groups reported that they had been able to use the Duty as an effective tool to improve services, for example, in successfully lobbying to ensure women at asylum interviews could access childcare, so that they could relate their stories of persecution without their children in the room (see case study 1). However, other groups reported that the Duty had been used to justify perverse – and counterproductive – efficiency measures. For example, it emerged that local services were using it as an excuse to bring together specialist services supporting ethnic minority women with mainstream services for all women (see below). Others were using the Gender Duty to insist that women's organisations opened domestic violence provision to men. This understandably caused alarm within women's organisations and concern for the safety and security of their beneficiaries. The policy seemed to be the result of a lack of awareness of the risks on the part of planners and deliverers of public services. This is something which training for public service providers can tackle.



### 3.6.4 The importance of women-only and specialist services

A very significant problem for women's social inclusion is the unwillingness of service providers to recognise the value of women-only and single-sex spaces in bridging the confidence and capacity gap for socially excluded women. This is particularly true for women with insecure or unclear immigration status, and also for migrant and asylum-seeking women facing additional types of harassment and ill-treatment related to their sex. Our analysis is that this is, in part, a misunderstanding by service providers of how equality is achieved – the perception that if services are declared to be equally accessible, this is sufficient. More often, however, it is a failure to appreciate the value of women-only services.

For example, many specialist services for ethnic minority women have faced closure or cuts in their funding if they fail to combine with mainstream services and/or provide a service for both women and men. The successful case brought by Southall Black Sisters against Ealing Council, who tried to withdraw their funding on this basis, was important in setting a precedent. However, GenderWorks' evidence is that it is difficult for ethnic minority women's organisations to muster the capacity and confidence to mount a similar challenge. Local councils, such as Manchester, continue with the closure of specialist services, even though there is sufficient evidence of the importance of these services in bridging the gap between home and the public world of employment and education, for vulnerable women.

Women who have participated in GenderWorks training have emphasised the value of women-only services. For example, 'Tea in the Pot' in Glasgow, gave evidence of their importance for the mental and physical health of women in providing a safe and unpressurised space.<sup>15</sup> GenderWorks recommends the wider adoption, and re-adoption, of women-only spaces in supporting women and giving them confidence to enter the labour market, pursue their education, and gain confidence to participate in the public arena and in decision making.

#### Recommendations: better quality services for excluded women

- Women-only spaces are the essential first step on a long road towards women's full inclusion in society and the economy, providing the bridge for them to start on the journey.
- We recommend the adoption of women-only spaces to give women the confidence to enter the labour market, pursue their education, and participate in the public arena.

- We call on all member states to respect and protect the fundamental human rights of all women, regardless of their citizenship status. We call on them to take steps to make marginalised women aware of their rights, and to ensure that service providers respect them.

### 3.7. Tackling violence against women

At least one-quarter of all women across Europe are affected by domestic violence at some point in their lives, driving many into poverty and social exclusion.

Violence has an impact on women's poverty both inside the household and in the public arena. Inside the household, partner violence may cause inequality of access to, and control of, family income and savings. It may eventually put women's ability to live in the family home at risk. In the public arena, domestic violence means that women are often unable to play their part in the economy and wider society: women may be unable to take up, or to keep, education or employment, thus reducing their income (immediately and over a lifetime) and their future opportunities. Overall, domestic violence creates a vicious cycle of increasing vulnerability and social exclusion, from which it is very hard for women to take control of their lives and to escape.

Domestic violence carries an economic as well as a social cost to member states. Sylvia Walby worked out the cost of violence in the UK<sup>16</sup> (in terms of police and court time, social welfare services, etc.), to be £23bn per year: £6bn in direct costs to the economy; and £17bn in human and emotional costs. And a report by New Philanthropy Capital found that violence against women costs society £40bn each year in England and Wales alone.<sup>17</sup> The costs for public services, and therefore member state governments in other European countries, have been counted in other authoritative studies in the last few years, at the instigation of feminist academics who wanted to make visible these hidden costs.<sup>18</sup>

Some member states have made progress in creating and implementing domestic violence strategies. In the UK, reducing domestic violence reporting is now commonly a Local Area Agreement target set by local authorities, whilst Austria has introduced a national-level minimum social security payment for women experiencing domestic violence. In some countries protection laws have improved, and multi-agency cooperation to deal with cases of domestic violence is more common. However, most member state policy makers still fail to recognise the scale of the problem and the link between domestic violence and women's poverty.

Physical and sexual violence is recognised as a protection and safety issue – but combating the poverty

created by violence remains unrecognised and un-adopted by member states as part of anti-poverty and social inclusion policy, despite the efforts of women's organisations in every country in Europe. WAVE's policy paper spells out the connections between violence and poverty<sup>19</sup> in Austria in detail: the basic facts are the same in every country in the EU.

### 3.7.1 How service providers could do better

The failure of service providers to protect the most vulnerable women is most acute for the most marginalised groups – migrant women and those with insecure immigration status. These women face increased risks of domestic violence, as household or individual livelihoods may be precarious; yet they largely remain outside the system of social protection, with little information about their needs or entitlements. Many may end up facing destitution. This issue is highlighted in WAVE's response to the Austrian National Action Plan; in concern about the position of women with no recourse to public funds in the UK; and in concern about the racism towards, and lack of any national public resources for shelters for, women migrants experiencing violence in Italy (evidence from Casa della Donna).

Service providers, even in Austria which has a record of significant attempts to ensure good quality treatment for women experiencing domestic abuse, remain ill-equipped to recognise symptoms of domestic violence, and fail to consider the impact of violence on a woman's ability to enter the labour market or on her social protection needs. The picture of local service provision in the UK, while improving in some areas, remains patchy and unacceptable in many places. This was spelled out in the *Map of Gaps* produced by the UK End Violence against Women coalition and the Equalities and Human Rights Commission: one in four local authority areas provide no specialised support services for women experiencing violence in their areas. Training and advocacy by GenderWorks partners in the UK, Italy, and Austria have all highlighted the gaps in understanding, provision, and resourcing of safe and appropriate services by service providers.

The experience of GenderWorks in all three countries is that policy and practice on the issues of poverty and social inclusion, and of domestic violence, remain separate. Experience in the women's movement is that radical changes such as this require a long timescale and very significant advocacy. And women's organisations lobbying on violence have few resources and little time to devote to changing minds in the anti-poverty sector. However, WAVE has engaged with the Austrian Federal Ministry for Labour, Social Affairs, and Consumer Protection on the issue, and, through its expert seminars, succeeded in getting the issue

onto the social inclusion agenda. Women's shelters providing immediate relief and support remain the most important response mechanism in helping to prevent violence being the trigger for women falling into poverty.

### The value of women's shelters in preventing violence and poverty

Women who escape a violent relationship are at a very high risk of falling into poverty. Loss of housing, health problems, traumatisation, loss of residency permit and, as consequence, loss of job and social benefits, are just a few examples of poverty traps that confront women survivors of violence and their children.

Women leaving a violent partner may be forced onto the street, and they may lose their homes. Women's shelters provide a safe place for them and their children. Besides providing women with a secure place to live, women's shelters help women to find affordable housing, and prevent them from being evicted if they can't pay their rent. For instance, in Vienna, women's shelters cooperate closely with social housing programmes. Under the *Übergangswohnungen* (breakout flats) programme, women can stay for one year for an affordable rent.

Women need to rebuild their confidence and determination in order to move out of the trap of poverty and violence, and women's shelters provide the counselling and therapeutic support which enables them to do this. They provide legal aid and advice to women negotiating changes in residency, work permits, and employment law – meaning they can keep jobs even if violence strikes. They support women to ensure subsistence – advising them of their rights and helping them to apply for social benefit, to access housing, and where possible, giving them help in meeting day to day expenses or advice about debt. They support women to find a job or training, and gain qualifications.

In short, women's shelters are essential facilities in preventing women survivors of violence from spiralling into poverty.

### Recommendations: tackling violence against women

- Public service providers are often ill-equipped to give women the support they need to escape poverty and social exclusion. They must be properly resourced; workers must be trained to ask the questions which will reveal domestic violence; and appropriate support must be provided in mainstream services such as health, employment, housing, and education.
- International standards<sup>20</sup> must be used as a benchmark enabling service providers to understand the minimum standards necessary to protect women experiencing domestic violence, and against which



they can measure their services. The standards have been adopted by European bodies,<sup>21</sup> but as yet lack consistent implementation across member states. These standards should be more widely applied across Europe as a way to tackle poverty and achieve better social inclusion for women.

### 3.8 Women's and children's poverty: the connections

In the EU, one child in five lives under the poverty threshold, and in most countries children face a greater risk of poverty than the rest of the population. Child poverty is a high priority for social inclusion. All countries face challenges in eradicating child poverty, and the common causes are having parents who are not in work (joblessness or economic inactivity), having parents who are working but in jobs that do not pay them enough to live on (in-work poverty), and insufficient welfare support (ie. benefits and tax credits) for families,<sup>22</sup> especially those with several children or disabled children.

Countries with more generous social protection systems (Austria, Luxembourg, France, and Denmark) provide most of their support through non-income related ie. universal benefits. Other countries, such as the UK, use a mix of targeted measures, such as child tax credits related to earnings, and universal child benefit. Italy currently has no national system for payment of unemployment benefits, although limited social protection mechanisms exist in some localities.

Child wellbeing is intimately connected with the wellbeing of their main carers, who are usually women. In fact, women are often the main 'shock absorbers' of family poverty – they adopt a number of strategies to protect children and family members from poverty. These may include 'going without' themselves, taking on insecure and undignified work in order to increase family income, taking out additional loans, and working harder to manage on less money (eg. shopping around for the cheapest items or managing without a washing machine if they cannot afford to mend it).

The UK Women's Budget Group has drawn attention to the failure of government to recognise the connections between mothers' and children's poverty,<sup>23</sup> although there is strong evidence (from the UK) that mothers are more likely than fathers to spend income on children's needs.<sup>24</sup> This problem is masked by data collection methods, as in the UK the breakdown of the numbers of children in poverty is related to economic and family status, but not gender. While there is a policy focus on 'second earners' in a household, there is insufficient recognition that these are largely women.<sup>25</sup>

#### Recommendations: women and children's poverty

- Increase basic social protection for all working-age adults, including women, as a means to tackling child

poverty. Child poverty and women's poverty cannot be treated separately, as women are so often the main carers in every European country. The best way to tackle child poverty is therefore to increase the level of basic social protection measures for all working-age adults.

- Provide enhanced social protection for the most vulnerable women. In particular we recommend bringing up benefit levels for young people, especially single young pregnant women, to the same level as all working adults, to ensure that children of young mothers are not disadvantaged.
- Provide free language support and adequate social services for minority women such as migrants and refugees, whose children are particularly badly affected by their experience of social exclusion.

## 4. Where next for women's social inclusion?

While progress has been made, significant and persistent barriers remain to women's full social inclusion in Europe. These are both conceptual (a lack of acceptance that economic independence is an effective goal) and practical (in understanding and acceptance of how marginalised women experience discrimination in services). GenderWorks recommends that member states fully adopt the Commission's analysis that tackling women's social inclusion means taking action on the structural disadvantage of all women. It also recommends a particular policy focus on the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalised women.

So what does the future hold for women's social inclusion? According to press coverage and the statements of economists and governments, the recession and financial crisis have eased. Governments and the Commission have been assessing the impact of the recession on different groups and for women's social inclusion.<sup>26</sup> It is already known in the UK that those who were already poor, and those living in traditionally poor areas, have been hit hardest.<sup>27</sup> How the recession has affected women and men differently is still emerging.

Oxfam and the European Women's Lobby are carrying out research into how women are affected by the recession in 11 European countries. It will reveal that the longer-term effects of recession on women are invisible. The way statistics are collected fails to show increased poverty and exclusion as it emerges. The research is likely to reveal the hidden costs of increased violence against women, and the impact on women's lives of cuts in public services, especially in Eastern Europe. This renders the need to protect the most vulnerable women (undocumented migrants,

women with insecure immigration status, women with disabilities, and lone parents) ever stronger. Across Europe there are an increasing number of women who are falling through the gaps in social protection provision, resulting in acute hardship and vulnerability. We hope the European Commission will play its part in highlighting the hidden crisis, and urging member states to take action.

## 5. Social inclusion and the National Action Plan (NAP)

This chapter introduces the European social inclusion agenda, and summarises the GenderWorks partners' findings about what is in the NAPs on women's inclusion and poverty. It reflects on the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), and examines the opportunities created by the European Year against Poverty.

### 5.1 The European Union social inclusion agenda

Reducing poverty and social exclusion, and promoting greater social inclusion, has been a key policy priority of the EU since 2000. The aim of European social inclusion policy is to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion by 2010. The European social inclusion process includes common objectives, two-yearly NAPs in which member states set out their plans to tackle poverty and social exclusion in their countries, common indicators, and a Community Action Programme (PROGRESS) to encourage mutual learning and dialogue between member states. In 2006, equality between women and men also became an overarching objective, supported by the European Commission *Roadmap for equality between women and men (2006-2010)*.

### 5.2 Social inclusion and the NAPs

Articles 2 and 3 of the EC Treaty (ie. the legal basis for the EU's activities) set out the EU's commitment to eliminate inequalities and to promote equality between women and men in all its activities. In the social inclusion process, the Commission committed to 'strengthen gender mainstreaming in the Open Method of Coordination for Social Protection and Social Inclusion and to provide a manual to actors involved in the process'.

However, member states have not consistently or effectively responded to this agenda. The Commission's Gender Equality Unit has commented in the 2009 Joint Report<sup>28</sup> that: 'the extent to which member states have taken on board gender considerations shows a mixed picture. The presentation and analysis of statistics broken down by sex has improved for almost all member states, but this is not always reflected in the proposed

policy responses. While in general greater visibility is attached to increasing equality between the sexes, there remains room for improvement to integrate the gender mainstreaming approach consistently.'

The GenderWorks partners examined the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming in their country's NAPs, and their conclusions mirror those of the Commission's gender groups and experts. We found that there are major gaps in policy makers' understanding of the gender dimensions of exclusion in mainstream issues such as child poverty, health, and employment. This means that policies reported on in the NAPs fail to tackle exclusion as effectively as they could, especially for vulnerable and marginalised women experiencing multiple discrimination. For more information, please see GenderWorks' critiques of the NAPs in the UK, Italy and Austria. These draw attention to shortcomings in the national collection and use of gender-disaggregated data, and the lack of a thorough gender analysis.

The OMC used for social inclusion in Europe has many advantages. Its encouragement of mutual learning, awareness raising, and its ethos of peer review between member states, means that the picture of what is happening on poverty and exclusion is comprehensive and regularly updated. However, because real power to take action - or not - on social exclusion lies with the member states, and because policy makers do not understand the gender dimensions of poverty as well as they should, progress in tackling women's exclusion is put at risk.

While progress has been made in the National Action Plans, analysis of how social exclusion affects women and men is still not carried out systematically, nor is it built into the structure of the National Action Plans. Where progress has been made in creating and monitoring policy, European directives on equality between men and women have been the driver. An example is the creation of legal Duties on the Gender Duty on the public sector in the UK, or a focus on women's employment in local service support in Italy.

The EU's core analysis (as evidenced, for example, in the *Roadmap for equality between women and men*) of the causes of gender inequality and social inclusion remains largely unadopted by member states. Examples include EU recommendations towards equal economic independence for women, stronger encouragement for sharing unpaid care between men and women, and ensuring social protection for all over the course of lifetimes. GenderWorks advocacy with government in the UK shows that some policy makers are interested in challenging the assumptions on which policy is based, and carrying out further research; but we found less enthusiasm for specific policy measures in areas such as social protection and the labour market.<sup>29</sup>

For the most excluded women, such as migrant women, women experiencing domestic violence, ethnic minority women, women with disabilities and elderly women, there remain serious barriers to improvement – although the importance of their labour market participation in member states' policy has been recognised. Evidence from participants

in GenderWorks training in the UK and Italy reveals significant barriers to recognising the rights of marginalised women. We heard many stories of how discrepancies between immigration policy and human rights/social inclusion policy have led to destitution and discrimination.

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