

COVID-19 and its economic impact on women and women's poverty ¹

Insights from 5 European Countries

This in-depth, case-analytical overview, commissioned by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the FEMM Committee, examines the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on a representative sample of member states with the aim of alimending policy recommendations for the COVID-19 recovery period to ensure that the gains of the past years in the matter of gender equality are not overridden by the short-term negative effects of the measures implemented to combat the COVID-19 sanitary crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its associated economic crisis have impacted women differently than men in the European Union (EU). Even if gender issues have never been so high-up in the European political agenda, the effects of the COVID-19 crisis are putting in jeopardy the progress achieved in the past decades in terms on the reduction of gender inequalities in European member states. The effects of the COVID-19 sanitary crisis have also served to highlight the need for member states to develop proactive – rather than reactive – gender mainstreaming policies. A thorough, case-analytical review of a representative sample of EU member states (i.e., Italy, France, Germany, Poland and Sweden) depicts how the measures taken by European governments to halt the pandemic have affected women to divergent degrees and have widened the gaps to a greater extent in some member states *vis-à-vis* others.

One of the areas in which women have been, overall, disproportionately affected *vis-à-vis* men is in counting with an equal access to the economy. The difference has been greater in those member states which did not prioritize gender mainstreaming in the years prior to the pandemic, or which did not account for gender differentials in the measures applied to halt the spread of the Sars-Cov-2 virus. Overall, in Europe, women have tended to be overrepresented in the frontline of the pandemic and also in the services sector, which has been particularly affected by the current crisis. This has translated into an increase in female unemployment rates and thus a higher likelihood of poverty for women in the EU. Women have also tended to partake a disproportionate amount of uncompensated childcare work, even if enforced lockdowns have meant that men increased their household participation in comparison to the years prior to the pandemic. This re-arrangement of family relations represents an opportunity for change in the future in which household and childcare tasks could become more equally divided and thus permit women to increase their participation in the labour market.

¹ Full study in English: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/693183/IPOL_STU\(2021\)693183_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/693183/IPOL_STU(2021)693183_EN.pdf)



Not all women have been equally affected, however. Apart from experiencing divergent situations in different member states, the women group is also intersectionally divided according to other demographic pillars. Lower-income and lower-skilled women tend to encounter themselves in a vicious cycle of systematic poverty. Older women and single women now also face greater prospects of poverty.

Higher incidences of violence, and particularly intimate-partner violence, have not merely increased but also caused a greater number of women victims than men victims. The growth of such phenomenon has been also denominated the 'shadow pandemic,' as violence throughout Europe has tended to intensify alongside the COVID-19 crisis and its related governmental measures. Increases in stress levels have been historically associated with other economic and social crises, yet public policies have not caught up with research on the matter. The saturation of European healthcare systems additionally meant that women could not attend the hospital to report crimes. Additionally, the lack of access to healthcare services have prevented women in the EU from exercising their right to abortion. The effects of such limitations are yet to be seen throughout the recovery period.

With this information in mind, and gathering the lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis, this report seeks to offer public policy recommendations in order to ensure that European governments implement proactive – rather than reactive – public policy solutions in preparation for future crises. Women have also been underrepresented in COVID-19 decision-making bodies, despite the fact that the inclusion of women in policymaking and leadership positions results in increased efforts towards successful measures to reduce gender gaps and mainstream gender into relief policies.

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External Authors:

Paola PROFETA, Professor of Public Economics, Bocconi University (Corresponding author and responsible of the study)

Ximena CALÓ, Researcher, Bocconi University

Roberto OCCHIUZZI, Research Assistant, Bocconi University

Research Administrator responsible: Martina SCHONARD

Editorial assistant: Ginka TSONEVA

Contact: poldep-citizens@europarl.europa.eu

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