The Eradication of Poverty

A qualitative study of European level work to eradicate poverty among women

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Author: Regina Mattsson
Supervisor: Ulla-Carin Hedin
Abstract

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Author Regina Mattsson
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The European Union has long been leading in women’s rights and has worked to integrate a gender perspective in all policy documents. Although many efforts for women’s rights have been taken, gender equality is not yet reached. The reasons why women experience poverty still differ to that of men. The purpose of this study was to examine and highlight European level work done to eradicate poverty among women in Europe. The main empirical focus was set on European Institutions and Non-governmental Organisations as well as the Europe 2020 Strategy. The study had a qualitative approach and was based on seven semi-structured interviews with professionals as well as document analyses of three Europe 2020 documents. A thematic analysis was used to examine the empirical data with support of the main theoretical perspectives: power, gender system and neo-functionalism. The main conclusions showed that the Europe 2020 Strategy was created with the goal to bring at least 20 million people out of poverty, but lacked women specific measures. Within social policy, the principle of subsidiarity governs meaning that European level instruments to eradicate poverty were not made binding, nor where Women’s rights made priority. Furthermore, Non-governmental Organisations called for more formalised involvement and direct participation of people experiencing poverty.
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1. Introduction

The European Union has long been leading in women’s rights. Measures striving for gender equality date back to 1957 when equal pay for equal work was established in the Treaty of Rome. Since then, numerous efforts have been conducted, including strategies for gender equality and directives for equal treatment and parental leave. In the past decade an institute for gender equality was established and the EU pointed to women’s participation in the labour market as a necessity for ensuring future economic growth (Lane, Spehar & Johansson 2011). However Europe is still facing inequalities within the labour market with gender pay gap levels or 16.4% and gender pension gaps at 18%. Whilst women’s economic contribution to their household is growing, women are more often subjected to long-term unemployment and are four times more likely than men to be employed part-time (Barnard 2012; Ponthieux & Meurs 2015). The differences in access to the labour market as well as high levels of non-paid caring responsibilities correlate with a gendered division of poverty (Barnard 2012; Gradín, del Río and Cantó 2010). In Europe today, over 120 million people live in poverty, over half of these are women. Lone parents, elderly and migrant women as well as women with disabilities are at particular risk (European Commission 2014a).

In the United Nation’s Millennium goals equality between women and men were set as a fundamental prerequisite in the eradication of poverty. Strategies for equality include integrating a gender perspective in all policy (European Commission 2010a). With gender mainstreamed into all areas of work there seems to be a lack of specific strategies targeted at eradicating poverty among women. Does this mean that women’s situation of poverty is being neglected?
1.1 Purpose and research questions

The purpose of this study is to examine and highlight how different actors at European level attempt to eradicate poverty among women. The study builds on the poverty and employment targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy and aims to answer the following research questions:

- How do European Institutions work to eradicate poverty among women?
- What role do Non-governmental Organisations have in the eradication of poverty among women?
- What do relevant Europe 2020 Strategy documents say regarding women’s employment and the eradication of poverty among women?
- Which implications can the work that is done at European level have on eradicating poverty among women?

1.2 Central concepts

1.2.1 Poverty

In this study poverty is understood from the three-fold indicator used by the European Union. The indicator is made up of: at-risk-of poverty measures the equivalent of an income below the 60% national median income; the severe material deprivation indicator measures not being able to afford four out of nine articles; households with low-work intensity (Eurostat 2013a). For further explanation see 3.4.

1.2.2 Social exclusion

Social exclusion occurs when a person or a group is marginalised and denied full participation in society (Eurostat 2013a). Social exclusion involves the incapacity to participate in economic, social and culture activities, and includes dimensions such as poverty and lack of participation in the labour market (Atkinson, Cantillon, Marlier & Nolan 2002). For further explanation see 3.4.
1.3 The study’s relevance for Social Work

Social Work is constructed within a framework of dominating discourses, political decisions and norms regarding what “social problems” are (Blomberg & Petersson 2006; Hertz 2012). Over the years, Social Work has become more individualised, focusing on individual’s abilities to “overcome” social problems rather than changing the structures that enable them (Hertz & Johansson 2012). The individualisation of Social Work is clear in Scandinavian research as well as in the Social Work Bachelor Programme in Gothenburg (cf. Ejrnæs & Kristiansen). Mizrahi and Dodd (2013) write that one aim of Social Work is to strive for equality through the prevention of conditions that create marginalisation and social exclusion.

The tradition of individualised Social Work risks maintaining and reproducing the structures that generate inequality. Social Work has been criticised for lacking structural analyses, it is therefore relevant to go beyond solutions based on individual’s abilities and instead explore how structures, as well as the power dimensions within them, affect people’s opportunities and living conditions (Mattsson 2012).
2. Background

It may seem as though the European Union’s activities are conducted far afield from national politics. However about two thirds of innate politics are affected by decisions made at European level (Berg and Spehar (2011). This chapter provides a background to relevant history and organisation of the European Union with the purpose of providing adequate information in order to understand the study’s results. The chapter begins with a brief history of the European Union followed by its functioning and implications on gender equality and poverty. Finally, central strategies and actors are introduced.

2.1 The history of the European Union

When the original European Union was established after the Second World War it was with the determination to prevent future wars. The then called European Coal and Steel Community had six Member States, throughout the years additional countries have been recognised as Members and the European Union today consist of twenty-eight Member States. See Annex 1 for list of Member States and joining year. The European Union is a political and economic union aimed at economic integration with an internal market. As well as broadening the number of members, the political areas included within the cooperation have been extended. The political cooperation has deepened and come to include areas such as a mutual external and security policy, justice and home affairs as well as an economic and monetary union (Costa & Brack 2014; Berg & Spehar 2011). The European Union’s cooperation has through time come to take a supranational form, from the beginning all decisions were intergovernmental and each Member State had the option to stop any decisions. However as the number of Member States rose, this veto- possibility was removed (Berg & Spehar 2011).

2.1.1 The crisis

In 2008, the financial crisis was deepening which caused an erosion of the market. The crisis erupted in several Member States causing institutional and budgetary crisis (Costa & Brack 2014). The recession after the crisis meant austerity measures, including cut downs in public spending, hitting social benefits and
public services all over Europe. The austerity measures have had greatest impact on women as women (European Women’s Lobby 2012).

2.2 The functioning of the European Union

The areas of which the European Union contra the Member States hold decision power are regulated in the Treaties (Berg & Spehar 2011; European Union 2014). The European Treaties are intergovernmental agreements that regulate which political areas are within jurisdiction of the European Union as well as which areas are within the Member States authority. For a new Treaty to be put in place each Member States has to approve it and depending on national laws, national referendum may be needed (ibid.). In December 2009, the Lisbon Treaty was initiated. The Lisbon Treaty takes focus on human rights, equality and value in respect for democracy, human dignity and freedom and provides two clear texts: The Treaty on European Union (TEU) (European Union 2012a) and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) (European Union 2012b; Berg & Spehar 2011; Costa & Brack 2014).

The European Institutions of interest for this paper are the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Council, as well as the Council of Ministers. The European Commission represent the Union in its whole and consist of one Commissioner from each Member State, the Commission put forward legislations and control that the current legislations are followed. The Commission is appointed every five years, within six months of the election for European Parliament. The European Parliament consist of 751 members who are elected by European citizens, elections are held every five years and the Members of the European Parliament are to represent the interests of the citizens. The Parliament has the power to dismiss the Commission if so needed. The European Council include the Heads of State or Government of each EU Member State and has together with the Parliament legislative powers. Finally, the Council of Ministers represent the Governments of each Member State and consists of the heads of the respective department from each particular national government. Different Councils are summoned that deal with different individual departments (Berg & Spehar 2011; European Commission 2014b).
The parliament has 751 seats, as of 2014 elections the division between political groups are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political group</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>EPP</strong> Group of the European People’s Party (Christian Democrats)</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S&amp;D</strong> Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the EP</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ECR</strong> European Conservatives and Reformists</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ALDE</strong> Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GUE/NGL</strong> European United Left/Nordic Green Left</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Greens/EFA</strong> The Greens/European Free Alliance</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EFDD</strong> Europe of freedom and direct democracy Group</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NI</strong> Non-attached Members – Members not belonging to any political group</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: European Parliament 2014a

As understood by the chart there are eight political groups organised by political affiliation. The members who do not belong to a political group are the Non-attached Members. When assigning placements the political groups are situated from left to right (European Parliament 2014b).
2.2.1 Decisions

When a decision is being made, the Commission makes a legislative proposal. The proposal is sent to the relevant Committee in the Parliament it is discussed and amended, the proposal is also discussed and amended by the relevant formation of Council of Ministers (European Commission 2014b).

There are three types of competences within the European Union, exclusive, shared, and supportive. Exclusive competence means that EU alone has power to legislate and adopt binding acts. Shared competence includes that the EU and Member States both can adopt binding acts. Supporting competences entail that the EU has no legislative power and can only intervene with support, coordination or complement to the action of Member States (European Union 2012b).

There are both hard and soft laws. Hard laws are legislations, directives, regulations or decisions and are legally binding for all Member States, these occur within the areas of which the EU has legislative power. Soft Laws are more or less binding although unlike hard laws, come without sanctions if they are not followed (Barnard 2012; Berg & Spehar 2011; Costa & Brack 2014). Recommendations and opinions put out by the Union provide norms and common perceptions although are not binding for the Member States (Berg & Spehar 2011).

2.2.2 Subsidiarity

Article 5 of the Treaty on European Union states the principle of subsidiarity. According to the article “Under the principle of subsidiarity, in areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Union shall act only if and in so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States, either at central level or at regional and local level, but can rather, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved at Union level” (European Union 2012a:18). This means that the Union only acts if actions are thought to be more effective at EU level than national level. The Treaties regulate which areas are within jurisdiction of the EU, the subsidiarity principle is applied to each new law that is not made within an area under exclusive power of the European Union to make sure that the decision is made
and carried out at the most appropriate level (European Commission 2014b).

The national Parliaments monitor the EU decision making to make sure the principle is followed (European Commission 2014b). The social political area is traditionally seen as one within national sovereignty, where subsidiarity lies with Member States (Barnard 2012).

2.3 Strategies

The Lisbon strategy was set in year 2000 to make Europe both competitive and knowledge based. There were three main pillars, an environmental, economic and a social pillar. The social limb was set to modernise the European Social Model by combating social exclusion through investing in people (Barnard 2014; Costa & Brack 2014). The strategy set to reach the overall employment rate of 70% by 2010, including an employment rate of over 60% for women and 50% for older women and men (aged 55-64) (Barnard 2014). Within the Lisbon Strategy the Open Method of Coordination was established, the OMC was essential to meeting the goals set by the Lisbon Strategy. The OMC made up a platform for exchange and dissemination of experience and good practices, it included common indicators, measurements, and benchmarks with a mutual purpose of each Member State reaching the common goals. The OMC was to be a form of peer pressure (Barnard 2014; Berg & Spehar 2011).

The Europe 2020 Strategy replaced the Lisbon Strategy in 2010. Europe 2020 set new objectives for a smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth (European commission 2010b). Developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation, promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy as well as fostering high employment and territorial cohesion (Barnard 2012). Five headline targets, two of which include bringing at least 20 million people out of poverty and 75% of the age 20-64 employed by year 2020. To catalyse progress and tackle bottlenecks in order to reach the headline targets flagship initiatives were established, the two relevant for this paper are the European Platform against poverty and social exclusion (European Commission 2010b), and An Agenda for new skills and jobs (European Commission 2010e).
2.3.1 The European Semester

Europe 2020 is coordinated in a framework named European Semester. Which is a tool used for the thematic surveillance of the Europe 2020 targets. The European Semester was taken on by the Council of Ministers in 2010. The Semester stretches from November to October and includes National Reform Programmes, Country Reports, and Country Specific Recommendations. The process is aimed at coordinating budgetary work between Member States (European Commission 2015a). The European Semester is a process of economic governance “in order both synchronise the assessment of Member States’ budgetary and structural policies and also to ensure that the strategy's implementation can be monitored” (EESC 2013:4)

European Semester begins with an Annual Growth Survey providing overall economic priorities. Member States then produce National Reform Programmes in which they set national targets and explain how they will be reached. The Commission then reviews these and provide countries with Country Specific Recommendations (European Commission 2015a).

2.4 The EU and gender equality

In the past, the European Union has been leading in the promotion of equality between women and men. The pursuit of equality has been high on the agenda with legislations such as equal pay for equal work and directives aimed at the enhancement of women’s rights within the labour market (Lane, Spehar & Johansson 2011). The objective for equality between men and women is stated in the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union.

The aim for gender equality is declared in article 2 and 3 of the Treaty on European Union. As well as in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights by approving the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women as well as the adoption of the Platform for Action of the Un Conference on Women in Beijing 1995 (Johnsson-Latham 2004; European Union 2012a).
2.4.1 Gender balance

Gender balance in leadership is one of the European Union’s goals for a more equal Europe. On the website of the Directory General for Justice a database is provided containing statistics for gender balance in key decision-making positions. The Commission established this database in 2003. The European Commission is today headed by a man and includes by 32% women and 68% men out of a total of 28 Commissioners (European Commission 2015b).

The gender division in the national Parliaments is 72% men and 28% women. The heads of Parliament are represented by eighteen men and ten women, which make up the European Council (European Commission 2015c). As of the 2014 elections, the Parliament is made up of 63% men and 37% women (European Parliament 2014c). In European Economic and Social Committee, there are 76% men as opposed to 24% women (European Commission 2015c). As of July 2015, there are 51.4% women and 48.6% men working in Eurostat, this number includes managers, administrators, and assistants (Berthe 2015).

2.4.2 Gender mainstream

In article 2 of the Treaty on European Union and article 8 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union it is made clear that the Union shall work to promote gender equality and that all activity shall aim at the elimination of inequalities and promote equality between women and men (European Union 2012a;b). Gender mainstream has been established as a strategy towards gender equality. Gender mainstream entails assessing the impact that policies and decisions have on the lives of both men and women, as well as to integrate a gender dimension into all decisions and in each level of the decision making process (Barnard 2012:260; Lane, Spehar & Johansson 2011).

The approach to gender mainstream was adopted by the Commission in 1996 as an addition to an already existing equal opportunity policy. Gender mainstream was not only looking at women but seeks to mobilise all general policies and measures to achieve equality. This by establishing formal equality such as equal treatment legislatives, developing action programmes for women to promote equal outcomes and assumes that a transformation of institutions and/or
organisations may necessary for gender equality. Gender equality should according to gender mainstream be incorporated into all policies, at all levels as well as all stages of the decision making process (European Communities 2008).

2.5 The EU and the fight against poverty and social exclusion

The history of the European Union’s work to fight poverty and social exclusion dates back to the first poverty programmes in the 1970s and 1980s. Although social policy was not, and have never been, a priority for the European Union initiatives were taken to strengthen a mutual social agenda (Johansson 2012). Over the years social exclusion was reoccurring on the agenda and had a comeback when the poverty and social exclusion goal of Europe 2020 was established in 2010 (ibid.).

The European Union’s commitment to the fight against poverty and social exclusion is regulated in article 9 of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union. The article states that the fight against poverty and social exclusion shall be taken into account when defining and implementing activities and policies (European Union 2012b).

2.6 European level actors

2.6.1 The European Economic and Social Committee

European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) is made up of 353 members from twenty-eight Member States and is an advisory body to the European Union. EESC include employer and trade unions as well as Civil Society, which are made up of national groups such as Non-governmental Organisations, professional associations, and grass-root organisations. The EESC is to be consulted by the Commission, Parliament, and/or the Council before making decisions (European Union 2014; Costa & Brack 2014).

2.6.2 Eurostat

Eurostat is the Commission’s provider of statistics on Europe. Eurostat’s main role is to provide statistical data to the Commission as well as other European Institutions (Eurostat 2015a).
2.6.3 The European Social Fund

The European Social fund is the main tool used to promote employment and social inclusion. The European Social Fund (ESF) is designed to provide funding for projects and is used as a redistributive financial instrument (Berg & Spehar 2011; European Commission 2014c).

2.6.4 European based Non-governmental Organisations

Non-governmental actors include interest groups, experts such as consultants and officials, researchers and academics as well as lobbyists (Costa & Brack 2014). The two central interest groups to this study are the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) and European Women’s Lobby (EWL). These organisations strive to voice national organisations opinion and feed into the European Institutions. Both organisations are partly funded by the Commission, European Anti-Poverty Network by 87% and European Women’s Lobby by 83% (European Anti-Poverty Network 2015a; European Women’s Lobby 2011).
3. Previous research and literature

The following chapter provides a summary of prior studies and literature that are of value for an understanding of the subject at hand. The chapter examines studies and literature relevant to the different areas of this study: The European Union, social policies, employment, poverty, and social exclusion among women, as well as the concept of the feminisation of poverty. The literature used is meant to provide a background with hopes to contribute to a more complex analysis.

3.1 European social policy

The article “Paradigms in EU social policy: a critical account of Europe 2020” is most possibly the closest to this study. The author, Daly (2012), examines the poverty target of Europe 2020 as well as the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion and offers a somewhat critical interpretation of the social aspects of the strategy. The paper is based on an analysis of the main documents and developments to the date of the study in Europe 2020. The author seeks to “identify the main concepts and undertakings of Europe 2020, with particular focus on the poverty-related instruments” (Daly 2012:274).

The poverty target of Europe 2020 is one of a kind in the history of EU, not only is it a part of the strategy but also one of the headline targets (Daly 2012). According to Daly (2012), the Lisbon strategy was made when the EU was at its most social era, it did not have a prescriptive approach but instead had a what Daly (2012) calls *loose* open method of coordination (OMC) which aimed at coordinating social policy among Member States. The European Union has a history of structural separation between economic, monetary and employment policy on one hand and social policy on the other. This made it seem as though the social aspect of the strategy is an add-on. One thing unique among the targets is that the poverty target provides the opportunity for Member States to each choose which indicator and strategies to use to reach the target. This, according to the author, is because poverty is diverse and has to be conceived accordingly (Daly 2012).

Three main conclusions derive from the study. Firstly, Daly (2012) debates that even though poverty receives a predominant role in the strategy, the poverty target
is lost and risks being rendered ineffective as a European wide target. Secondly, the social goals and philosophy that Europe 2020 has taken as a starting point are under elaborated. Daly (2012) argues that even though it is of importance for poverty solutions to be treated like the others the strategy is not clear on how growth will bring about the planned eradication of poverty by at least 20 million. Finally, Daly (2012) writes that Europe 2020 lacks a coherent model of social development, and philosophically it draws mainly from social investment and liberal approaches, which neither according to Daly (2012) is strong at targeting poverty.

Although the article does not focus on different social groups who experience poverty, other than to state that goals have been set up for anti-discrimination and gender equality, the article makes a valuable analysis of the Europe 2020 Strategy that is useful to understand the study at hand.

3.2 The European Union and women’s poverty

In Europe women make up one third of the workforce, women are more likely to occupy part-time as well as precarious jobs and are particularly affected by long-term unemployment. This is according to Barnard (2012), who is the author of the book “EU Employment Law”. Barnard (2012) gives a background to employment legislation on European level and discusses their implications on gender equality. The Lisbon Treaty and accompanying strategy as well as the later Europe 2020 Strategy, all have direct and indirect effects on employment. The crisis of the twentieth century left twenty three million Europeans unemployed. Barnard (2012) argues that gender equality would serve both political and economic goals.

Although traditionally referring to social policy as services within the welfare state the author argues that on European level social policy is considered synonymous to employment policy. According to the author, the absence of a clear European social policy can be explained by subsidiarity, that Member States wanted sovereignty in certain areas such as social policy and labour law. On one hand to maintain “the integrity and political stability of their respective political regimes” (Barnard 2012:2) and on the other, one may assume, the fear of European social policy challenging the national requirements. Johansson (2012)
provides a historical analysis of the EU’s role in poverty combating strategies. According to the author, the Commission used to have an active role in the fight against poverty. Johansson (2012) considers that the presence of poverty can be interpreted as an attempt by the Commission to expand latitude or through lobbying of interest organisations. Furthermore, the author argues that presiding political ideas influence the agenda.

Due to the subsidiarity principle, the areas of poverty and social exclusion as well as a majority of employment legislation fall within the jurisdiction of Member States. However Berg and Spehar (2011) argue, in the introductory chapter of the anthology “EU and the welfare’s Europe: Family, labour market, migration”, that the EU still plays an important role in these political domains. The authors describe a tendency that increasingly national politics have come to be affected by European level decisions. Over time an increase in domains within the jurisdiction of the EU have increased as well and now about two thirds of national politics are affected by European level decisions (Berg & Spehar 2011).

Lane, Spehar, and Johansson (2011) write a chapter on the subject of family politics in Europe. The authors write that gender and age play a central role in risk of poverty, just like Barnard (2012), the authors argue that women are subject to a lifecycle of poverty risks. Discrimination in access to and within the labour market as well as often low-intensity employment rates due to child bearing and non-paid caring responsibilities all play a role in a risk of experiencing poverty (Barnard 2012; Lane, Spehar & Johansson 2011). The gender pay gap is measured as an average percentage of the difference between men and women’s hourly earnings. In Europe the overall gender pay gap level is 16,4%, with countries such as Austria reaching the height of 23% in 2012 statistics (European Commission 2015d). The gender pay gap does not only lead to differences in working age but also differences in social security benefits and retirement. Furthermore, it can affect decisions regarding parental leave. For women, earning less during their lifetimes may lead to lower pensions, which can cause poverty in older age (Lane, Spehar and Johansson 2011). In 2012, 21,7% of women aged 65 and over was at risk of poverty, this compared to that of 16.3% of men (Eurostat 2012; Eurostat 2015b).
3.3 Gender inequality and risk of poverty

The government offices of Sweden, with writer Johnsson-Latham (2004), issued a publication named “Power and privileges – on gender discrimination and poverty”. The publication realises gender-based discrimination as a cause of poverty. Strategies and policies that are made out to be gender neutral are in fact often deriving from a male norm and therefore favour men. From the day a child is born gender specific expectations and norms give boys and girls different sets of privileges and rights. Resources are divided unevenly within the family, the study points out differences in living situations among girls, and boys tend to be greater in families living in poverty. The publication ultimately points at gender discrimination as the main cause for poverty among women as well as importance of gender equality to eradicate poverty (Johnsson-Latham 2004). One may add that other power dimension play a role in poverty as well, a woman may be discriminated against in other social positions beyond gender which further the risk of poverty. This article takes focus at a Swedish context. However, the usages of theories are relevant for this study and can be applicable to other Member States.

An article that offers similar conclusions to the prior one is written by Gradín, del Río and Cantó (2010). The study’s main conclusion is that generally in the European countries discrimination plays a vital role in the levels of poverty. The article raises the presumption that gender is one of the most common discriminatory grounds within the European countries, often concerning labour market participation and earnings. Gender based discrimination is vital for why women are more likely to carry out part-time jobs and are overrepresented in temporary jobs (Gradín et al. 2010).

Gradín et al. (2010) hypothesis is that in countries where women face a higher level of labour market discrimination, the poverty levels are higher among women. This is according to the authors based on two factors, the first because women’s earnings are too small in connection to what they should be earning with regards to experience, skills and level of education. The second is that either many women are not working or they are working in low-wage, part-time jobs. The authors point out that estimating and recording wage discrimination is far from
precise (Gradín et al. 2010). The results of the study shows that the labour activity among women differs across the European countries, within the group of women aged 22-55 there are higher activity rates in Northern and Central Europe and lower activity rates in most Mediterranean countries and in Ireland. Furthermore, the extent of contracts of thirty hours or less per week among women is high in countries such as Ireland, the UK, Austria, Belgium and Germany where the ratio is over 35% of women employees working less than thirty hours per week. Other countries however have lower, below 20%; these countries include Portugal, Greece and Finland. Keeping in mind that differences in wages and conditions may exist in these countries. In countries where female labour market participation is low, the gender wage differences are lower than in countries with a higher amount of female labour market participation. These numbers may vary a bit from those of today as the study was carried out in 2010 (Gradín et al. 2010).

Ponthieux and Meurs (2015) provide, in a chapter of the “Handbook of Income Distribution”, an up to date description of gender inequality. While the economic-status of women and men, according to the authors, has closed in on each other as of the second half of the twentieth century, it is still not equal. Women’s income is in general less than that of men. However, as the authors point out, the measurement is not as straightforward as it seems. The majority of income statistics are measured as received at household level as opposed to individual level. This is based on the assumption that within multi-person households the distribution of income is equal among the household members. This makes it difficult for measurement of individual outcome such as differences in wage pensions or time spent carrying out unpaid work. Within the household, paid and unpaid work is central to understanding economic outcomes. Institutions, policies and social norms all play a role in shaping male and female behaviour and what influences the division of labour (Ponthieux & Meurs 2015). Measuring poverty from a household level may exclude same sex-coupled households as well as other forms of constellations not based on the two-headed household.

3.4 Conceptualising poverty

Eurostat (2013a), Europe’s main instrument for statistical data, provides in their working paper named “The measurement of poverty and social inclusion in the
EU: achievements and further improvements” a common measurement of poverty for the European Union. Poverty and social inclusion are two multidimensional concepts. As the poverty situation differs between the Member States, it is of importance to use a relative poverty measure. The poverty measurement refers to income and resources being inadequate to uphold the social standards that are accepted in the society in which they live (Eurostat 2013a). Poverty can lead to disadvantages through unemployment and low income, it also often comes with poor housing, inadequate health care as well as creating barriers to lifelong learning and culture, sport and recreation. Social exclusion means being unable to participate in society, the document reads: people experiencing poverty “are often excluded and marginalised from participating in activities (economic, social and cultural) that are the norm for other people and their access to fundamental rights may be restricted” (Eurostat 2013a:2).

When the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy were established as lifting at least 20 million people out of poverty as well as increasing employment rate to 75% the European Council of Ministers agreed on an at-risk-of poverty and social exclusion indicator named “AROPE” (Eurostat 2013a). AROPE is the indicator to monitor progress of the Europe 2020 Strategy and measures three dimensions: the number of people who are at-risk-of poverty, living in severe material deprivation and living in households with very low work intensity (ibid.). The at-risk-of poverty or social exclusion variable measures disposable income after social transfers, the at-risk-of poverty threshold is 60% of the national median disposable income. Severe material deprivation looks at living conditions that are constrained by lack of resources, living in severe material deprivation means experiencing at least four or more out of the nine deprivation indicators. The nine deprivation indicators are not being able to afford:

1. To pay rent, mortgage or utility bills
2. To keep one’s home adequately warm
3. To face unexpected expenses
4. To eat meat or equivalent proteins regularly
5. To go on holiday for one week annually
6. A colour television
7. A washing machine
8. A car
9. A telephone (including mobile phone) (Eurostat 2013a:3; 2015c)

The third measurement measures persons living in households with very low work intensity and who are aged between 0 and 59. This is measured by living in households where adults during the past year have worked less than 20% of their potential amount (Eurostat 2013a). For statistics concerning the poverty, indicators see Annex 6.

There is a gendered employment gap in the twenty-eight countries of the European Union, where the overall employment rate for men aged 20-64 was 75% in 2014 as opposed to women’s 63.5%. Women’s employment rates are lower than men’s in all Member States. However there are variations in rates across the EU. According to the European Commission (2015e:1) “When employment is measured in full-time equivalents, the gaps are even bigger; even in Member States where female employment rate is relatively high (e.g. Austria, the Netherlands, Germany and the United Kingdom)”.

Lister (2004) discusses poverty and its different meanings in her book “Poverty”. Lister makes the point that “Socioeconomic structural and cultural contexts shape the experiences and understandings of poverty” (Lister 2004:3). Therefore, poverty is both culture-bound and universal at the same time. According to the author, poverty is a construction of its context; the policy aimed at the eradication of poverty will therefore reflect the dominant conceptualisations. The author argues the need to combine different forms of measurement to include the whole spectrum of poverty (Lister 2004). Poverty implies an inability to participate fully in society, which on one hand differs from the absolute measures but on the other is closely linked to a lack of resources. In Europe women, face poverty more than men, most notably female-headed households, lone mothers and single pensioners (ibid.). Lister (2004) writes that female poverty reflects the inferior position women hold to men in society, this leads to a gendered division of labour as well as discrimination and stereotyping. There is a need for female economic independence. According to Lister (2004) women’s position in underpinned by their position in the labour market, family and the welfare state and the way in
which these three interact. This determines women’s economic status over their lifetime and distinguishes female poverty from male poverty. The exact constellation of these three varies between welfare regimes, labour markets and welfare policies (ibid.). The gendered division of poverty that Lister (2004) writes about is one important category but it is also mediated by other social divisions, most notably that of ethnicity. The role of ethnic discrimination and racism as well as ethnical stereotyping affects economic and social opportunities. Another group who is at particular risk is women with disabilities, although poverty is not automatically linked with disabilities, most people with disabilities live in poverty as they experience disadvantage, discrimination and exclusion also by welfare systems (Lister 2004).

3.4.1 The Feminisation of poverty

Many studies research the phenomenon the Feminisation of poverty. The Feminisation of poverty has many definitions, according to Chant (2006) one is that a disproportionate amount of people living in poverty are women, that this phenomenon is worsening and that the increasing poverty among women is connected to rising amount of female headed households.

Although the concept was first introduced by Diane Pearce in 1978’s America it is still used widely today (for example by the European Women’s lobby publication “The price of austerity”). Pearce (1978) view of poverty is that of an economical one, the author writes about the differences in employment rates and earnings between women and men, where women’s unemployment rate (in 1976) was almost double that of men’s. Pearce calls it “economically disadvantaged”. There are two groups according to Pearce, women who experience poverty in man-headed household and, according to Pearce (1978:28) “women who are poor because they are women”. Although written in 1978 the main ideas put forward are still relevant today. The issue of the temporary status of women on the labour market not only causes the low earnings but also lessens the possibilities of women participating in Unions, making demands as well as participating or asking for skills development. The temporary position ultimately keeps women from earning a pension. Furthermore, child-care services are lift as being the support for women to participate permanently in the labour market (Pearce 1978).
Pearce (1978) argues that the poverty of men and the poverty of women are different things and requires different solutions. For men the problem is more closely linked to the welfare system whereas for women it is due to the labour market, although occupying a full time job does not automatically lift women out of poverty (ibid.). The feminisation of poverty is rooted in a view on woman as an oppressed group, it takes focus on women as exposed to structural oppression by a patriarchal structured society, which leads to a systemised oppression of women (Gunnarsson 1991). Gunnarsson (1991) writes about women’s poverty within the welfare state and argues that when women more often become sole earners they are more likely to experience poverty. This due to the women carrying sole financial responsibility for children at the same time as experiencing discrimination on the labour market.

Some authors have discussed the validity of the concept of feminisation of poverty (see McLanahan & Kelly 2006; Mutua 2001). Chant (2006) writes about the need to rethink the “feminisation of poverty” in regards to aggregate gender indicators. The author argues that the use of the concept often is made without adequate evidence. Chant’s (2006) article aims at discussing the weaknesses of the concept of feminisation of poverty and highlights lack of evidence in a report by United Nations Development Programme that speaks of feminisation of poverty without using data. Chant (2006) means that instead of a feminisation of poverty we should speak of gendered poverty, and create a gender poverty index. The author continues by making the case for the opposite and questions if there is a masculinisation of wealth rather than a feminisation of poverty. In addition, Gunnarsson (1991) wonders if a feminisation of poverty has happened, as women always have experienced poverty. Gunnarsson (1991) argues that the concept feminisation of poverty also excludes class and ethnicity as a variable, whilst these are often closely linked to gender in terms of experiencing poverty.
4. Theoretical framework for analysis

The following theories will serve as an instrument for understanding and conceptualising the material collected from interviews and documents, in regards to answering the study’s research questions (Watt Booslen 2007). The basis of the theories lie on the notion of a general social construction perspective, social construction assumes the understanding of constructions of reality through history, culture, social aspects and the interactions among them (Loseke 2003; Mattsson 2010). “Constructionists focus on the meaning humans create in our world” (Loseke 2003:14).

4.1 Power

Power entails making something happen by creating social change in a small or large scale and is often described as A having power to make B do something that B would not otherwise do (Börjesson & Rehn 2009; Engelstad 2006; Lukes 2005). Power provides the possibility to claim one’s own interest, power can be seen as a relation between individuals or groups (Göransson 2007).

4.1.1 Power structures

Power takes form in societal power structures, which are made visible through formal and informal hierarchies, the way we speak, where resources are placed, values and legislation. Power structures are visible through categories, which are constructed and ordered hierarchically in relation to each other. This is done by creating isolating borders through exclusion and inclusion and therefore creating an “us” and “them”, where “us” is the norm and “them” or the “other” are seen as inferior. The superiority and subordination of these categories are products of power structures. When categories of people are valued differently, it leads to uneven power relations (Börjesson & Rehn 2009; Franzén 2000; Mattsson 2010).

Engelstad (2006) writes that in society today power’s most comprising form is through building institutions, drawing up guidelines, making laws and defining roles. Both formal and informal power-holders obtain potential to affect decisions. Decisions, norms and resources are basis for power positions. Resources can be symbolic, take economic or organisational form and often provide the power-holder with option to mobilise resources, uphold sanctions or give rewards.
Power structures ensure that the interest of some groups is kept out from the decision-making agenda (Giddens 1994; Lilja & Vinthagen 2009). Structures are according to Giddens (1984 referenced in Meeuwisse & Swärd 2013) that actor and structure are not separated but constitutes one another. Structure and social action cannot be parted. Structures create action from people, as people’s actions create structures.

Power differences entail uneven division of resources as the subordinate is expected to follow the power-holders wishes. If the subordinate does not approve of the uneven power dimension, they will try to break this difference (Engelstad 2006). Marx (1971, referenced by Engelstad 2006:32-33) means all power differences have to be legitimised. The legitimation of power is grounded in three areas: Legislation or rules that acquire a power position, the leader is chosen by those with authorisation; Power position based on being chosen by those who are to be governed, political representatives hold these positions; Power holders can also be legitimised based on their knowing. These aspects do not necessarily exclude each other. Moreover, the legitimacy of power is often documented, providing guidelines over what areas decisions are acceptable or not to make (Engelstad 2006).

4.1.2 Power/knowledge

Foucault (2003) was interested in knowledge and how its production never stands freely from interpretations and power relations. The knowledge that is produced serves the powers interests and recreates a view that favours the powerful.

Power/knowledge are there for interlinked, and to be read as one combined concept instead of two separate terms (Börjesson & Rehn 2009; Mattsson 2010). Postmodernism have also taken interest in the relation of power/knowledge and argues that science is a result of dominating group’s worldview. With this in mind, they question the quest for universal objective truths. Postmodernism mean that all knowledge and science are results of both social and historical context and shaped by power structures (Lilja & Vinthagen 2009; Mattsson 2010).

Foucault (2003) describes a form of power, which applies to everyday life where a person is categorised, and marked by individuality, it imposes a law of truth, or paradigm, which makes this person into a subject of power. Categories such as
social problems are formed within a dominating paradigm, which social problems are created derive from which instruments and solutions are available (Loseke 2003).

Mattsson (2010) argues that in today’s society, it is the white, heterosexual, western, middle class men who generally produce knowledge. This has great consequences for what are known as truths and whose stories are made visible. The category man is seen as gender neutral and remains unquestioned in evident areas (Giddens 1994). Some argue that using a gender-neutral perspective has become a blind spot for women’s situation, and that gender neutrality legitimises women’s oppression and consequently works in men’s favour (Atkinson et al. 2002; Hydén 2013).

4.1.2.1 Empowerment

Although empowerment is not used as a main theory for analysis in this study, the term is used in the documents analysed and is therefore of interest to define. Empowerment is rooted in the concept of power and means to usurp power and strength. It seeks to empower individuals or groups in order to change the conditions that have placed them in a powerless and vulnerable situation, by working against resistance and mobilising persons to take control over their lives. Empowerment is both the goal and the method (Askheim 2007; Askheim & Starrin 2007). From a political context, the term does not possess one united definition. When coined empowerment was used within the political left and was about discrimination, poverty and the fight for equal human rights. By the end of the 1990s, the term was relaunched by the political right and promoted personal fulfilment within a market model (Askheim & Starrin 2007). Today the term must therefore be understood in relation of who applies it.

4.2 The gender system

According to Johnsson-Latham (2004), the main areas of the gender discourse can be said to be universal and refer to discrimination based on gender. The gender system consists of institutions, norms, traditions and values that generate expectations about the relation between the sexes and the division of paid and unpaid labour. On an institutional level, the gender system is present and regulates
legislation and decisions that affect women and men’s opportunities. At household level decisions are made about labour participation and household work (Lane, Spehar & Johansson 2011; Johnsson-Latham 2004).

Hirdman (2001) makes the case for the gender system in her book “The gender system: about the stabile’s changing forms” (own translation). Hirdman (2001) claims that the gender system is based on the idea of men and women as opposites, where men are dominant and superior to women. The gender system places men and women in dichotomies where attributes are ordered as men being active and rational and women being passive and irrational, this comes from a biological view on the sexes that sees women as carers, whose main responsibilities are birthing and caring. Hirdman (2001) give a historical perspective and writes about the rise of capitalism; in its first stadium, capitalism changed the everyday structures of society. Among others, the most significant being the usage of women and children in the new labour work. Women and children had long worked. However, with the rise of capitalism the new labour was outside of one’s own, or others, home. The view of women and children as subordinate to men made their workforce cheaper (ibid.).

Hirdman highlights two principles that characterises the relation between the sexes in each modern society: on one hand separating them from each other and on the other hand seeing men and masculinity as norm from which women deviate. This constitutes a hierarchal order of the sexes (Göransson 2007; Hirdman 2001).

Hirdman’s gender system has been critiqued for using gender in a statistic way. The critique argues that the theory perceives gender as an isolated category and seldom in relation to class, age, sexuality, ethnicity, and what I would add, functionality. These social distinctions create different opportunities for people (Göransson 2007; Mattsson 2010).

4.2.1 Intersectionality
Some feminist researchers argue that it is not fruitful to speak of a category “women” as the conditions for different groups of women vary (Gemzöe 2014). Instead, when observing women’s situation, it has to be understood in relation to
sexuality, ethnicity, class, functionality and age, as these social dimensions mutually affect each other. The analysis of how social dimensions overlap, interact and integrate is called intersectionality (Hoskyns 1996; Mattsson 2010). These social dimensions counter and interact with each other through social structures and practices. It is important to see how different social dimension affect and integrate with one another. If we were to speak of a category that is “women”, which this study does, it is of importance to understand that within the category there are structures of dominance and inferiority (Göransson 2007; Hoskyns 1996; Mattsson 2010). Class, sexuality, ethnicity, functionality, age, religion, all form ground for power relations (Franzén 2000). An intersectional perspective is of importance to keep in this study both as a compliment to the gender order and to stand by itself.

4.3 Neo-functionalism

Welfare decisions such as those aimed at eradicating poverty and social exclusion are ones that Member States in the European Union have delegation over. Therefore when undertaking a study that examines the EU’s work to eradicate poverty among women it is of interesting to use a theory that provides a perspective on European level relevance. A development over time that the areas that EU’s integration has come to include an increasing amount of political areas, and decisions made at European level have affect national politics in greater occurrence (Berg & Spehar 2011).

Neo-functionalism is said to be one of the grand theories on European integration. Neo-functionalism focuses on the process of cooperation between Member States within European regional organisation. It assumes that collaboration creates further and more collaboration and over time integration will include even more political areas (Berg & Spehar 2011; Costa & Brack, 2014). Neo-functionalists believe that socio-economic problems facing countries in Europe were no longer able to be resolved at national level and that the integration of non-political as well as technical domains was the result of a necessary functioning (Costa & Brack 2014). Neo-functionalism aims to explain the integration and voluntary cooperation of Member States (ibid.).
A central term is “spill-over”. The term seeks to explain the advancement of European integration. “Spill-over” seeks to explain how further integration takes a life of its own after initial steps (Bache, Bulmer, George & Parker 2015). In the general formulation, Lindberg (1963:10) explains it as “’spill-over’ refers to a situation in which a given action, related to a specific goal, creates a situation in which the original goal can be assured only by take further action, and so forth”. Lindberg (1963) goes on to describe that integrating one economic sector will lead to other sectors, and political areas, integrating as well. “Spill-over” implies that the situation has developed so that another sector or involvement by another Member State is needed to achieve a set out policy goal (ibid.). There are two main “spill-over” effects. Functional “spill-over” entails that actors who begin cooperation will soon realise the advantages of further cooperation and see the value in cooperating in additional areas. Political “spill-over” regards attitudes and changes thereof among important political actors, as well as favouring further integration through building up political pressure. For example among people who work in the supranational institutions such as the Commission and Parliament, the political “spill-over” is rooted in the idea of when coming to Brussels a Europeanisation happens and actors start seeing how problems effectively can be solved at European level (Bache et al. 2015; Berg & Spehar 2011). A third term was later added namely “cultivated spill-over” to explain how the Commission fosters integration “for neo-functionalists, the European Commission was believed to be in a unique position to manipulate both domestic and international pressures on national governments to advance the process of European integration, even where governments might be reluctant” (Bache et al. 2015:11).

According to Schmitter (2004) who is one of the leading neo-functionalism scholars (Costa & Brack 2014), neo-functionalism is a theory of regional integration, where non-state actors play a lead role. These actors are especially supranational organisations like the Commission and Parliament. However, also interest associations and social movements (Schmitter 2004; Lindberg 1963). Member States start the process with initial agreements however they do not have exclusive power to determine the root. Schmitter (2004) means that these actors seek to exploit the “spill-over” that occur when supranational responsibility is assigned for accomplishing a limited task and when it is discovered that the
function has that external effects have on the interdependent activities. Non-state actors are important in international politics.

Neo-functionalism has been critiqued for being obsolete. The main critique was being the lack of evidence to support the theory and for underestimating factors as diversity of conditions and expectations among Member States and the importance of nationalism (Haas 1975; Schmitter 2004). However, Godowska (2012) argues that although criticised the theory hold empirical and theoretical value.

Neo-functionalism is here used as one way to understand the European integration. The theory is not used exhaustively.
5. Method

The following chapter will provide a description of the study’s process including the methodical approach and considerations. A detailed description is given for transparency so that the reader can evaluate the empirical procedure and its correspondence to the problem description as well as its bearing to the conclusions of the study (cf. Backman 2008; Watt Bolsen 2007).

5.1 Methodical approach

A qualitative method was used for this study and chosen to examine and exemplify how different European level actors work to eradicate poverty among women. An abductive approach was used, which can be understood as an alternation between induction and deduction (Watt Bolsen 2007). An inductive method intends to draw conclusions from empirical data without an already determined hypothesis. A deductive approach entails assuming a theory with the ambition to confirm or falsify it (Kvale & Brinkman 2014). When analysing the empirical data collected through interviews an inductive method was used, through a thematic analysis different themes were chosen. These themes were then used when analysing the documents, in a manner that resembles a deductive approach. Furthermore, a deductive method was used when applying theoretical perspectives to the empirical data (Bryman 2011; Watt Bolsen 2007).

Qualitative interviews were chosen to in order to understand how different actors work in reality. The study’s empirical data was collected through seven interviews with professionals, as well as four policy documents. First, a pilot interview was conducted with open questions; the themes from the interview were then used as the basis for a semi-structured interview guide. A semi-structured interview guide was chosen because its flexible nature that allows for new questions or themes to be included as they arose, this was of high importance as the informants are experts. All interviews were then transcribed and analysed and four policy documents were chosen on based on relevance (Kvale & Brinkman 2014; Watt Bolsen 2007).
5.2 Selection process

The process of selecting professionals for the interviews begun with something Bryman (2011) calls purposive sampling, this means pinpointing relevant informants based on the research topic. The actors could be researcher, representatives of organisations, directorates/committees as well as documents (ibid.). The process acquired different levels; first relevant actors were listed. Secondly, I constructed individual emails to each organisation and/or person on the list, with a description of the research and a request for an interview. Finally, based on the interviews and research, relevant policy documents were chosen (Bryman 2011; Hjerm & Lindgren 2010).

5.2.1 The Informants

When making the list of organisations and persons I kept the research questions in mind. The actors were chosen with purpose to provide a description of European level work with eradicating poverty among women (cf. Bryman 2011). These organisations included the European Women’s Lobby, The Social Platform, European Anti-poverty Network, International Federation of Social Workers and European Network Social integration Enterprises. Out of five organisations, three answered and one had persons available for interviews. From the European Anti-poverty network, secretariat two professionals were available for interviews. These informants were named BH and AF in the study.

From the European Parliament, the Civil liberties, justice and home affairs (LIBE), Women’s rights and gender equality (FEMM) and the Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) committees were chosen, and representatives from each group contacted. Two politicians were available for interviews. Both politicians sat in the LIBE and FEMM committees. One is member of the “Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats” and the other is member of “Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left” in the European Parliament. The politicians are hereon referred to as AH and MB.

Three researchers were contacted, two of which work with research questions concerning poverty and social indicators at European level and one working with minimum income schemes and reference budgets for social participation. Out of
the three researchers, two answered and one was available for an interview. The researcher is referred to as BS, and is a researcher at Antwerp University.

From officials working in the Commission, I contacted a person who I had had earlier contact with through a project during my internship period. When asked for an interview she redirected me to another person working within the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion. This person was available for an interview. After this interview, I also contacted an officer in the DG for Justice and Home Affairs although without response. The informant from DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion is called EA in this study.

Finally, a former member of the European Economic and Social Committee was contacted and agreed to an interview. The informant provided also statements from the EESC. When statements are used these are referred to as EESC. The informant received the initials JO in the study.

5.2.2 Documents

Preliminary documents where collected based on the research question and were all within policy areas of poverty, social inclusion, gender equality and employment. After the themes arose from the interviews the list of documents was narrowed down to include the Europe 2020 Strategy document along with the Strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015 (European Commission 2010c). When the final themes were decided, the decision was made to use two flagship initiatives under the Europe 2020 Strategy along with the Strategy for equality. The documents were all dated between 2010 and 2015.

The opinion documents received from informant JO are used as statements from EESC. These documents are: The open method of coordination and the social clause in the context of Europe 2020 - Rapporteur Jan Olsson (2010); The gender dimension in the Europe 2020 Strategy (own-initiative opinion) - Rapporteur Joana Agudo i Bataller (2013); Taking stock of the Europe 2020 Strategy - Rapporteur Stefano Palmieri (2014). When used in the results, the documents were referred to as EESC 2010, EESC 2013 and EESC 2014 respectively.
5.2.3 Statistics

To complement the analysis statistical data was collected using Eurostat’s database. Statistical data regarding the poverty indicators at-risk-of poverty and social exclusion, material deprivation and very low work intensity were collected and inserted in table form. Statistics are gathered from Eurostat’s most recent data, 2013, unless stated otherwise.

5.3 Literature search

In order to find relevant literature for the study three search methods were used, consultation, manual search and computer-based search (Backman 2008). When searching for literature the Central European Library in Brussels, the University Library of Brussels and the Gothenburg University Library were used. Furthermore, I used different online databases to further the search. The search engines used were Cible+, GUNDA, Libris, Supersök as well as Google Scholar. Following words were used: “Women”, “Wom*”, “female”, “gender”, “poverty”, “poverty among women”, “social inclusion”, “social exclusion”, “employment”, “EU policy”, “EU”, “European Union”, “Europe”, “inequality”, “equality”, “social policy” and “feminisation of poverty”. Often multiple terms were used simultaneously. Literature that covered the different aspects of the study’s problem definition was used.

5.4 Preconceptions

The basis of understanding is always preconceived by interpretation, this affects how we understand and describe a phenomenon (Thomassen 2007). In a qualitative study, the researchers’ preconceptions are central to how the results are understood. It is therefore of importance to discuss one’s own preconceptions in relation to the subject of the study (Kvale & Brinkman 2014).

My own understanding of poverty derives from two main events: my upper secondary school project regarding people living in homelessness in Gothenburg and London, where my project partner and I spent time in both cities visiting different organisations and meeting people living in homelessness. The second part event was a part of the Bachelor programme in Social Work when I underwent an internship at the European Anti-Poverty Network. I have long been
interested in social issues on structural level and therefore applied at EAPN. As part of the internship, I had the opportunity to attend various events and conferences, most on the subject of anti-poverty, but also some on gender equality and the situation of different social groups. The major conference was the “people experiencing poverty meeting” where delegations from each Member States joined in Brussels for a three-day event. It was through my participation in these events and through the internship that my interest in women’s poverty grew, as my perception became that focus was seldom on women when speaking about anti-poverty measures at European level.

5.5 Interviews

The pilot interview had an open character in order to gain knowledge on the area and to create a base for the interview guide (Bryman 2011). The pilot interview was used in the results.

When interviewing experts it is of importance to have an extent of knowledge to meet the informants’ expectations, to gain respect, and to be able to know technical terms and ask follow up questions where they are needed (Kvale & Brinkman 2014). The experts were seen as informants (ibid.). After the original interview, I found major themes, on which I based the further search. I started collecting literature, reading about how the European Union works, reading publications and attending events (virtually via the Parliament and Commission’s websites).

An interview guide was structured from an ambition to keep the conversation open so to not lose important notions and to be able to ask follow up questions as well as clarifications (Kvale & Brinkman 2014; Bryman 2011). The questions were shaped from a basis of the first interview as well as in connection to the research questions, trying not to form leading questions (ibid.). Each interview was recorded, with the consent of the informant. The questions were somewhat customised to the different informants. My supervisor approved each interview guide before being used. Each interview finished with a question if the informant would like to add something (Backman 2008).
Two interviews were conducted via telephone, one via email, one at the European Parliament, two at the office of EAPN and one at Thomas More College in a city named Geel in Belgium. Four interviews were carried out in English and three in Swedish. The interviews stretched from twenty-five minutes up to an hour long. One of the informants asked for the questions before our interview and prepared answers. However, when new questions arose under the interview the informant answered them.

Three interviews were carried out in Swedish and the rest in English. When quotes are used from the interviews carried out in Swedish, I have translated them with the consent of my supervisor. When translating I tried to make the quotes understandable without changing the content.

5.6 Method of analysis

All interviews were transcribed in proximity to the interview. During the first transcription, I wrote repetitive words, hesitations and pauses as well as my own confirmatory sounds. However, as purpose was to use the interviews as information gathering and not to linguistic meaning I further on stopped transcribing details (Bryman 2011). After the transcriptions, I read each interview without a focused theory (Watt Boolsen 2007). First, I noted different quotes or sentences with codes, I then wrote out all the codes on pieces of paper, which I then ordered into different groups and themes. From the method three categories derived: poverty, economy and equality. Under each major group were subthemes, under poverty were: measurement, social inclusion, strategies, and gender mainstream. Under economy were: crisis, austerity, economic independence, social protection, and labour market. Under equality: poverty, social protection and gender mainstream. The final theme “equality” was later integrated into the two other themes, both due to the reoccurrence and of the theme within the other two and to stay within the study’s length requirements. Each theme was assigned a colour and the transcriptions were read again, highlighting sentences or words according to the themes. When theories were decided, I read the collected data again with the chosen theories in mind. This process can compare to what Bryman (2011) calls thematic analysis.
When analysing the documents a more deductive perspective was taken (Watt Boolsen 2007), as the themes that I looked for were already decided by the interviews. I read the documents twice, the first time with the colours already chosen, then again to see if I had missed something. The analysis method was close to that of a content analysis, as it was governed by already decided hypotheses. The deductive approach was also used when applying the theories to the empirical data. Finally, I coordinated words and quotes from the interviews and sentences from the documents under each theme and subtheme before applying the previous literature and theories in writing (Watt Boolsen 2007).

5.7 Ethical considerations

In Lister’s (2004) words, I myself come from a position of relative affluence. My understanding of poverty is mainly derived from studies carried out at University and therefore through academic literature. As this study is not regarding the experience of poverty but the implications of eradicating poverty at European level it can be understood as okay. Nevertheless it can be seen as problematic not to include actual stories from people with experience of poverty, “in addition to traditional forms of expertise associated with those who theorize and research poverty, there is a different form of expertise born of experience” (Lister 2004:2). See 3.4 for preconceptions.

Bryman (2011) established four ethical principles to follow when performing research work. Information requirement, consent requirement, confidentiality and utility requirement. Each interviews person was informed of the study’s aim and purpose prior to confirming the interview. The informants were informed that they had the option to stop the interview at any time. The basis of consent entail that informants are given full information in order to make a decision about participation (Bryman 2011). As each informant gave written consents to participation, in the form of confirmatory emails. The interviews and transcriptions were only used as for this study and deleted after (Bryman 2011; Kvale & Brinkman 2014). The study was written in English so that each informant could take part of the results.
The confidentiality requirement has to be set in relation to the informants (Kvale & Brinkman 2014). As the informants are considered experts and did not share private information, the study was considered not to bring negative consequences. When finalising the study, the informants who had not previously agreed to the usage of their initials in the study were contacted. The informants received a copy of when and in which context their initials and quotes were used. All informants approved in writing. When an informant asked for a certain quote to be removed or proposed grammatical improvements to the quotes this was done, making sure the meaning was not changed.

When researching for qualitative studies ethical considerations often include the presence of power relations. Kvale and Brinkman (2014) pose the question is the researcher an insider or outsider? When viewing the power dimension between informants and the researcher. In the case of this study, the power dimension was somewhat different from “usual” studies within Social Work, as the focus is on experts and not a marginalised group for instance. When carrying out interviews with experts or elites the power dimension can become symmetric. However, as I am a student I believe that the power more so was asymmetric in favour of the informants (Kvale & Brinkman 2014). From my own reflection there was a noticeable difference in the power dimension with the informants whom I had already met and those that was the first time when interviewing, as the former dynamic was more symmetric than the later. Furthermore, there is a risk when interviewing experts that they can have a planned agenda when answering questions (Kvale & Brinkman 2014).

Finally, there is an ethical consideration to be made when researching policy’s impact on the category women. For this to be possible I had to see women as a static category, which is problematic due to the multiple social dimensions that affect ones conditions (see for example Mattsson 2010). However as gender is the only social dimension, apart from age, that poverty statistics are broken down by it would not be possible within the frame of this study to research different aspects.
5.8 Restrictions

Much delimitation had to be drawn after the original idea was established. Using the term “women” unfortunately excludes anyone who does not identify oneself as a cis-woman\(^1\). Furthermore, the choice was made not to examine child or youth poverty as multiple dimensions such as the child’s perspective would be needed, this was not conceivable within the time and frame of the study. Focusing on work carried out to eradicate poverty among one defined group means excluding others, this was not meant to belittle the work against or experiences of poverty, but to exemplify one fragment of a wide-ranging situation.

5.9 Quality of the study

To assess the quality of qualitative studies some researchers have dismissed the terms validity, reliability and generalisation as they are routed in ideas more adjoined with quantitative studies (Bryman 2011; Kvale & Brinkman 2014). As an alternative when seeking to validate this study, the terms trustworthiness and authenticity are used (Bryman 2011:353).

Within trustworthiness are four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. The credibility of the study is reached by the background of the study, giving a full background as well as summaries of the documents aims at giving an accurate picture of the study’s topic (Bryman 2011:345-346). A triangulation was made to validate credibility, as multiple methods were used to acquire empirical data and information concerning the topic (Watt Bolsen 2007).

Qualitative research often takes focus on specific contexts, exemplifying reality rather than making wide-ranging assumptions. Thus, the prospect of transferability is hard to reach. Instead, Geertz (1973 referred by Bryman 2011:355) highlights the need for thick descriptions, so that the reader can decide how transferable the results are. To reach the acquirements for transferability, each part of the process has been explained in detail as well as detailed

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\(^1\) A cis-person is a person whose legal sex, biological sex, gender expression and identity are interrelated according to the norm (RFSL 2015).
information regarding the informants. The empirical data collected should be understood as exemplifications, I do not intend to say something absolute about the working methods of each particular actor but to exemplify reality.

*Dependability* is acquired by a thorough description of each phase of the process and the reader can decide on *conformability* through my preconceptions and strive to act as objectively as possible. Although Backman (2008) writes about the complete objectiveness of knowledge is impossible, it is up to the reader to decide to which extent the conclusions are rightly made. Finally, authenticity is hoped by given a fair view on the topic (Bryman 2011).

5.9.1 The Documents quality

Scott (1990) is referred to by Bryman (2011:489) when writing about quality criteria for documents as empirical data. Authenticity, credibility, representation and meaningfulness are the four assessment criteria; each document meets all requirements.

5.10 Methodical reflection

The method of gathering empirical data and previous literature was time consuming, although it proved useful in order to answer the research questions. I should have made restrictions earlier in the process. It has been a time consuming and difficult process to carry out the study by myself. During my studies, we have studied little about the European Union so it proved difficult to acquire knowledge enough to carry out this study. This can mean that there are areas that I have missed as the EU is a complex and large unit I could not cover everything. Some information can therefore have been disregarded.

Authenticity is of importance in qualitative research, traditionally informants are chosen independently (Backman 2008). As I had had previous contact with some of the informants through my internship period, this may have affected the reason why they chose to participate in the study. However, I do not believe that our previous contact had implications to the result of the study. Perhaps it helped me as a researcher to be more daring in the interviews. Research is contextually bound and choices made actively or not have effect on the outcome and results of the study (Bryman 2011; Watt Booslen 2007). Nevertheless our prior contact may
have played part in why I chose to ask them as well as why they chose to participate. This could have had affects on the results, as other informants would have participated who may have contributed with different knowledge.

The two Members of Parliament were both from Sweden, which ultimately may have affected the material towards a Scandinavian angle. The MEPs were also both members of the political left, which of course had consequences for which causes as well as solutions they saw necessary. These were the politicians who, out of the contacted group, were available for interviews. Nevertheless, it would have been optimal to interview politicians from a larger variety of political groups. In addition, of importance to consider is that all informants were experts, which could mean that they had an already decided agenda during the interviews. To receive a broader description that was not dependent on a single informant, multiple experts from different areas were interviewed (cf. Kvale & Brinkman 2014). Six out of seven informants were women; the gender balance was therefore not even. This ultimately affects the results. That majority of informants were women were partly due to whom were available for interviews and partly due to that, a majority of those contacted were women. As the informants provided their professional knowledge regarding work done at European level to eradicate poverty, my hope was that this information would not have differed if the gender balance were differently divided.
6 Results and Analysis

This chapter outlines the results of the interviews and document analysis. The chapter will be presented from two main themes that derived from the interviews: poverty and economy. Each theme begins with a summary of the main documents for analysis and includes quotes and information given by informants. Under each theme are sections that were identified during the thematic analysis. Analyses are presented continuously throughout the subthemes. The “Europe 2020 Strategy” and the “Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015” documents occur regularly throughout the chapter. The “Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion” is presented under the theme Poverty and the Flagship “An Arena for New Skills and Jobs” is presented under the theme Economy.

6.1 Poverty

The “European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion: A framework for social and territorial cohesion” is one of seven flagship initiatives under the Europe 2020 Strategy (European Commission 2010d). The European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion aims at the Europe 2020 goal to reduce poverty with at least 20 million people. The platform intends “to ensure social and territorial cohesion such that the benefits of growth and jobs are widely shared and people experiencing poverty and social exclusion are enabled to live in dignity and take an active part in society” (European Commission 2010b:6).

The Platform document makes clear that the first and foremost reason for poverty is unemployment and states the crisis’ effect on vulnerable groups in particular. This group consists of “young people, migrants and the low skilled, often relying on temporary and low-paid jobs, have experienced the greatest increases in unemployment and are therefore exposed to a worsening of their living conditions” (European Commission 2010d:2). See Annex 4 for detailed description of the document.

6.1.1 Poverty measurement

The poverty measurement that underlies the headline target was a reoccurring theme in the interviews. The Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion provides the indicators on how poverty can be measured. The measurement
concludes: “the at-risk of poverty rate (after social transfers), the index of material deprivation and the percentage of people living in households with very low work intensity” (European Commission 2010d:3). According to the Platform document the aim of a broad definition of poverty is to include the multiple and varying factors as well as territorial differences that underlie poverty and social exclusion (European Commission 2010d; Eurostat 2013a).

As Lister (2004) argues, poverty is a construction of the context in which it exists; poverty and the experiences thereof differ within and between Member States. The context of poverty and social exclusion that Lister (2004:3) describes is in line with what the document points out as “multiple dimension of poverty and exclusion”.

One informant, EA, describes the measurement as a complex calculation and informs that multidimensional measurement was developed so that Member States could take on different strategies to address the headline target. What EA describes is in line with the Europe 2020 documents description: “These targets are representative, not exhaustive. […] They do not represent a “one size fits all” approach” (European Commission 2010b:12).

Each Member State can relate to one, two or all three of the indicators depending on the country’s occurring forms of poverty. EA describes the measurement as developed in order to be adaptable to the challenges that Member States face. The countries choose a particular poverty dimension to work with, which the Commission approves or denies. The idea was for amplify coordination between Member States so that each country contributed to reach the headline poverty target (Daly 2012).

However, some of the informants questioned the way the at-risk-of poverty and social exclusion are measured by Eurostat, and discussed the validity of these measurements. BS, for example, discussed the at-risk-of poverty line of 60% of a country’s median income, arguing that in countries with a low median income, as for example Bulgaria or Romania, the indicator does not in fact show how many people live at-risk-of poverty. This can be understood as why a threefold indicator
is needed, as poverty situations differs between Member States. According to BS the threshold does not measure poverty and social exclusion:

BS: The great advantage of this line is that it is easy to compute, and it is perfectly comparable across countries, but I don’t want to say it measures poverty […] That you compare poverty no, you compare the number of people that are far away from median income. That is what the poverty line measures.

According to BS, the at-risk-of poverty line does not measure poverty, but rather an income that is far from the median income of a country. The indicator does not take into account what it means to live under the national threshold. It furthermore supposes that all people with an income higher than 60% of the median income have sufficient means in order to fully participate in society. BS continued by describing what a decent poverty measurement should be: *valid* capturing the essence of the problem and having a clear and accepted normative interpretation; *reliable* as being robust and statistically validated; *policy relevant* meaning it being responsive to policy interventions, although not for manipulation; finally, it being sufficiently comparable between Member States.

The severe material deprivation index is a list of nine indicators, living in severe material deprivation means experiencing at least four or more out of the indicators. Multiple informants highlighted the relativity of the severe material deprivation indicator. Access to the material indicators can differ depending on the country. Therefore, the measurement may therefore not always be relevant. BS argues the relativity of the indicators: for example if one lives in a country where public transport is accessible and affordable the lack of owning a car will not be a sign of deprivation. The variety and diversity of poverty becomes visible through the interviews and prior research. Daly (2012) claims that poverty is diverse and should be conceived accordingly, the threefold indicator can be understood as a way to cover different aspects of poverty.

Political decisions regarding how to measure poverty have an effect on the levels of poverty (Swärd 2012). The Platform document (European Commission 2010d:3) makes this point clear: “The larger aggregate (totalling 116 million
people in 2008) covers a broader population than the one that is normally considered as “poor””. Understood through the term power/knowledge one can assume that those who hold power to define measurements also have the resources to outline and implement solutions (Foucault 2003). How we define poverty ultimately affects how we measure and shape policy. For example, if household is the smallest unit of measurement then strategies and support will also be implemented at household level.

When measuring poverty among women, multiple informants highlighted the issue with indicators measuring poverty at household level. A majority of income measurements are carried out at household level, such as the “very low work intensity” indicator. Measuring poverty and income at household level excludes women and children’s situation to a large extent (Pontheiux & Meurs 2015). MB, Member of Parliament, describes the problem with household level measurements as being connected to the need for individualised social security. According to MB, there are strong forces within Europe that want to keep the family as the smallest unit and within the realms of that, measure poverty at household level. In some ways of measuring, there is only household and not individual level, MB continues:

MB: and then, you even make women’s poverty invisible.

Measurements at household level assume that income is distributed equally within the household. MB’s argument must therefore be interpreted from the perspective of power and gender system. When resources are divided unequally within a household, women and girls are often disadvantaged (Johnsson-Latham 2004; Hirdman 2001). From a gender perspective, the gender system is here visible in the norms of measuring poverty. Assuming that income is distributed equally within a household, can be understood as a tradition within the gender system (ibid.). A household measurement could potentially affect women’s opportunities and economic independence by not correctly describing their situation of poverty.

6.1.2 Involvement of Non-governmental Organisations

The secretariat of the Non-governmental Organisation from which representatives were interviewed for this study, EAPN, work to affect decisions and policy made
at European level that impact on groups experiencing poverty and social exclusion. EAPN strive to include the voice of citizens. EAPN is a network of organisations working both at European and national level to eradicate poverty and social exclusion. This cooperation between Civil Society and the European institutions aims to “bridge the gap between the EU and its citizens through a more direct participation of citizens’ organizations and of excluded groups in the decision-making process” (European Anti-poverty Network 2015b). EAPN secretariat follows Europe 2020 and tries to impact policy in each stage of the process. When the Commission is to make a proposal EAPN can make general inputs or produce key messages. AF describes the process:

AF: You never know if you are contributing. I mean you do not have an actual opportunity to discuss these concerns and that would be ideal, to be able to contribute to a document before it comes out of the Commission, but most likely, you cannot.

The European Economic and Social Committee believes that the complexity and inadequate financial resources of the Europe 2020 Strategy make it difficult for Non-governmental Organisations to influence the Semester process. The informants from EAPN attest this, and add that current funding is less than previously. Less funding ultimately affects the amount of work that can be done.

In the Platform against poverty document Non-governmental Organisations are made out as essential actors in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. EA, who works at the Commission, describes the collaboration with NGOs as of high importance and occurring within the Platform against poverty. Regular stakeholder dialogue meetings as well as an annual convention on the Platform against Poverty are part of this collaboration. Another informant, AF from EAPN, explains the collaboration process somewhat differently. AF considers that the Platform is no longer active, and describes less collaboration between the NGOs and the Commission than previously. The collaboration process on European level according to both informants from EAPN is dependent on if there are “friendly” Members of Parliament (MEP) or someone working at the Commission who is accessible for collaboration. AF from EAPN expresses frustration over the lack of clear channels to work through.
Johansson (2012) argues that the Commission previously held an active role in the fight against poverty, with poverty reoccurring on the agenda. According to Johansson (2012), nowadays the Non-governmental Organisations have to work hard to keep poverty on the agenda. BS, the researcher, expresses this difference in commitment from the current Commission as opposed to the former one. As previously stated, the Commission is chosen every five years within months of the Parliamentary elections. The difference in commitment to social policy and/or the principle of subsidiarity can be interpreted through the new Commission’s worldview and ideas for solutions differing from the previous (Lilja & Vinthagen 2009).

The Commission ultimately possess political power, although not voted forth by the citizens. Asymmetric power relations have to be legitimised (Engelstad 2006). The Commission’s power can be seen as legitimised by the involvement of EESC, who are representatives of Employer Organisations, Trade Unions and Civil Society. Furthermore the legitimation of the Commission is made on one hand through being chosen by authorisation (Member States) and on the other, the European Economic and Social Committee can legitimise the Commission through providing involvement of citizens (Engelstad 2006). There is a difference in involvement of NGOs contra Social partners, which include trade unions and employer organisations. It is compulsory for the Commission to consult with the Social partners; this is done within the framework for social dialogue and is regulated in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. However, it is not a legal obligation to consult the NGOs. AF describes that the Commission cannot pass policy without the consent of Social partners and continues:

AF: And we say why not us? It is not just workers and employers in the world. What about civil dialogue? Let’s have the same formalised civil dialogue with clear steps, clear responsibilities and obligations on both sides.

The informant makes the same point as the EESC; EESC provides assessments of the Europe 2020 Strategy and voices that “Organised civil society should be given a greater role in the various stages of the process of planning and implementing European policies” (EESC 2013:11). The EESC makes out three levels of
governance that should be covered by the strategy: European, National and Regional. Both the EESC and EAPN call for the direct participation of people with experience of poverty and their Civil Society organisations in designing, implementing and monitoring inclusion policies.

6.1.3 Cooperation between Parliament and Commission

EA describes the cooperation between the Commission and the Parliament as formalised. When asked to describe the MEPs work, AH explains that in the FEMM Committee they write resolutions and opinions to legislations in other committees. They also write to the Commission trying to influence the shaping of policy.

AH: It is a committee where we give opinion and then we try to follow as much important legislation as possible. The problem is that we only receive those that have a bearing on something that has to do with women. We do not for example receive legislation that is about the environment, climate or legislation about transport […] although there should be a gender perspective in all areas.

Furthermore AH describes that the FEMM committee appoints a person in each Parliamentary committee to be have responsibility to keep a gender perspective and to report on progress once a year. Although gender is mainstreamed into all policy documents, in practice it seems to work differently.

6.1.4 Subsidiarity

When it comes to institutional power at European level, the power is divided among the different institutions. There is a certain power structure within the European Institutions; the different roles are regulated in the Treaties (Engelstad 2006; Franzén 2000). A central word is subsidiarity, which is not only regulated in the Functioning of The European Union but also in Europe 2020 as well as in the Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion. “Europe 2020 will give new impetus and relevance to this work and help developing tailored policies and actions to fight poverty and social exclusion. While the main responsibility in this area falls within the competence of Member States, achieving the EU poverty rate
target will require a pooling of all efforts and instruments at EU and at national level” (European Commission 2010d:4).

This Platform document brings up the aspect of subsidiarity while also encouraging cooperation, and makes the point that achieving the headline poverty target will require cooperation and working together both at European as well as at National level (European Commission 2010d). Engelstad (2006) argues that powers most comprising form is through building institutions, drawing up guidelines and making legislation. The Commission has both formal and informal power. The formal power is regulated in the Treaties and the informal power is both symbolic and visible through having possibility to mobilise resources. However, the formal power varies, as the Commission does not have the possibility to issue sanctions in the social area if Member States do not follow recommendations. The informants from EAPN discuss the fact that there is no enforcing mechanism. Both informants say that most Member States are currently not respecting the headline poverty target.

Although the Commission does not have formal power or any hard instruments to regulate the social aspect of the poverty target, other ways of control have been established. One of which is named the Social Open Method of Cooperation (OMC). The Platform document establishes the Social OMC as part of the “new improved governance structures of the strategy” (European Commission 2010d:18). Berg and Spehar (2011) describe the OMC as a form of peer pressure, a platform created to share best practices. However, the informants from EAPN believe the OMC is no longer in use.

The OMC can be understood as twofold: on one hand, it is a way to push Member States to reach the targets, as there are no sanctions (Berg & Spehar 2011). On the other hand, the Commission may have established this in order to cultivate further integration. There are three aspects of this, by creating “spill-over” through political, functional or cultivating effects (Bache et al. 2015; Berg & Spehar 2011). Seen from a functional view, the positive effects through Member States cooperation within the OMC can lead to seeing value in further cooperation, and perhaps eventually include poverty and social exclusion policy within EU’s sovereignty (ibid.). All informants speak about the disadvantages of the lack EU’s
power in regards to fighting poverty and social exclusion, which can be interpreted as a political “spill-over” where the informants now see advantages with reducing poverty from an EU level. Through cultivating “spill-over”, the usage of the OMC can furthermore be understood as the Commission creating an arena where Member State cooperation is used, and therefore fostering further integration (Bache et al. 2015; Berg & Spehar 2011; Schmitter 2004).

6.1.5 Poverty, women and the Strategy
The informants from the Non-governmental Organisation as well as the EESC show little belief in the Europe 2020 Strategy’s headline poverty target. Their concern is that there is a poverty target but no strategies nor methods on how to implement it. They speak of the European Semester process but that Europe 2020 is not an important part of this process, and therefore poverty does not play an important role in analysis and implementation at EU level. BH describes it as big goals without an accompanying strategy or timetable to reach the particular goal. In addition, the informants who are Members of Parliament question the Europe 2020 Strategy’s validity and MB discusses the contradiction in politics, that the poverty target is set apart from the other targets. These stories correspond with what Daly (2012) writes that social policy seems like an add-on and the poverty target risks being rendered ineffective. Furthermore when asked about women and the strategy the informants from EAPN, the MEPs as well as the researcher all note that the target is not broken down by social dimensions such as age, gender, ethnicity, and etcetera.

AF- So, right now I do not think that there is a coherent initiative approach of the European Union to fight poverty of women, quite honestly because there is hardly any initiative to fight poverty.

The informant speaks about a lack of initiatives to fight poverty in general. In regards to poverty among women, all informants speak of poverty as a gendered issue, where women experience poverty due to different reasons than men. Yet, strategies to cover women’s poverty situation are not clear in the Europe 2020 Strategy. An informant from EAPN point out:
BH: Everybody talks about the feminisation of poverty, but nobody does anything.

According to BH, EAPN secretariat not specifically push gender in European level work as they tackle poverty on a general level, is the same for European Women’s Lobby, who do not push poverty specifically as they work with women’s rights on a general level. In the linkage between gender and poverty, neither EAPN nor the EU strategies are very strong according to BH. Furthermore, the informant declares that the EU has given up on both poverty and women, and wonders:

BH: Who speaks for these women? Is it us?

The NGOs not specifically pushing women’s poverty in particular seems to be the case for the Commission as well. When asked about a potential gender divide in the strategy EA, working in the Commission, answered that, as the poverty and employment targets are general headline figures they are therefore not disaggregated into sub groups. Many argue that women more often experience poverty than men, predominantly due to gender-based discrimination on the labour market and uneven division of paid and unpaid work, that accumulate during one’s lifetime. Meaning that women who experience poverty in working age are likely to experience poverty in retired age (Barnard 2012; Gradin et al. 2010; Johnsson-Latham 2004).

Even though the gendered division of poverty is evident, the references to women in the Strategy and accompanying documents are scant: the Platform against Poverty makes out women as accounting for over half of the European population living in poverty. Women are also mentioned with reference to the employment target being to bring 75% of women and men into employment (European Commission 2010d:3). Women are in total mentioned ten times in the document either when written “women and men”, in relation to men such as “Also, the gender divide is clearly visible and women are generally more at risk than men” (European Commission 2010d:4) and when made out as a risk group. Men are mentioned six times in the document each time is relation to women. Gender appears to be mainstreamed into the document.
The Commission has called for Gender Mainstream in the Treaties of the European Union. Gender is mainstreamed into all analysed policy documents. According to AF:

AF: There is an obligation to mainstream gender equality in all documents. But the problem with mainstreaming is mainstreaming means putting it everywhere. Putting it everywhere also means watering it down.

The informant discusses that mainstreaming gender into policy documents could mean that the gender perspective is not clear. When a gender dimension is unclear or not prioritised, it can be understood in regards to what Johnsson-Latham (2004) writes about, that when strategies or policies strive to be gender neutral they in fact often derive from a male norm. Atkinson et al. (2002) and Hydén (2013) also write that there is a risk with gender mainstream that it can end up favouring men.

Two methods are mentioned as targeting women’s poverty, the contribution of European Social Funds (ESF) and the mention of women in the European Semester’s Country Specific Recommendations (CSR). According to EA the ESF is shaped to help reducing poverty. Which is made clear in the Platform document that states that “Every year, 5 million unemployed and some 1 million people from vulnerable groups benefit from direct support from the European Social Fund (ESF), the key European financial tool for supporting employment and social inclusion” (European Commission 2010d:12).

The EESC says that a consistent use of the European Social Funds is needed to implement equality policies (EESC 2013). However, BH questions the usage of the ESF for women in particular, and wonders how much of the funding is made available for issues of discrimination or poverty fighting measures. BH continues:

BH: So the now we have the 20% of the ESF is made available for discrimination and poverty fighting measures, but then is it really being used for women or to tackle feminisation of poverty?

In terms of the Country Specific Recommendations, the informant from the Commission says that many CSRs have been targeted specifically to include...
women’s employment. Other informants speak of the lack of gender perspective in the CSRs, which is strengthened by the EESC (2013:12) who state that in 2012 twelve out of twenty eight Member States received CSR incorporating a gender dimension even though all Member States have gender based differences in wage and employment (Gradín et al. 2010; Pontheiux & Meurs 2015). “Only one country, Austria, was given the recommendation to address the gender pay gap, despite the fact that this is still a reality in all Member States” (EESC 2013:12).

Although gender is mainstreamed into the document, there is not a gender perspective as to how to eradicate poverty among women. Production of knowledge is never free from interpretations; the knowledge produced favours the powerful. When power/knowledge is combined with an interpretation based on the gender system, it can explain how a seemingly gender-neutral perspective in fact may exclude women (Foucault 2003; Giddens 1994; Lilja & Vinthagen 2009).

6.2 Economy

Women’s situation of poverty is underpinned by their position in the labour market, family life and welfare systems (Lister 2004). The Europe 2020 Strategy identifies unemployment as the main cause of poverty among the working age population, and claims that eradicating poverty relies on growth as well as modern and effective social protection systems. This second theme will therefore address the connection between the economy, the labour market and their effect on poverty among women.

Apart from the previously mentioned documents, the Flagship document aimed at monitoring the headline target for employment, “An Agenda for new skills and jobs”, will be used. An Agenda for new skills and jobs is the European Union’s contribution towards full employment. The document aims to set routes to bring 75% of the population into employment by year 2020 (European Commission 2010e). See Annex 5 for detailed description of the document.

The Flagship document sets the target to raise employment especially for women, young and older workers by focusing on four key priorities: “better functioning labour markets, a more skilled workforce, better job quality and working
conditions and stronger policies to promote job creation and demand for labour” (European Commission 2010:2-3). The document clarifies subsidiarity by stating that the main responsibility for reaching these objectives as well as the main instruments are ones that the Member States hold. “However, the EU employment rate target for women and men of 75% by 2020 will only be achieved by pooling all efforts and instruments” (European Commission 2010:3).

6.2.1 Crisis and austerity measures

After the crisis, austerity measures with the aim of reducing budget deficits were made, reducing public expenditure and increasing taxes (European Women’s Lobby 2012). The EESC (2014:4) points out that “while austerity policies may boost competitiveness and cohesion if implemented during a period of economic growth, if applied "automatically" in a period of recession, which is the situation currently faced by most Member States, such policies have a detrimental effect on growth”. The Agenda for new skills and jobs document makes clear that the situation for groups has worsened and states that it is due to increases in unemployment.

All informants speak of the financial crisis’ impact on women’s situation in the EU. The informants, similar to that of Gradín et al. (2010) and Barnard (2012) among others, argue that women have been hit hard by the crisis. The cuts in public expenditure have led to reductions in public jobs and services, most of which affect women. Migrant women, elderly women and women from ethnic minorities are according to the informants especially at risk.

AH: We have had and have a financial crisis that has hit Europe hard. Many countries like Italy, Portugal but particularly Greece have been hit particularly hard. Who is it that lost their jobs? It is women […] It is women who are the biggest losers, it is them who are affected by poverty in Europe.

AH goes on to describe that women had to lessen their working hours to take care of the elderly in their families and had to go early to take the children from school. The EESC (2013:9) clarifies: “Single-parent families, widows, women with disabilities, victims of gender-based violence, elderly women and migrant
women are particularly hard hit by budget cuts and the crisis and are at greater risk of social exclusion, given the lack of protection or specific aid measures”.

Understood through Hirdman’s (2001) perspective of a gender system, women are seen as carers and therefore more often hold caring responsibilities. The gender system can also explain why women more often are subjected to employment within the public sector as private and public sector are kept apart as being men and women dominated respectively (ibid.). This proves gender discrimination, that when austerity measures were taken it affected women dominated arenas (Gradín et al. 2010; European Women’s Lobby 2012; Johnsson-Latham 2004).

Social dimensions overlap, and hierarchical structure of power underlie all social dimensions, also within the “category” women. The “us” and “them” that are created by the powerful make it so that women of ethnic minority for example are doubly discriminated. This therefore be sought to risk poverty to a greater extent, as they may earn less than women from ethnic majorities in a country (Lister 2004; Engelstad 2006; Franzén 2000; Mattsson 2010; Pearce 1978).

The EESC (2014) voices that the crisis had effect on the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy itself “Since the architecture of the EU's economic governance is heavily geared towards austerity policies, it has put the achievement of the Europe 2020 Strategy's medium- and long-term goals in second place after fiscal discipline” (EESC 2014:4). JO adds that the austerity measures are underpinned by a political agenda. Furthermore the Agenda for new skills and jobs (European Commission 2010e:4) describe some policies as insufficient, “Policies to reduce segmentation have been insufficient: young, temporary workers and migrants have been among those hardest hit by the recession. […] At the height of the recession, job losses for workers in temporary work were almost four times higher than for those in permanent employment”.

How the EU chose to act after the crisis can be understood through prevailing political ideas (Johansson 2012). The crisis hit Europe and made millions of people unemployed, confronting it with poverty. However, from the empirical data, statistics and previous research it is evident that the austerity measure done to boost growth instead has had a negative impact on women’s situation of
poverty in Europe. Cuts in public finances effect women both from an employment perspective and as users of social services (Lister 2004; European Women’s Lobby 2012).

6.2.1.1 Social protection

As a way out of the crisis, the Europe 2020 Strategy proposes modernised social protection systems. It is an issue of equal economic independence according to MB, who stresses that social protections systems need to be individualised. The proposal of individualised social protection systems is in line with Ponthieux and Meurs (2015) argument that household level distribution is based on the notion that income is distributed equally, which is not always the case.

6.2.2 Labour market

The European Union makes it clear in the Europe 2020 Strategy that the linkage between employment and experiencing poverty is central. The EU agreed on an employment target of 75% women and men aged 20-64 employed by year 2020: “an ambitious commitment to the sustainability of Europe’s social model, welfare systems, economic growth and public finances” (European Commission 2010e:2). Two main themes in terms of labour market were visible in the interviews: access to, and discrimination within the labour market. These were spoken of as two main reasons for female poverty in Europe.

6.2.2.1 Access to labour market

One informant, EA, speaks about the issue of labour market participation among women, meaning that the employment target will not be reached if the barriers that prohibit women from entering the labour market or working full-time are not eradicated. Furthermore the EESC (2013) considers that in most Member States women live in poverty and that this, as most informants and documents correspond, is due exclusion from the labour market. “Therefore, breaks in periods of work and precarious jobs, which are so common for women, especially women with low levels of qualification, have an immediate negative effect, which can continue into the medium and long term” (EESC 2013:15). Accessing the labour market as well as inadequate parental leave keep women of the labour
market. Barriers to employment are upheld through power structures where men favour men (Hirdman 2001; Engelstad 2006).

The informants, as well as the document, clarify gender based discrimination and discrimination based on migration status as two main grounds for discrimination in access to the labour market. Moreover, “Barriers to employment are also reflected in higher inactivity rates and higher long-term unemployment rates” (European Commission 2010c:5). Inactivity and long-term unemployment lessen the changes to re-enter the labour market.

6.2.2.2 Discrimination within the labour market

The Agenda for new skills and jobs document sets a goal to review the effectiveness of legislation and directives at EU level in the area of part-time work and fixed-term contracts and their impact on female participation in employment. This is a monitoring system implied by the Strategy for Equality, which states that the Commission will: “monitor closely the national policies adopted to improve gender equality in the labour market and boost the social inclusion of women” (European Commission 2010c:5).

The Strategy for Equality highlights the uneven division of the impact parenthood has on labour market participation as a problem, and state that women still hold a disproportionate part of unpaid household and caring work. The vast part-time employment among women mirrors the expectations of women as caring for household and children part-time (Hirdman 2001). The EESC (2013) are concerned with women’s situation in regards to the labour market, as women’s situation although making up for 44% of Europe’s working population are still in a vulnerable situation in a number of areas that are stated as: “a lower employment rate, the pay gap, the concentration or absence of women in particular sectors, limited involvement in business start-ups, part-time work (75% of the total); temporary contracts, the lack of adequate childcare facilities; poor career advancement; the under-representation of women in the most senior positions, in both the business and political spheres, and imbalanced access to the various disciplines in education, vocational training and university studies” (EESC 2013:7).
Gender based discrimination is a central issue why women more often carry out part-time jobs and unpaid household work (Gradin et al. 2010; Hirdman 2001; Johnsson-Latham 2004). Discrimination on the labour market can be interpreted through the gender system, in that it consist of institutions, norms, traditions and expectations that separate men and women and uphold masculinity as the norm. This system constitutes women as “lesser” versions of men with resulting in lower wages for women as well as difficulties advancing (Hirdman 2001; Göransson 2007). Poverty among women is according to Lister (2004), reflecting the inferior position that women hold to men.

As MB points out, having laws for anti-discrimination is based on the assumption that an individual is discriminated against within a functioning system. MB means that this type of anti-discrimination legislation hides the power structures through which women, migrants, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and so on are discriminated against. MB means that the current anti-discrimination legislation is based on a fault in the system as opposed to the system itself. Another informant, BH, highlights what MB describes in relation to women’s poverty:

BH: The whole system works towards the feminisation of poverty.

Interpreted from a view of gender system, each of these faults can be understood in terms of the structural discrimination of women (Göransson 2007; Hirdman 2001).

6.2.3 Poverty, Women and Economic Independence

Poverty is mentioned three times in the Agenda for new skills and jobs document, all times in relation to employment and never encompassing a gender perspective. The informants speak little if any about the document in itself. However, one informant, AF, highlights the relation between economy and poverty by speaking about hard and soft instruments:

AF: You do not have hard instruments for combating poverty, however you have hard instruments increasing poverty because you have hard economic instruments, which often actually increase poverty.
Some informants speak of this particular connection by stating that the economic instruments of today are about maintaining debt and deficit at a low, which to is done by cutting social protection, cutting wages and cutting services. As women, according to the Strategy for equality document, more often have social benefits and use social services these cuts have a greater effect on women than of men and can therefore reduce possibility for women’s economic independence (European Commission 2010c).

Economic independence is a clear way for women to exit poverty, according to the informants and the Strategy for equality (European Commission 2010c). The Strategy for Equality document claims that higher labour market participation among women would also reduce the strains on social protection systems. The EESC (2013) furthermore believe that the European Social Funds are to be used as a kind of monitoring system to evaluate all measures to ensure that the Strategy for Equality is taken forward.

The EESC (2014:5) describes the Agenda for new skills and jobs as “unnecessarily complex” to its structure and that the economic approach overlooks the social aspects: “Much less emphasis is placed on gender equality than in previous employment strategies. The only visible and explicit aspect, the employment rate for women, clearly ignores the qualitative aspects of work and the different starting positions that exist on the labour market. Even the quantitative gender-specific targets contained in the Lisbon Strategy have disappeared“.

MB claims that the European Semester has had negative effects on the economic policy in the EU. This is because, according to MB, that the economic policy that has been implemented in many ways contradicts prioritising a policy that generates higher equality. Meaning instruments such as austerity having direct impact on women dominated fields of work as well as social protection systems. When these are hit, women’s economic independence lessens and therefore the inequality rises. These contradictory politics send the wrong signals from EU level according to MB.
6.3 Challenges to reach the Europe 2020 targets

At the end of each interview, the informants were asked which challenges they see to reaching the headline target of at least 20 million less in poverty and 75% employment. The informants were not optimistic to the targets being reached. JO, and the EESC, for example stated that poverty figures have risen between the years 2009 and 2013 and that delayed impacts from the crisis are still yet to be seen. EA from the Commission answered that concerns due to the link between poverty and the labour market are proving a challenge, as the Commission means that there is a need for employment growth. Another challenge is tackling the issue of new jobs developing into part-time or temporary jobs as well as in-work poverty rising. EA spoke about the need for the EU to be vigilant.

The EESC worries about the rise in numbers of persons living in poverty. There has been an overall increase in poverty similar for women and men. This increase strengthens the informants’ disbelief in reaching the poverty target.

The Europe 2020 Strategy and the accompanying Flagships claim the need to empower citizens to “enable our current and future workforce to adapt to new conditions and potential career shifts, reduce unemployment and raise labour productivity” (European Commission 2010b:18). “The economic crisis had a dramatic impact on job creation, but some obstacles to labour demand are structural […] It is not enough to ensure that people remain active and acquire the right skills to get a job: the recovery must be based on job-creation, which depends first and foremost on economic growth” (European Commission 2010b:16). It is evident that the Commission believes in empowerment as a solution to unemployment (Askheim & Starrin 2007). The EESC (2013) speak about the need to view women, as economic benefit and that Member States must recognise the economic benefit of women’s work.

As for reaching the headline targets, most informants speak about the need of gender equality measures to eradicate poverty:

   MB: To eradicate women’s poverty one must see EU’s economical politics and not just have a programme to fight poverty on the side.
If one really wants to eradicate poverty and especially women’s poverty then you have to go in and regulate the economical politics.

BH: And that means that if you do not have a gender perspective in the next strategy then you will not have accompanying policies. So, it’s very important that gender plays a part in that. If not there is no reason for the EU or the Member States to do anything further on gender so that’s a big challenge, to define, or help to define the next overarching strategy.

The discussion of regulating economic politics makes the case for “spill-over” effects, proving that cooperation in one area has impact on others, meaning that further action is needed to reach the first goal, or in this case balance out its negative impact (Bache et al. 2015; Lindberg 1963). The informants highlight the need for new strategies to tackle poverty. The EESC emphasise a need to reform the Europe 2020 Strategy in order to make it more efficient and prevent it from failing.

The informants from EAPN both see clear advantages in working to eradicate poverty from a European level. The same can be said for all informants. Interpreted through neo-functionalism the Commission and the Non-governmental actors would play a lead role in keeping poverty on the agenda (Bache et al. 2015). It can be understood as an Europeanisation having occurred among the informants, or perhaps the differences in impact possibilities in areas of European sovereignty seeing possibilities with integrating Social policy into the supranational domain (Costa & Brack 2014; Bache et al. 2015).

The areas of anti-poverty and social inclusion are not within formal power of the EU nor the Non-governmental Organisations (Engelstad 2006; Göransson 2007; Costa & Brack 2014). However, non-state actors such as the Commission and NGOs hold informal power, and work to keep poverty on the European agenda (Lindberg 1963; Schmitter 2004). It is of importance for the EU to lead by example because opinions and recommendations do have political impact on Member States (Berg & Spehar 2011). Even so, in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, Member States still hold ultimate jurisdiction.
7. Conclusions

The study aimed to examine and highlight how different actors at European level work to eradicate poverty among women. The empirical data depicted different aspects of the situation through two mayor themes: poverty and economy. Below is a summary of the results.

*How do European Institutions work to eradicate poverty among women?*

The European Institutions do not have exclusive competence over social policy, which means that measures aimed at fighting poverty and social exclusion at European level are not binding for Member States. The Institutions aim to influence the Member States to follow opinion and recommendations (Barnard 2012). The Europe 2020 Strategy was created with a goal to bring at least 20 million people out of poverty and 75% into employment (European Commission 2010b). The Commission holds main responsibility for forming and implementing the Europe 2020 Strategy. According to Johansson (2012), the Commission used to be leading in the fight against poverty, keeping poverty on the agenda. The Commission and Parliament collaborate on a formalised basis, described in the background of this study. Members of Parliament work through different Committees in order to influence policy documents. When developing and implementing policy the European Institutions are obliged to advise Social partners, meaning trade unions and employer organisations. The European Economic and Social Committee is also consulted. As social policy is a shared competence, the principle of subsidiarity is governing.

*What role do Non-governmental Organisations have in the eradication of poverty among women?*

Two Non-governmental Organisations were particularly relevant for this study: European Anti-poverty Network and European Women’s Lobby. From EAPN two professionals, working in the secretariat, were interviewed. Both NGOs comprise organisations at national and European level. The Member State based organisations work nationally to eradicate poverty and to advocate for women’s rights. For this study, it was of interest to examine the work carried out at European level where the secretariat’s of the NGO’s work includes influencing policy and legislation. Neither of the NGOs works with the eradication of poverty.
among women specifically. However, EAPN aims to eradicate poverty overall and EWL objectives include women’s economic independence.

The involvement of Non-governmental Organisations at European level is formalised and informal, as well as dependent on who describes the cooperation. In the Platform against poverty and social exclusion flagship, under the Europe 2020 Strategy, NGOs are to be involved in the process of designing and implementing strategies. This does not correspond to an EAPN informant’s descriptions of collaboration, who speak of a lack of clear channels to work through. With the Platform against poverty seeming politically inactive, there are increasing difficulties for Civil Society organisations to influence policies. Both EAPN and the European Economic and Social Committee call for more formalised involvement. Both parts also demand for the direct involvement of people experiencing poverty and their interest organisations.

*What do relevant Europe 2020 Strategy documents say regarding women’s employment and the eradication of poverty among women?*

It is evident that gender is mainstreamed into the Europe 2020 Strategy. However, all informants speak about a lack of specific strategies aimed at gender and other social dimensions. The Europe 2020 Strategy and accompanying documents highlight women’s situation as being at particular risk of poverty, although they do not specify strategies aimed at these particular risks. The Strategy for Equality between women and men intends to monitor the implementation of a gender perspective though is not an integrated part in the Europe 2020 Strategy. The document is used as an “add-on” to the Europe 2020 Strategy, which makes it clear that women’s rights are not a priority. The Europe 2020 Strategy Flagships and accompanying documents were made 2010 and has since then seemingly been abandoned, in favour of new documents that were not scrutinised in the study.

*Which implications can the work that is done at European level have on eradicating poverty among women?*

Social policy is not within formal and exclusive power of the European Union, but a shared competence between EU and the Member States. Through the study, it became visible that social policy areas are undermined by economic politics, where EU has exclusive competence. Austerity measures has had effects on social
protection systems and employment within the public sector, ultimately increasing poverty and unemployment (European Women’s Lobby 2012). As this study did not focus on national examples, it is difficult to consider what effects the Europe 2020 Strategy and accompanying measures have had on the poverty situation in the Member States. However, it can be said that although inequality is present in each Member State, women’s rights have not been integrated into all Country Specific Recommendations (EESC 2013).

Although the European Union does not have formal power to regulate social policy, decisions made at European level affect national politics (Berg & Spehar 2011). Sanctions cannot be used for Member States to follow recommendations though some political pressure can be issued. Overarching European norms and implications as well as non-state actors can affect Member States’ social politics (Bache et al. 2015; Schmitter 2004). Without national examples, answering the question of which implications EU level work has on Member States becomes purely theoretical.
8. Discussion

The European Union has made multiple attempts at gender equality and women’s rights. This has resulted in a gender perspective being mainstreamed into all policy documents (e.g. Lane et al. 2011). Nevertheless, over 25% of women in the European Union are at-risk of poverty and social exclusion. Women’s situation of poverty correlates with gender-based discrimination on the labour market, lack of economic independence as well as inadequate social protection systems (Barnard 2012; Lister 2004; Ponthieux & Meurs 2015). Through statistics (see Annex 6), it is evident that women experience poverty more so than men, and the gender divide in causes and consequences of poverty is clear (Chant 2006; Gradin et al. 2010; Pearce 1978). Women’s specific situation and the multiple social dimensions that affect women’s opportunities and situation of poverty must be addressed (Mattsson 2010; 2012).

The decision to mainstream gender into all policy documents does not seem to have had positive impact as Europe 2020 lacks specific measures targeting women’s situation of poverty. Mainstreaming gender seems to have resulted in an attempt at gender neutrality that instead makes women’s situation invisible (Atkinson et al. 2002; Hydén 2013). Gender equality through the increase of women’s rights would serve both economic and political goals, lessening the pressure on Member States social protection systems and contributing to an overall European economic and sustainable growth (cf. Barnard 2012).

The Europe 2020 Strategy encompasses that Member States produce national goals and strategies aimed at to contribute to the goal of at least 20 million people less at-risk-of poverty and social exclusion. How the European Union and its Member States choose to fight poverty is dependent on prevailing political paradigms. The Strategy implies that economic growth and full employment is reachable through the empowerment of citizens. Tackling unemployment and poverty through empowerment, by aiming to empower individuals to themselves overcome their marginalisation is in line with the trend of Social Work becoming more individualised. This coincides with the argument that the European Union’s social agenda takes on a liberal approach (Askheim & Starrin 2007; Daly 2012;
Hertz & Johansson 2012). The individualisation of empowerment and Social Work may have mutually affected one another.

There is a need to highlight the structures that discriminate against women, which ultimately affect their situation of poverty and social exclusion. Instead of seeking solutions at individual level, it is of importance to see how the current structures are working towards a gendered division of poverty (cf. Hertz & Johansson 2012). Perhaps women’s poverty needs to be emphasised in order for solutions to arise (cf. Blomberg & Petersson 2006).

8.1 Further research

Attempting to examine what the EU is doing to eradicate poverty among women is a topic that needs an enlarged study, and would be of value to further research. In the case of further studies on the subject, it would be interesting to examine what Member States pick up and implement from European level recommendations. Additionally it would be of interest to further explore how multiple social dimensions correlate with the situation of poverty.

Further topics that would be interesting to explore are: reasons for and consequences of a poverty situation for example for women who are homeless, people with non-normative gender expressions and women with differing abilities.
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Annex 1: Member States of the European Union

Member States of the European Union

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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
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Source: (European Commission 2015c;f).
Annex 2: Abbreviations

AGS       Annual Growth Survey
CSR       Country Specific Recommendation
EAPN      European Anti-Poverty Network
EESC      European Economic and Social Committee
ESF       European Social Fund
EU        European Union
EWL       European Women’s Lobby
MEP       Member of Parliament
MS        Member State
NGO       Non-governmental Organisation
NRP       National Reform Programme
OMC       Open Method of Coordination
TEU       Treaty on European Union
TFEU      Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
Annex 3: Interview Guide

- Would you like to describe your main areas of work?
- How would you describe the relation between the labour market and poverty (among women)?
- What are your organisation/institutions main strategies for fighting poverty (among women)?
- How is a gender perspective applied in your work?
- How does your organisation/institution collaborate with other EU level organisations/institutions?
- Which challenges do you see with regards to reaching the Europe 2020 targets of at least 20 million people less in poverty and a 75% employment rate?
Annex 4: European Platform against Poverty

“Flagship Initiative: "European Platform against Poverty"

The aim is to ensure economic, social and territorial cohesion, building on the current European year for combating poverty and social exclusion so as to raise awareness and recognise the fundamental rights of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, enabling them to live in dignity and take an active part in society.

“At EU level, the Commission will work:
– To transform the open method of coordination on social exclusion and social protection into a platform for cooperation, peer-review and exchange of good practice, and into an instrument to foster commitment by public and private players to reduce social exclusion, and take concrete action, including through targeted support from the structural funds, notably the ESF;

– To design and implement programmes to promote social innovation for the most vulnerable, in particular by providing innovative education, training, and employment opportunities for deprived communities, to fight discrimination (e.g. disabled), and to develop a new agenda for migrants' integration to enable them to take full advantage of their potential;

– To undertake an assessment of the adequacy and sustainability of social protection and pension systems, and identify ways to ensure better access to health care systems.

At national level, Member States will need:
– To promote shared collective and individual responsibility in combating poverty and social exclusion;

– To define and implement measures addressing the specific circumstances of groups at particular risk (such as one-parent families, elderly women, minorities, Roma, people with a disability and the homeless);

– To fully deploy their social security and pension systems to ensure adequate income support and access to health care” (European Commission 2010b:19).
Annex 5: An Agenda for new skills and jobs

“Flagship Initiative: "An Agenda for new skills and jobs"

“The aim is to create conditions for modernising labour markets with a view to raising employment levels and ensuring the sustainability of our social models. This means empowering people through the acquisition of new skills to enable our current and future workforce to adapt to new conditions and potential career shifts, reduce unemployment and raise labour productivity.

At EU level, the Commission will work:

– To define and implement the second phase of the flexicurity agenda, together with European social partners, to identify ways to better manage economic transitions and to fight unemployment and raise activity rates;

– To adapt the legislative framework, in line with 'smart' regulation principles, to evolving work patterns (e.g. working time, posting of workers) and new risks for health and safety at work;

– To facilitate and promote intra-EU labour mobility and better match labour supply with demand with appropriate financial support from the structural funds, notably the European Social Fund (ESF), and to promote a forward-looking and comprehensive labour migration policy which would respond in a flexible way to the priorities and needs of labour markets;

– To strengthen the capacity of social partners and make full use of the problem-solving potential of social dialogue at all levels (EU, national/regional, sectoral, company), and to promote strengthened cooperation between labour market institutions including the public employment services of the Member States;

– To give a strong impetus to the strategic framework for cooperation in education and training involving all stakeholders. This should notably result in the implementation of life-long learning principles (in cooperation with Member States, social partners, experts) including through flexible learning pathways between different education and training sectors and levels and by reinforcing the attractiveness of vocational education and training. Social partners at European
level should be consulted in view of developing an initiative of their own in this area;

– To ensure that the competences required to engage in further learning and the labour market are acquired and recognised throughout general, vocational, higher and adult education and to develop a common language and operational tool for education/training and work: a European Skills, Competences and Occupations framework (ESCO).

At national level, Member States will need:

– To implement their national pathways for flexicurity, as agreed by the European Council, to reduce labour market segmentation and facilitate transitions as well as facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life;

– To review and regularly monitor the efficiency of tax and benefit systems so to make work pay with a particular focus on the low skilled, whilst removing measures that discourage self-employment;

– To promote new forms of work-life balance and active ageing policies and to increase gender equality;

– Promote and monitor the effective implementation of social dialogue outcomes;

– To give a strong impetus to the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework, through the establishment of national qualification frameworks;

– To ensure that the competences required to engage in further learning and the labour market are acquired and recognised throughout general, vocational, higher and adult education, including non-formal and informal learning;

– To develop partnerships between the worlds of education/training and work, in particular by involving social partners in the planning of education and training provision” (European Commission 2010b:18-19).
Annex 6: Poverty Statistics

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At risk of poverty and social exclusion
UNIT: Percentage of total population
AGE: Total

Severe material deprivation
UNIT: Percentage of total population
AGE: Total

Very low work intensity
UNIT: Percentage of total population aged less than 60
AGE: Less than 60 years

Source: Eurostat 2013b