



EmpowerMed

# Gender and energy poverty

*Facts and arguments*



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## Gender and energy poverty - facts and arguments

Energy poverty is a global problem and can be seen as a situation in which a household lacks socially and materially necessitated level of energy services at home. Estimates show that 57 million people in Europe cannot keep their homes warm during winter and 104 million people cannot keep their homes comfortable during summer. Given that women are disproportionately affected by energy poverty it is crucial to take a closer look towards the relationship between energy poverty and gender.

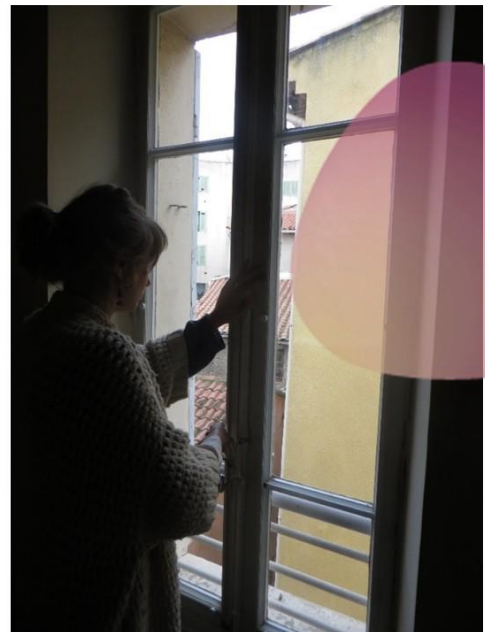
### Ana from Slovenia

Let's take a look at Ana's life in Slovenia to get a general understanding of the relationship between energy poverty and gender.

Ana is a single mother who lives with her two children and her elderly mother. Her mother couldn't afford to live alone on her low pension. Ana wants to spend time with her young children while she takes care of daily tasks. She is working in the tourism sector on a seasonal basis and works hard during the tourism season, whilst saving money for the rest of the year. She already earns less than her male colleagues who do exactly the same job. Her income is not high enough to guarantee the well-being of her family.

They rely on cheap, processed food most of the time and the kids are not able to afford the healthier food options in the school cafeteria.

Although a lot of Ana's money goes directly to heating expenses, Ana's family, especially her mother, seem to get cold during the cold winter days. Gender and physiology play an important role when it comes to sensitivity to the cold. Since they live in a coastal area, their house is not insulated, and heating options are limited and expensive. They have an electric heater in the living room and the family often spend time there.



**Vulnerable people who suffer disproportionately from the phenomenon of energy poverty are mostly women.**

As we can see in this short story, a single mother has problems that go beyond being alienated by society and judged for her marital status. It is evident that vulnerable people who suffer disproportionately from the phenomenon of energy poverty are mostly women. This can be linked to their physiological and health situation as well as their economic and social status.

## Dimensions of gender and energy poverty

The following arguments show the interlinkage between gender and energy poverty in four different dimensions: physiological, health, economic and social/cultural.

- **Age** is a significant factor in dealing with heat and cold stress, with young children and older people being particularly vulnerable.[1]
- Additionally, a higher share of women make up the **elderly** due to longer life expectancy. **Life expectancy** at birth in the EU was estimated at 80.6 years in 2015; 83.3 years for women and 77.9 years for men.[2] Older women (65+) are more likely to be poorer than men if they are living alone. (23% of older women, 18% of older men).[3]
- **Women are more heat and cold sensitive than men** due to their physiology (chronic temperature-related discomfort, heat and associated diseases).[4] Recent studies have noted that women are more sensitive to extreme temperatures, which may place **women suffering energy poverty at a greater risk**.[5]



dimension  
Physiological

Health  
dimension



Living in inadequately heated or cooled homes has detrimental implications on respiratory and cardiovascular systems, as well as on mental health and well-being.[6]

- **Mental health:** Inadequately heated or cooled homes cause increased stress, reduced well-being and comfort, and depression. In Barcelona, people with reported **energy poverty show poor mental health** (4 times more frequently than among general population) [7]
- **Physical health:** Infections, respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, headaches, nausea, and dizziness can result from cooking with solid fuels, and there is even the risk of poisoning and death. [8] Every year, almost 4 million people die prematurely worldwide from diseases caused by **domestic air pollution**, with

children and **women disproportionately affected**. This number is much higher than the deaths from malaria or tuberculosis. [9] Among affected people 52,6% of women and 31,8% of men stated they had a state of poor health in Barcelona. [7]

- The consequences of the **energy poverty gap** on women's health deserve closer scrutiny. Several studies have already pointed out women's higher vulnerability to winter mortality.[10]
- **Social health:** Stigmatisation and social isolation hinder normal everyday life, such as work or study, and decrease social relations.

People at risk of poverty or social exclusion by age and sex in percent (eurostat, 2019)



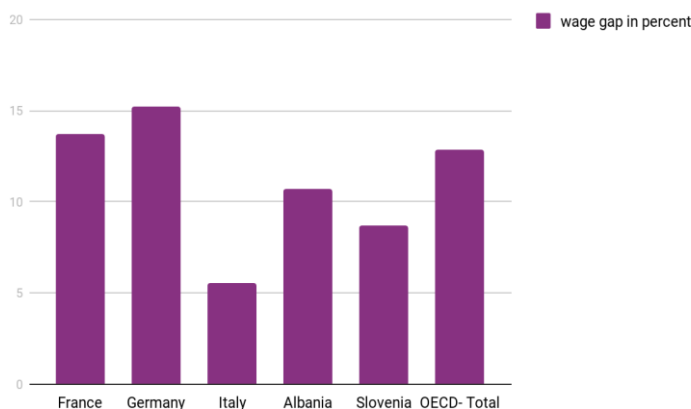
A higher share of women are at risk of poverty or social exclusion

## Economic dimension



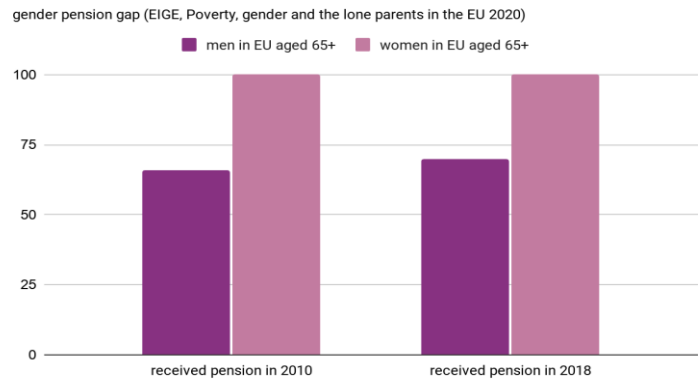
- **Lower income:** The Gender Pay Gap and Gender Pension Gap have a strong correlation with economic welfare as well as energy poverty.

Gender wage gap (eurostat 2018, oecd.org 2019, Gender Equality Index for the Republic of Albania 2020)

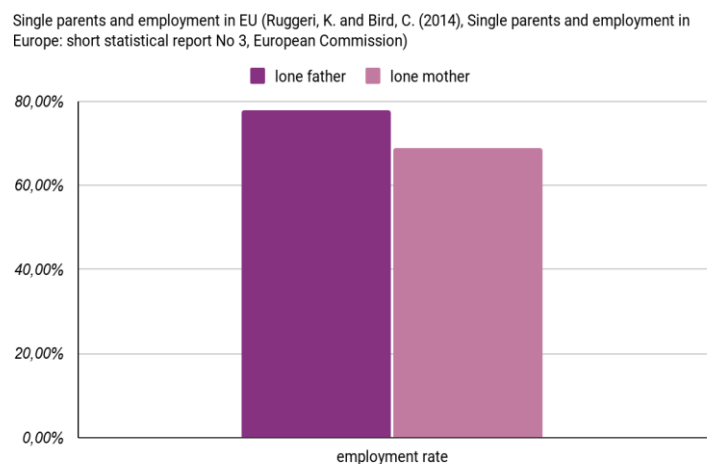


- **Gender pay gap:** In 2017 in the EU, men were paid, on average, 16 % more than women.[11]

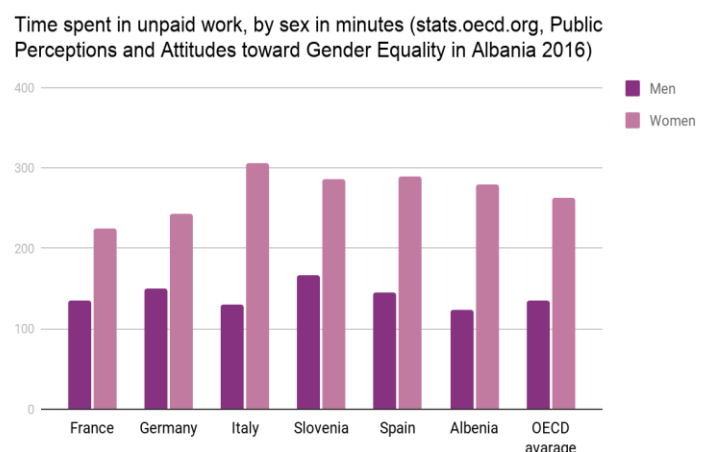
- **Gender pension gap:** Elderly women get lower pensions than men. In 2018, women in the EU aged over 65 received a pension that was on average 30% lower than that of men.[2]



- **Single-parent households:** Almost half (48 %) of lone mothers and a third (32 %) of lone fathers are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Women in particular are affected as they make up almost 85 % of all one-parent families in the EU. [13]  
**Younger mothers and women with young children are the least-employed parent groups.**[14]. One-parent families headed by women are also more likely to be materially deprived than those headed by men. [13]



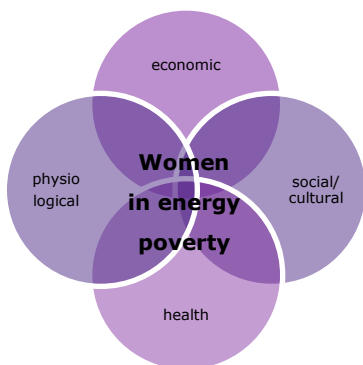
- **Less time for paid work:** 32 % of lone fathers and 44 % of lone mothers who work part-time (less than 30 hours per week) have less time for paid work due to unpaid care work. [12].  
**Compared to men, women are less likely to work full-time,** more likely to be employed in lower-paid occupations and less likely to progress in their careers. Women are mostly responsible for house tasks and child care even when working full time. [14]







- **Responsibilities and household roles:** The gendered division of labour generally assigns women the responsibility for the provision of household energy in relation to their spheres of influence in the household.
- **Women do not have equal voices** on policy, economy and the household - even though laws foresee them. In 2019, 27.78 percent of women were part of the parliament in Slovenia. For comparison, the world average in 2019 based on 188 countries is 22.85 percent.[15] Slovenia ranks 11th in the EU on the Gender Equality Index and is therefore 0.9 points higher than the EU's score.[16]
- **Care work:** the responsibility for dependent children and other (family) members in the household increases the unpaid care work of women.



## Conclusion

The intersectional perspective analyses different factors that women are facing. **The physiological, health, economic and social situation** of women put them and their households at higher risk of energy poverty.

## EU measures to tackle gender and energy poverty

### Legal commitments

**Gender equality is a core value of the European Union**, which is reflected within its treaties: it is included in articles 2 and 3 of the Treaty on the European Union ("principle of the equality between men and women") and in articles 8 and 19 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. The latter determines that the EU in all of its actions ensures the respect for equality between women and men. Articles 21 and 23 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights prohibit any discrimination on grounds of sex and require



equality between men and women to be ensured in all areas. These basic rights are backed up with specific binding directives relating to various issues, such as **work and employment, health and access to services and goods**.

## Political commitments

On a political level other commitments exist, such as the EU Gender Equality Strategy, which is a general obligation of the EU to **empower women** and to **implement gender mainstreaming**, including the following targets:

- Addressing the **gender pay, care and pension gap**, encouraging **equal participation** across different sectors of economy and making EU rules on work-life-balance will be the main actions concerning equal economic participation.
- Binding measures on **pay transparency** by the end of 2020, promotion of equal uptake of family leaves and flexible working arrangements, as well as **investments in care services**.
- Commission's gender mainstreaming actions and embedding in the next EU budget (2021-2027): Gender equality-related projects will be supported and funded through a number of EU programmes, as a gender dimension has to be integrated throughout the financial framework and various EU funding and budgetary instruments.

## How does project EmpowerMed tackle gender and energy poverty?

**EmpowerMed** focuses on the special characteristics of energy poverty in the coastal areas of the Mediterranean, with the overall objective to contribute to energy poverty alleviation and health improvement of people affected by energy poverty, with a particular focus on women, through:

- implementing practical solutions, tailored to empower over 4,200 households (**mainly focussing on women**) affected by energy poverty to manage their energy consumption and improve their access to appropriate energy resources,
- assessing the efficiency and impacts of various practical energy poverty alleviation measures and **their potential to empower women** to formulate local, national and EU policy recommendations and
- promoting the policy solutions for tackling energy poverty **by empowering women** at local, national and EU level among 220 decision-makers, 560 social actors, 100



utilities, 180 health experts and 100 energy poverty experts.



**EmpowerMed will support women, households, and key actors to take action against energy poverty in the Mediterranean.**

“In order to enhance women's agency in acting against energy poverty, EmpowerMed will develop the full potential for women as change agents and implement training, collective assemblies and gender just policy and advocacy work.”

Women will be empowered since women's agency is necessary for acting against energy poverty.

EmpowerMed will additionally collect and validate gender-disaggregated data in order to enable a better understanding of women's roles in addressing energy poverty.

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