



# Social injustice in accessing employment and education opportunities in Europe

A study from eight European countries

September 2024

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# Executive summary

# Executive summary

State Street Foundation (SSF) commissioned this study to analyse the systemic barriers faced by groups experiencing injustice in their pursuit of education and meaningful employment in eight European countries where State Street Corporation operates: France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (UK). The report includes recommendations for where State Street Foundation could target its philanthropic investments in Europe.

Across the eight countries studied, those individuals at greater risk of experiencing social inequalities and injustices identified as women; ethnic minorities, migrants, refugees, Travellers, Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic (BAME, a term previously used in UK); people of colour; LGBTQIA+; and people living with a disability.

These social inequalities and injustices can take various forms and shapes, and act as additional obstacles and challenges to accessing the financial, educational, housing, health care, and other key resources that facilitate entry to high-quality education and employment. This results in low social mobility across the European continent, with the above communities disproportionately affected by poverty, poor working conditions and low educational achievements. Overall, research shows that discrimination continues to drive social injustices and inequalities. Examples of racial discrimination, sexism, or ableism in the groups studied demonstrate the scale of the problem in the job market, in the workplace, and within society as a whole. But discrimination alone cannot summarise the complexities of social injustices and inequalities in Europe.

These are found at the intersection of political, cultural and social legacies and take various forms and shapes in different countries, regions and communities.

This report finds that SSF could drive further progress by taking a holistic approach to upskilling and supporting individuals, exploring solutions focused on eradicating discrimination and improving access to services and social mobility. In addition, SSF is positioned to encourage greater collaboration among grant makers, charities and other stakeholders such as businesses that favour localised solutions to empower people and communities.

# Introduction



## Context

In 2015, the United Nations urged global action to reduce inequalities and address the widening wealth gaps within and among countries. Among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals agreed upon by UN Member States to achieve sustainable development by 2030, goal number 10 sought to empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status. It called for the development and scale of solutions supporting income growth and enabling equal access to opportunities for all. Even though Europe is the least unequal region in the world thanks to historic

redistribution systems, the continent has not been spared by the effects of globalisation and the ensuing social, health and economic crises over recent years. As inequalities have been further exacerbated, efforts from governments and civil society alone have not been sufficient in slowing this trend and containing the devastating effects that social injustices and inequalities can have on one's life chances. The private sector, and funders such as SSF, have the opportunity to accelerate this effort, drawing from their resources to engage in addressing social inequalities and injustices by supporting initiatives to create more equitable communities.

## Why this study?

With this research, State Street Foundation seeks to better understand what lies underneath social injustices and inequalities in Europe, exploring their root causes and key drivers, and how they translate for different communities and populations across eight European countries in which State Street operates.

The research aimed to support SSF in reviewing its strategy and aligning its grantmaking programme to the needs of communities experiencing social injustices and inequalities in the context of education and employment.

# Methodology

By drawing on reports produced by a range of sources, the research collects evidence about existing inequalities and identifies commonalities in Europe as a region through a deep dive across the eight countries. Interviews with 21 field experts helped validate the findings in each country and, in many cases, provided first-hand experiences of dealing with key issues.

The research focused on the drivers of social injustices and inequalities that create unequal employment opportunities, with consideration also given to access to education where explicitly associated with securing better employment.

## To explore this, the research prioritised two questions:

1

**What are the key drivers of social injustices and inequalities and how do they create barriers to employment and education?**

2

**Which communities experience unfair treatment and face additional obstacles to access and succeed in employment and education?**

# Core findings



# 1 Behind social inequalities and social injustices in Europe



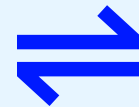
## Discrimination

Experiences of discrimination limit opportunities by increasing negative stigmas, restrictive employment practices and mental health challenges.



## Inequalities

Social inequalities and social injustices are multidimensional. They combine and intersect to limit educational attainment, positive aspirations and access to work opportunities.



## Limited social mobility

As a consequence of discrimination and inequalities, vulnerable groups such as women, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities are more likely to hold lower-status jobs with fewer career and training opportunities. This is reflected in diminished rates of social mobility.

### Prevailing discrimination continues to drive social inequalities and social injustices

#### Discrimination across Europe

Discrimination and discriminatory practices remain major issues across all eight countries studied and continue to feed social injustices and inequalities. Discrimination refers to the unjust and/or prejudicial treatment of different groups of people on the grounds of specific characteristics, such as their racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, gender or sexual orientation, or other form of identity. While everyone has the right to be treated equally, regardless of their identity or status, many people are unable to enjoy these rights. The 2023 Eurobarometer survey shows that over half of respondents see discrimination as a widespread issue in their country, with 21% of them also reporting feeling discriminated against or experiencing harassment in the past year.<sup>1</sup>

Research has found that worldwide, people living with a disability are more likely to hold lower-status jobs and positions, with fewer career and training opportunities.<sup>2</sup> The EU Parliament recognises that those living with a disability are among the most disadvantaged groups for employment<sup>3</sup> with an unemployment rate of 17.1% in Europe compared to 10.2% for the rest of the European population.

### **Unconscious bias and discrimination**

Discrimination can also take more subtle and unconscious forms. Unconscious bias refers to prejudice for or against a person or group which can influence how we judge or act toward them. In Switzerland, this type of bias accounts for why 35% of migrants feel discriminated against due to their language or accent.<sup>4</sup>

**One interviewee explained that in France, ‘even just your name results in a different success rate in terms of employers calling you back for an interview’. Research confirms this, as people with North African-sounding names have a 31.5% less chance of being contacted for an interview than the rest of the population.<sup>5</sup>**

LGBTQIA+ groups continue to face discrimination, with members of this community feeling compelled to hide their identity at work out of fear of persecution. In countries like Poland, which ranks as the worst EU country for LGBTQIA+ people to live in,<sup>6</sup> hostile regulations and organisational policies exacerbate the issue.

The number of LGBTQ+ people who have experienced hate-motivated violence, including physical and sexual attacks, has increased from 11% in 2019 to 14% in 2023.<sup>7</sup>

The experience of the LGBTQIA+ population illustrates how discrimination leaks into employing organisations and educational institutions.

### **Psychological impact**

Patterns of discrimination pose not only direct consequences to accessing the job market but can also reinforce self-imposed stigmas and lead to or worsen mental health challenges. Intergenerational transmission of poverty can be influenced by psychological factors such as low self-esteem, mistrust, frustration, trauma, lack of hope and planning, as well as socio-cultural factors.<sup>8</sup>

### **Taxonomy**

Language choices can serve to reinforce discrimination, with labels such as ‘BAME’ (Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic) and ‘NEET’ (Not in Education, Employment or Training) entrenching negative stigmas. Similarly, the tagging of people as a problem or issue — such as ‘at-risk’ youth or ‘homeless’ people — can negatively objectify and dehumanise the individuals involved.

### **Taking a holistic approach to understanding social inequalities and injustices**

#### **Social inequalities and injustices are multidimensional and interconnected**

The EU Multidimensional Inequality Monitoring Framework<sup>9</sup> provides a useful way of understanding the multidimensional nature of inequalities. The framework identifies inequalities across 10 domains: knowledge and skills; health; material living conditions; natural and environmental conditions; working life; cultural life and recreation; political participation and voice; social and family life; bodily integrity and safety; and overall life experience. These domains are interlocking, meaning inequalities in one area, such as knowledge and skills, will impact on inequalities in other domains, such as someone’s health and working life. Thus, it is essential that inequalities are treated in an interconnected way to understand their full force.

Together, inequalities impose restrictions on social mobility that persist for generations, making it difficult for some groups to advance their social and economic status through education and/or employment. For example, young people disconnected from employment and learning risk being permanently shut out of the labour market as they get older.

### **It takes nearly five generations for someone from a low-income family to break out of poverty, according to the OECD.<sup>10</sup>**

Those experiencing social injustices will not only be affected by lower incomes, but, at the same time, are also likely to experience lower educational, health and housing outcomes, which may be further disadvantaged through intersection with other inequalities such as gender, ethnicity and physical identity. Thus, the experience of ethnic minorities in Europe is characterised by poor access to high-quality education, mental health services and cultural integration, as one example of the multidimensional nature of injustice.

### **Inequalities start early and only widen with time**

Any inequalities experienced in education and skill level will persist for young people once they reach working age. Data from Eurostat<sup>11</sup> indicates that the EU ‘at risk of poverty’ rate for young people aged 15–29 years, at 24.5 % in 2022, is almost 3% higher than that of the general adult population. Since this figure is more likely to reflect the opportunities made available to young people rather than their personal life choices, the higher poverty rate is a good indicator that unequal opportunities exist from an early age.

### **Failure to recognise the qualifications of migrant groups increases inequality**

In 2019, up to 48% of highly skilled migrants worked in low- or medium-skilled jobs, compared with just 20% of EU citizens.<sup>12</sup> This reflects the struggle for migrant groups to have their skills and qualifications recognised in a foreign country. A recommendation for greater employer recognition of qualifications was promoted as an initiative in the EU President’s 2022 State of the Union speech but has not yet been implemented.

### **Multidimensional barriers and discriminatory practices**

Barriers to accessing employment opportunities may include lack of support through social networks, and lack of knowledge about rights and entitlements, as much as any specific formal education or training gaps. This in part explains why, for example, Traveller communities in Ireland are 10 times more likely to experience discrimination when looking for work and 22 times more likely to encounter difficulties when accessing services in the private sector than those who identify as ‘White Irish’.<sup>13</sup>

### **Gaps in policy**

#### **Lack of independence and recognition of women.**

While the gender gap in employment in the EU halved between 1992 and 2014 from 21.6% to just below 10%<sup>14</sup> significant differences still remain in access to certain types of employment, including senior positions and equal pay. For example, only 31.5% of managers in the EU are women, and women are still more likely than men to be employed in lower-paid occupations.

## 2 Social inequalities and injustices across eight European countries

### France

#### Groups identified as experiencing social inequalities and injustices

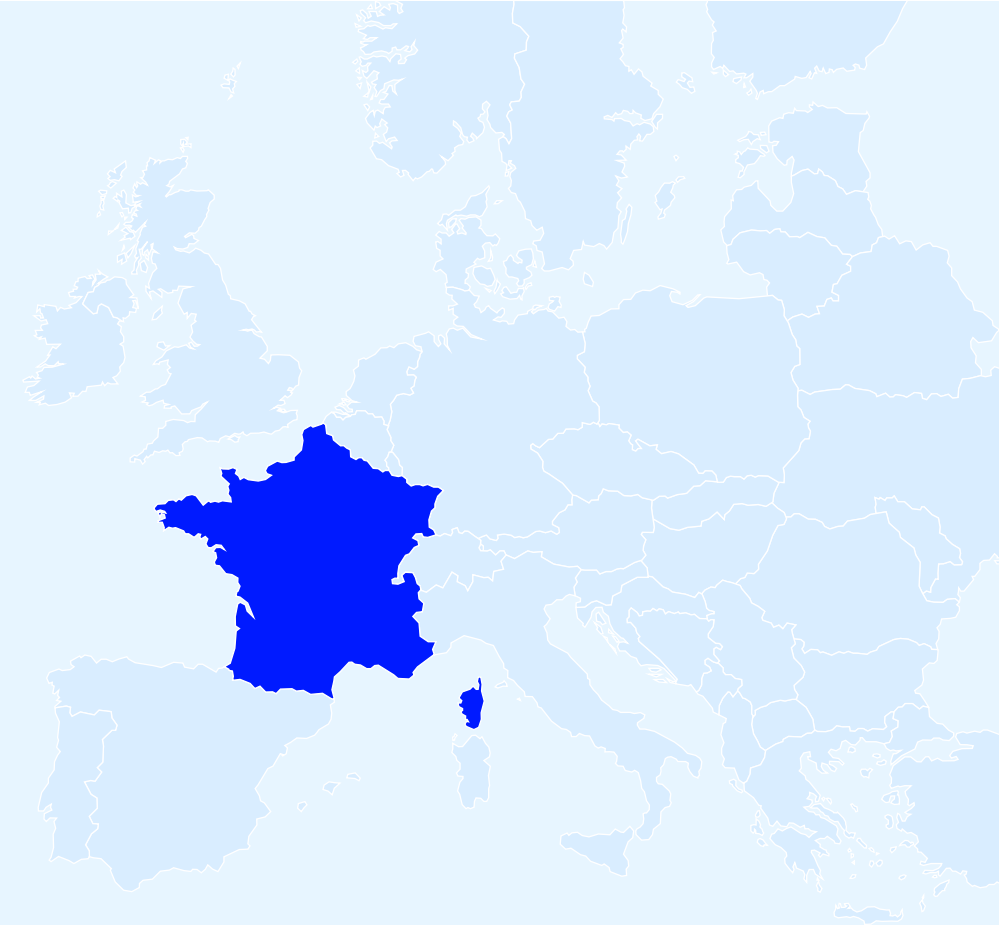
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- Migrant groups
- People living in low-income neighbourhoods
- People living with a disability
- Workers above the age of 50

#### Key drivers of social inequalities and injustices

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- Urban segregation, lack of social inclusion and unequal access to public services
- Discrimination and unconscious bias



### **Migrant groups**

This statistic reflects the additional challenges faced by people with a non-French background to secure quality employment and education, which are then transmitted from one generation to another. Second and third generations of migrants from Maghreb regions, for example, report lower-than-average educational attainment.<sup>15</sup> Recruitment practices themselves, such as the use of photographs on curriculum vitae (CVs), facilitate bias or discrimination, affecting employment decisions.

The lack of recognition of foreign qualifications and certificates also makes it harder for refugees and migrants to attain employment and education matching their competencies.

**In France, people with North African-sounding names have a 31.5% less chance of being contacted for an interview than the rest of the population.<sup>16</sup>**

### **People living in low-income neighbourhoods**

Housing divides also drive inequalities in France. The so-called 'cité' and 'banlieues' in the outskirts of cities create conglomerates of poverty, with people earning low incomes and living under poor conditions such as limited access to public services and unsanitary housing. The ways in which migrants have been historically placed in the city outskirts also make it hard for them to fully integrate to society given the physical and cultural barriers experienced. This social segregation further reinforces stigmas and perpetuates cycles of poverty, resulting in lower educational achievement and young people being three times more likely to be unemployed.<sup>17</sup>

### **People living with a disability**

People living with a disability are likely to face extra hurdles to secure employment, mainly related to discriminatory behaviours and deeply rooted negative bias.

**The unemployment rate for people with a disability is two times higher than the national average.<sup>18</sup>**

A lack of representation of people living with a disability continues to feed this cycle across society, especially in leadership positions, as well as reinforce stigma associated with disabilities.

### **Workers above the age of 50**

Research suggests that in France, age is a barrier to employment for older workers. Biased behaviours against older workers make it particularly challenging for those above the age of 50 or even sometimes for those in their mid-40s to secure a job or change career paths. 48% of senior executive workers report finding a job within six months, yet these numbers drop to 29% for senior executives over 55 years old.<sup>19</sup>

**23% of the respondents to a survey reported being qualified as too old for the role during a recruitment process, regardless of regulations in place to protect older workers against discrimination.<sup>20</sup>**

## Germany

### Groups identified as experiencing social inequalities and injustices

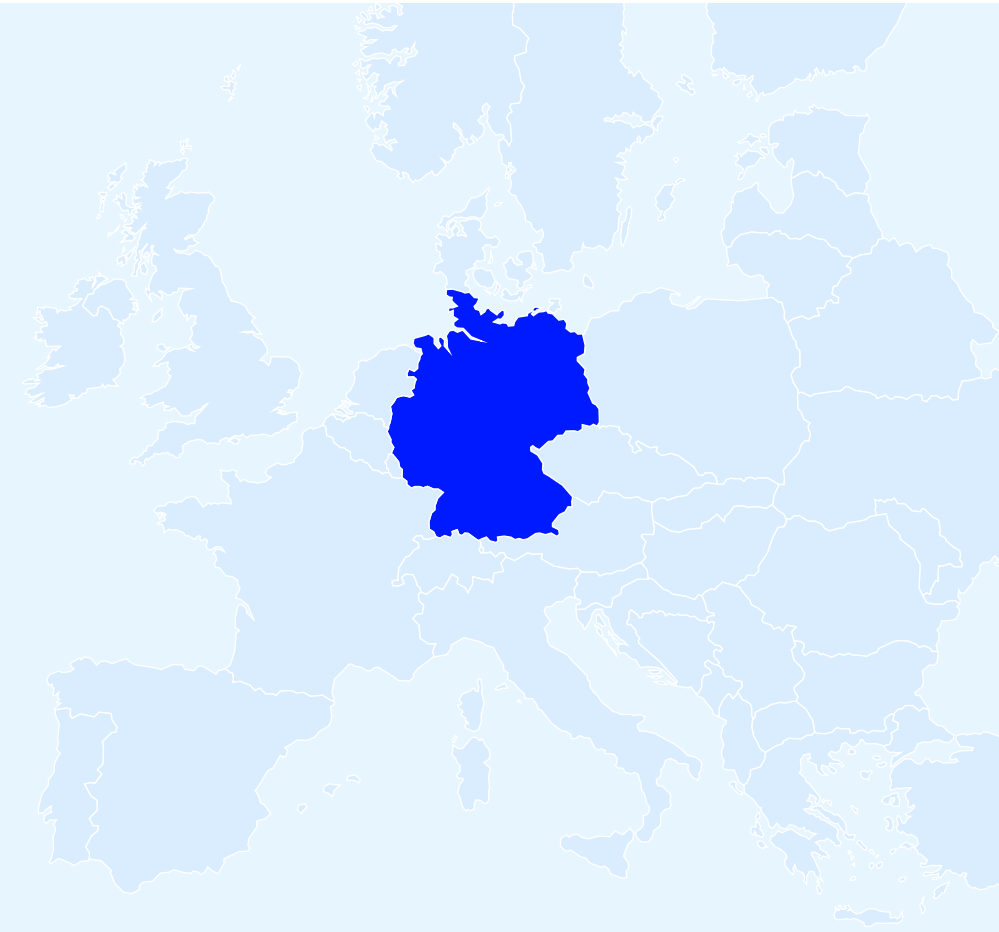
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- Refugees and asylum seekers
- Ethnic minorities, including Turkish-German population
- People from low socioeconomic background

### Key drivers of social inequalities and injustices

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- Discrimination and unconscious bias
- Language barriers to adapting in workplaces
- Educational system early cut-off





### Refugees and asylum seekers

Germany receives the highest number of refugees in Europe<sup>21</sup> with about 2.2 million refugees<sup>22</sup> living in the country, including recent influxes from Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq and Ukraine. Refugees and asylum seekers face various additional challenges settling in German communities. Local language barriers get in the way of connecting with locals and building social and professional connections, limiting opportunities related to education and employment. The lack of recognition of refugees' diplomas from their home countries is also a significant issue resulting in underemployment of highly qualified and competent refugees.

### Ethnic minorities

The Turkish-German population is the largest migrant population group in Germany, with a diaspora that has been settled in the country since 1950. Yet, evidence suggests that a Turkish-sounding name reduces one's chances of being hired and that there is a lower representation of Turkish people in high-income positions.<sup>23</sup>

**More than 1 in 4 inhabitants in Germany are first or second-generation immigrants.<sup>24</sup>**

### People from low socioeconomic background

The German education system presents barriers to achieving high-quality education and employment for those from low socioeconomic background. The practice whereby children are separated into different streams at 10 years of age based on their grades and performance leads to disparities in skills and competencies that is difficult to catch up on.<sup>25</sup> Those with the lowest socioeconomic background tend to have less support at home and limited access to external support such as private tuition or extra-curricular activities, creating an imbalance of opportunities that continues to grow with age.



# Ireland

## Groups identified as experiencing social inequalities and injustices

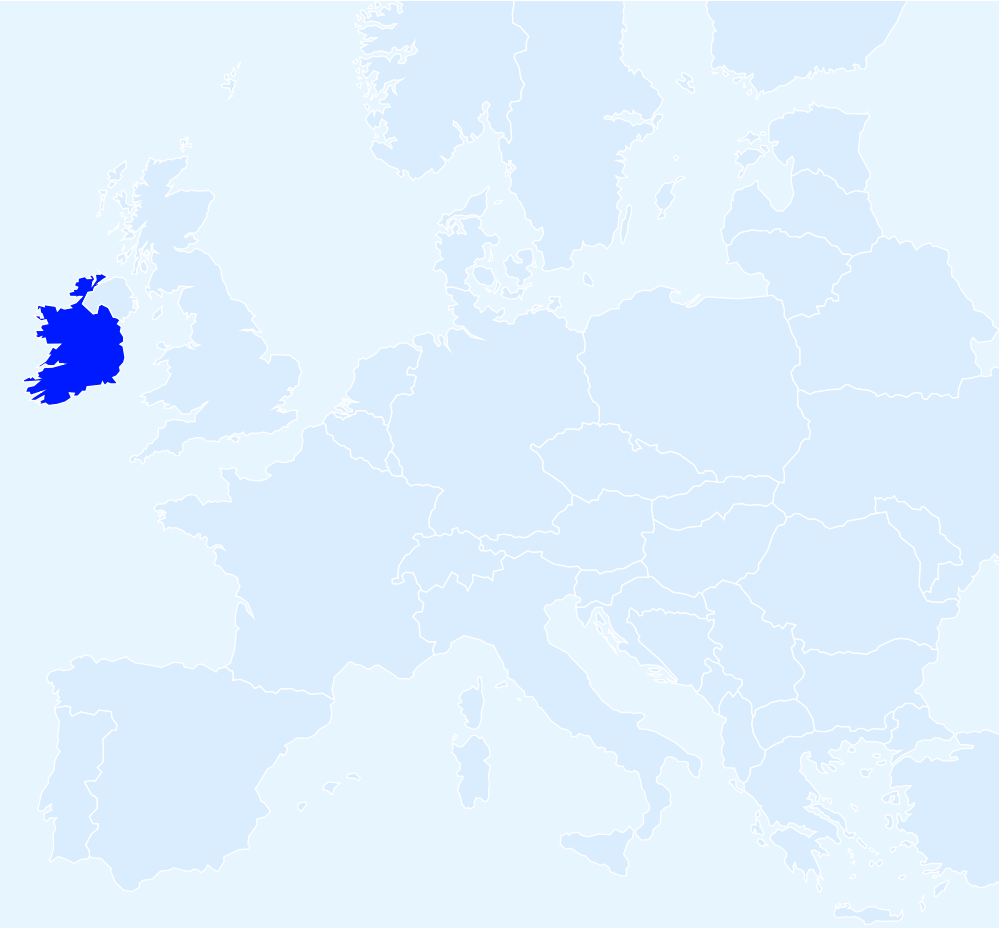
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- Traveller communities
- Migrant groups
- People experiencing homelessness

## Key drivers of social inequalities and injustices

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- Cost of living and housing crisis
- Skills for employment
- Educational attainment inequity





### Traveller communities

In addition to having limited access to financial, public and social resources, Traveller communities report feeling more isolated and face higher rates of mental health issues.

This results in lower chances of accessing, securing and succeeding in quality education and employment.

**In Ireland, those from Traveller communities are 10 times more likely to experience discrimination while looking for a job than ‘White Irish.’<sup>26</sup>**

### Migrant group

Migrants in Ireland are more likely to experience poverty and achieve lower education levels and poorer health outcomes. With a 15% less chance of employment<sup>27</sup> they face additional barriers to employment, including discrimination based on stigma and negative prejudices.

**Black non-Irish people are five times more likely to face discrimination while accessing employment than the rest of the population.<sup>28</sup>**

### People experiencing homelessness

High unemployment in disadvantaged neighbourhoods,<sup>29</sup> increases in housing prices and reduced provision of social housing from the state are responsible for a shortage of available and affordable housing, increasing the risk of the poorest to lose their homes.

People from the Traveller communities, non-EU migrants and those living with a disability are most at-risk.

**A 30% increase in the rate of homelessness in the last two years has reached the highest recorded number of people experiencing homelessness.<sup>30</sup>**



# Italy

## Groups identified as experiencing social inequalities and injustices

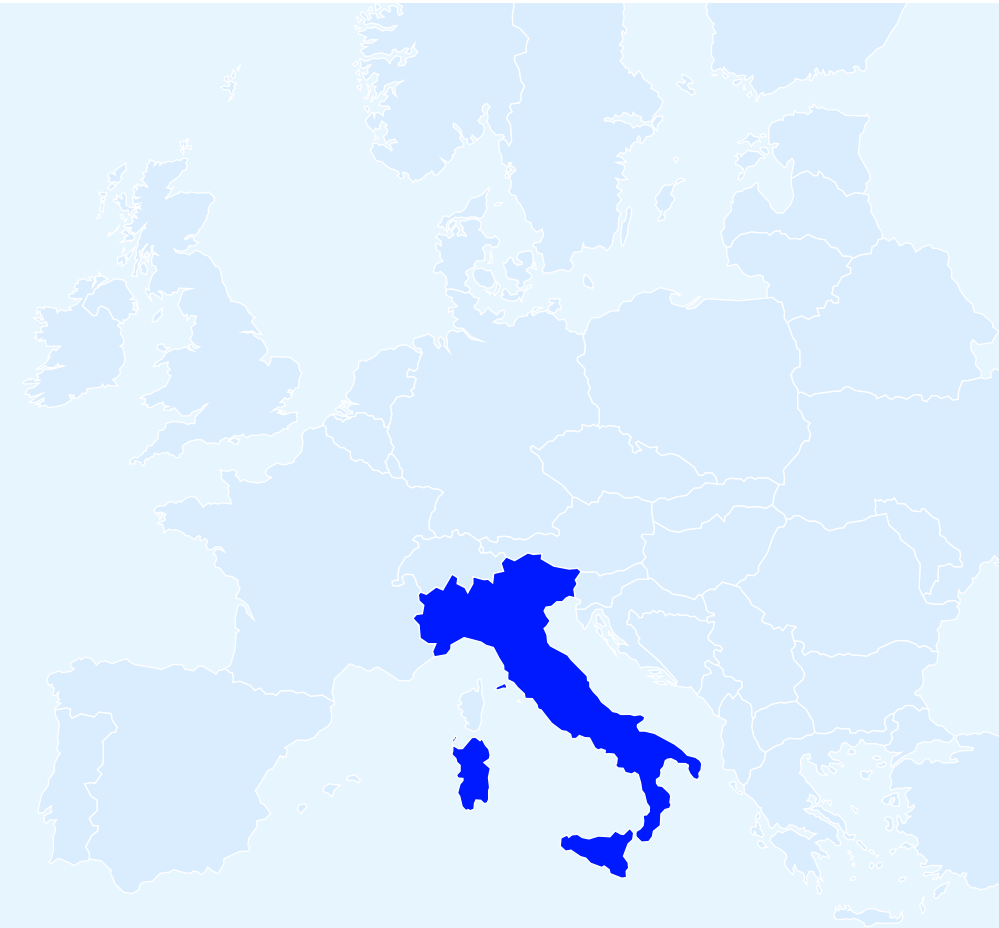
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- Non-EU migrants and refugees
- Young people below the age of 25
- Women
- Traveller communities

## Key drivers of social inequalities and injustices

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- Discrimination
- Hostile economic context
- Labour exploitation and high level of informal work
- Lack of support for women



### Non-EU migrants and refugees

Non-European migrants and refugees are more likely to face social injustices and inequalities in education and employment. Discrimination and negative unconscious bias create additional barriers for securing high-quality jobs and leadership positions.

Migrants are also more vulnerable to labour exploitation, reported as a growing issue in the country, due to their limited access to social and financial resources and opportunities to access formal employment or education.

**Only 0.9% of foreigners employed reached manager or executive roles, compared with 7.6% of Italians.**<sup>31</sup>

### Young people below the age of 25

For the first time since the beginning of the twentieth century, individuals between the ages of 25 and 40 are projected to have lower economic success than their parents, despite being the most educated generation. It is estimated that 70% of Italian workers are overqualified for the jobs they hold.<sup>32</sup>

**13% of people in employment live below the poverty line.**<sup>33</sup>

### Women

Women face significant challenges accessing employment opportunities in Italy. While political representation for women has increased after decades of inequality, the obstacles to women's access to power still outweigh any opportunities, with women continuing to be under-represented in leadership and managerial roles in the workplace.<sup>34</sup>

**Italy has the lowest employment rate in Europe for women, with only 51% of women being formally employed.**<sup>35</sup>

These disparities are even stronger in the southern region of the country, where the female employment rate stands at 32.3%.<sup>36</sup> Causes include gendered cultural norms and a lack of childcare support.

### Roma Community

The more than 120,000 people identifying as Roma in Italy are not officially recognised as Italian citizens by the government, limiting their access to education, employment and public services.<sup>37</sup>

**83% of Italians reported negative views about the Roma community, representing the strongest anti-Roma sentiment expressed across Europe.**<sup>38</sup>

Statelessness is also a key issue for Italy's Roma population, particularly for those who arrived as refugees during the conflicts of the 1990's in former Yugoslavia. Numbers are uncertain. In 2008, an Italian faith-based charitable organization estimated that between 10-15,000 Roma in Italy are stateless. At this point, they may belong to the second or third generation, and simply never had the chance to acquire Italian citizenship or regularise their stay."<sup>39</sup>

**Despite the 482/1999 Law that protects linguistic minorities, the Roma community is not officially recognized, limiting the exercise of some political and cultural rights...**

# Luxembourg

## Groups identified as experiencing social inequalities and injustices

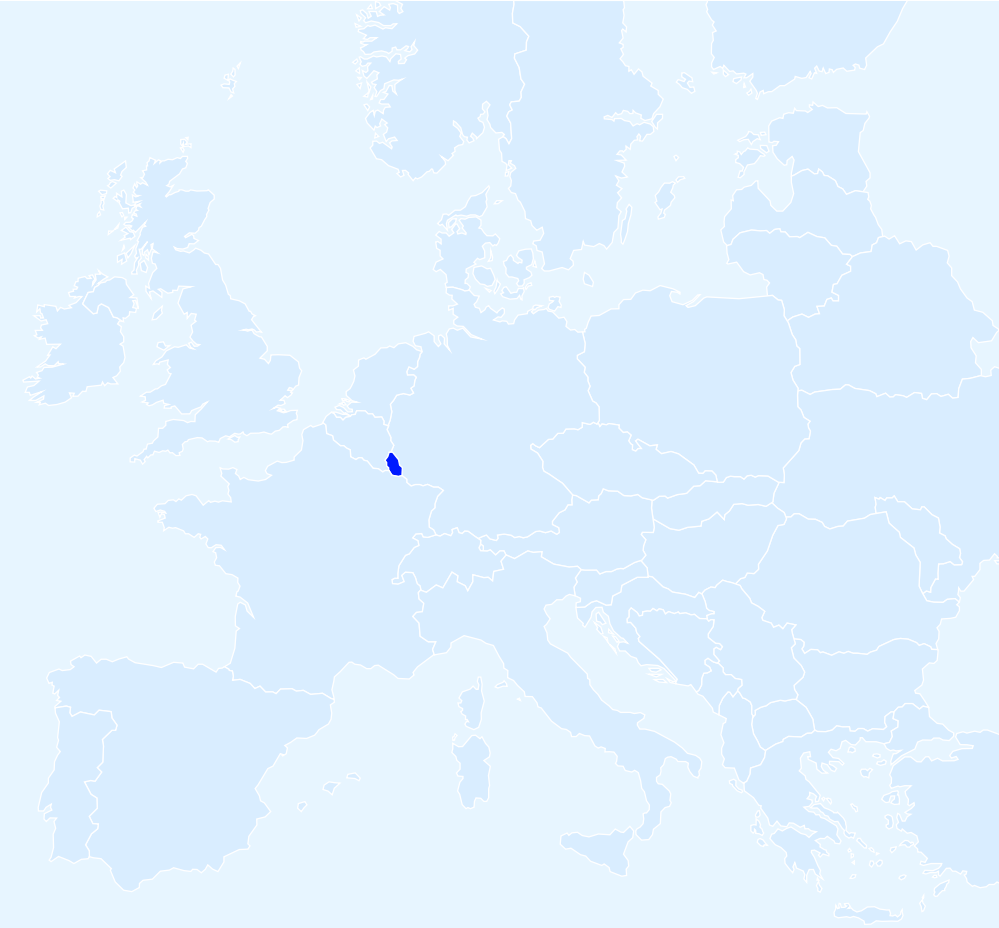
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- Low-income households
- Non-EU migrants
- People of colour

## Key drivers of social inequalities and injustices

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- Discrimination and unconscious bias
- Housing costs and access to health care





### Low-income households

Social mobility is low in Luxembourg, with low-income households having limited opportunities to secure high-quality education and jobs. This accounts for the transmission of poverty from one generation to the next. Young people's socioeconomic background is linked to their performance in schools and university.

In addition, the country is experiencing a rise of in-work poverty for low-skilled workers, placing those with lower educational attainment at greater risk of experiencing poverty even when they are working. This also coincides with an increase in the children's poverty rate. With limited support, poverty affects 40% of single parents.<sup>40</sup>

**13% of workers are at risk of poverty in Luxembourg.**<sup>41</sup>

### Non-EU migrants

Non-EU migrants find it challenging to assimilate in Luxembourg, especially when they do not speak at least two of the three official languages (German, French and Luxembourgish). Children in school are also affected, which reflects on their educational performance and, later on, access to high-quality job opportunities.

A rise of racial hatred on social media<sup>42</sup> targeting refugees and asylum seekers also fuels social stigma and discriminatory behaviours, ultimately making it more challenging to secure high-quality education and employment. As a result, non-EU migrants are overrepresented in low-skilled roles and are among the poorest members of society.

**The risk to be unemployed for non-EU migrants is three times higher.**<sup>43</sup>

### People of colour

Discrimination based on skin colour, personal beliefs and ethnicity prevails in Luxembourg, affecting one's chances of succeeding in school, securing a job and/or progressing in a career.

Ultimately, this results in people of colour being more likely to work in low-skilled jobs, associated with lower incomes and progression opportunities.

**50% of African descendants reported feeling racially discriminated against over the past 12 months.**<sup>44</sup>

# Poland

## Groups identified as experiencing social inequalities and injustices

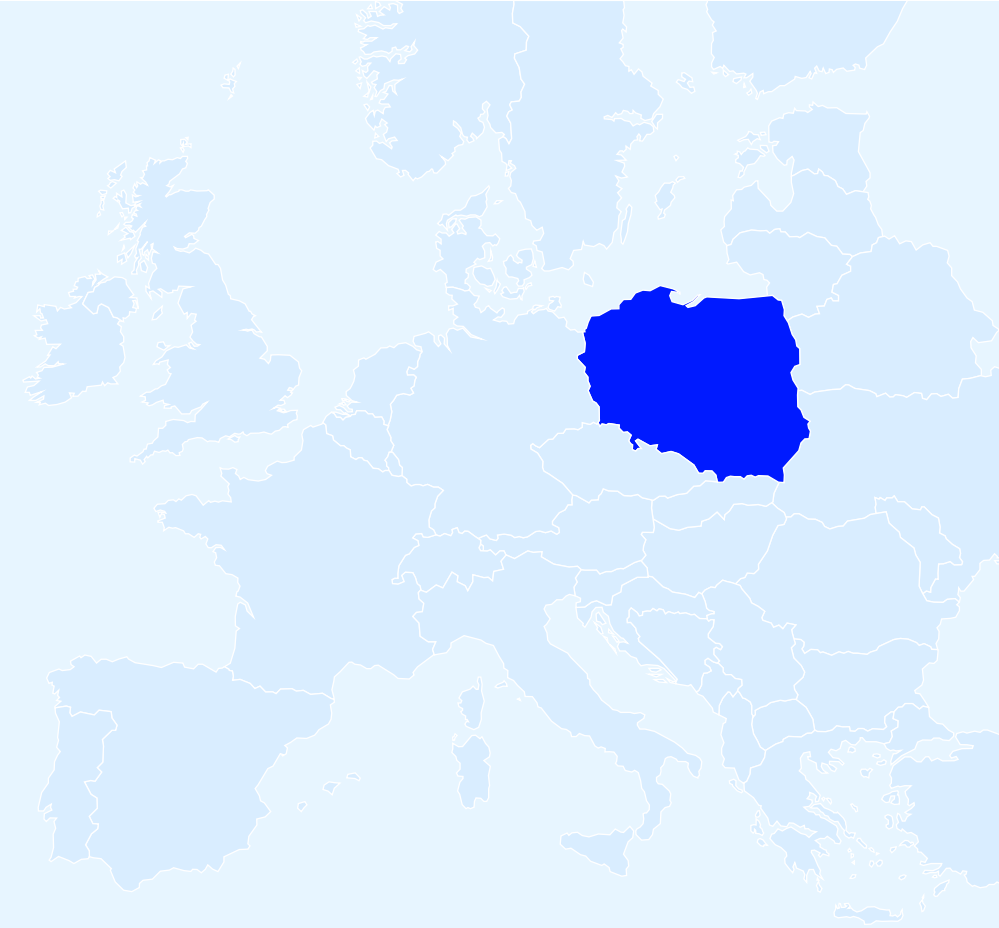
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- People who identify as LGBTIQ+
- People living with a disability
- Refugees and migrants
- Low-skilled workers

## Key drivers of social inequalities and injustices

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- Low-paid jobs and temporary employment, i.e., in-work poverty
- Low training opportunities outside of schools
- Discrimination and unconscious bias



## LGBTQIA+

Poland ranks as the worst EU country for people who identify as LGBTQIA+.<sup>45</sup> Hostility toward the LGBTQIA+ community has been prominent across the country over the past decade. Indeed, at one point, one-third of the country lived under local administrations condemning the LGBTQIA+ community, while in 2023, 79 Polish administrative units still declared themselves so-called “LGBT-free zones.”<sup>46</sup>

This creates fertile ground for discrimination, including in education and the workplace, affecting the career prospects of those identifying as LGBTQIA+ and weighing on their mental health.

**71% of LGBTQA people surveyed reported hiding their identity at work out of fear.**<sup>47</sup>

## Low-skilled workers

**9% of the Polish population could experience in-work poverty.**<sup>48</sup>

Low pay, coupled with limited learning and training opportunities, trap people in low-skilled employment. This is a growing issue as these jobs are threatened by automation, with 31% of Polish workers at high risk of seeing their job automated.<sup>49</sup> Adults have limited training opportunities, which makes it harder for those in low-skilled jobs to upskill themselves to secure higher paying positions. Only one in four adults reported participating in any form of training over the past year, while the EU average stands at one in two.<sup>50</sup>

## Refugees

Non-Ukrainian refugees frequently face discriminatory practices and hostility in Poland. Those coming from Belorussia are particularly subject to persistent historical and cultural stigma. For Ukrainian refugees, which number nearly 1 million in Poland, the biggest issue is underemployment as refugees were quickly absorbed by the Polish job market.<sup>51</sup> Yet, they take on jobs that do not match their level of competencies and qualifications, meaning that they tend to be underemployed with lower income and career opportunities as a result.

## People living with a disability

People living with a disability are only marginally included within the Polish job market, which has one of the largest disability employment gaps in Europe. Negative stigma and bias, the lack of inclusive infrastructure, policies and work/study environments, and insufficient support all fuel these inequalities.<sup>52</sup>

**40% of those living with a disability are employed, down to 22% with a severe disability.**<sup>53</sup>

# Switzerland

## Groups identified as experiencing social inequalities and injustices

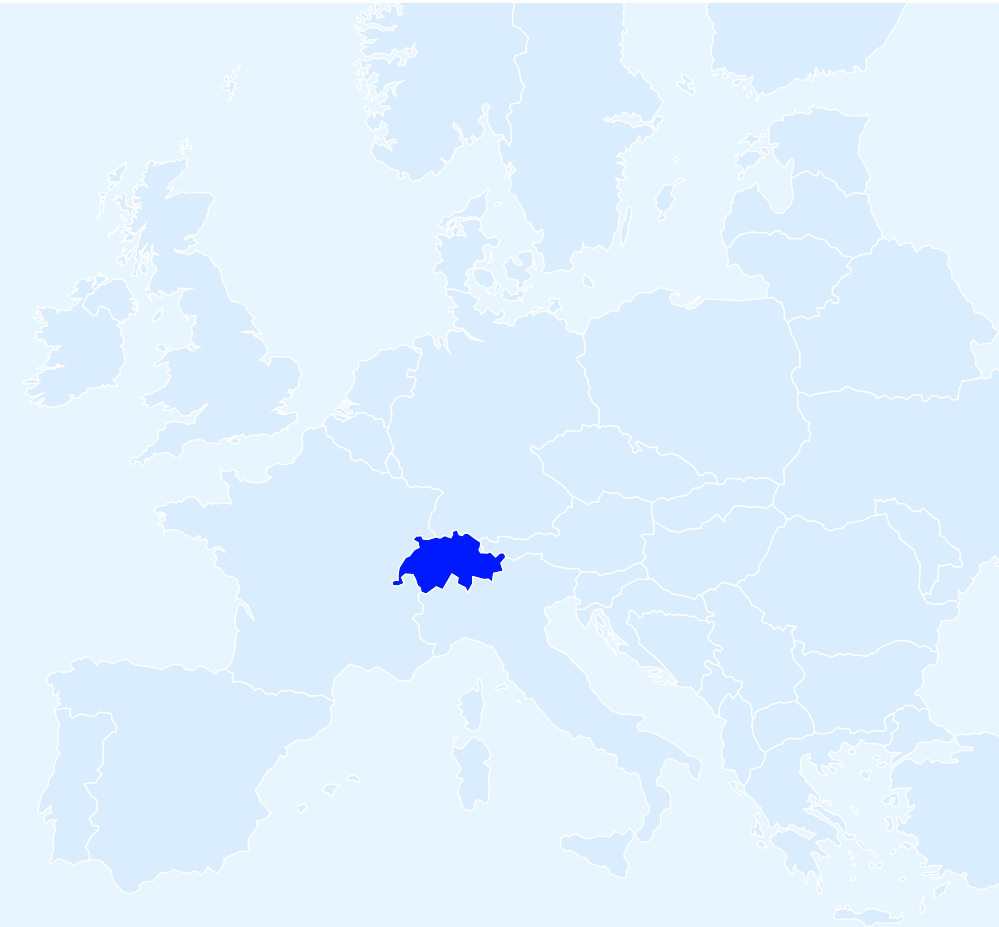
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- Migrant group
- People of colour
- People from low socioeconomic backgrounds
- Women

## Key drivers of social inequalities and injustices

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- Low social mobility
- Discrimination and unconscious bias
- Access to public administration roles



### **Migrant groups**

Discrimination against people based on their origin is common in Switzerland, with people reporting feeling discriminated against based on their nationality and/or accent, including in the workplace.

**Swiss citizens with a foreign background send on average 30% more applications to get an interview.<sup>54</sup>**

### **People of colour**

Racial profiling is not uncommon in Switzerland.<sup>55</sup> Including photographs and other personal details on CVs and job applications is common practice in Switzerland and facilitates biased decision-making in recruitment.

### **People from low socioeconomic background**

In Switzerland, great wealth disparities within the population result in access to different education and employment opportunities.

**The wealthiest 10% of the population hold 63% of all capital, while the poorest half owns 4% of the nation's wealth.<sup>56</sup>**

Those with low financial resources struggle to pay for early education and care for young children, which sets out learning disparities early on. The poorest non-German speaking households are particularly affected by this issue as children start kindergarten without being fluent in one of the learning languages.

### **Women**

Despite recent progress in women's representation in the workforce, women remain greatly underrepresented in leadership and managerial positions. Overall, gendered cultural norms result in women taking on more unpaid domestic chores and childcare, which continues to hinder their career progression.

**In 2022, women held 26% of top management positions in Switzerland.<sup>57</sup>**



# United Kingdom

## Groups identified as experiencing social inequalities and injustices

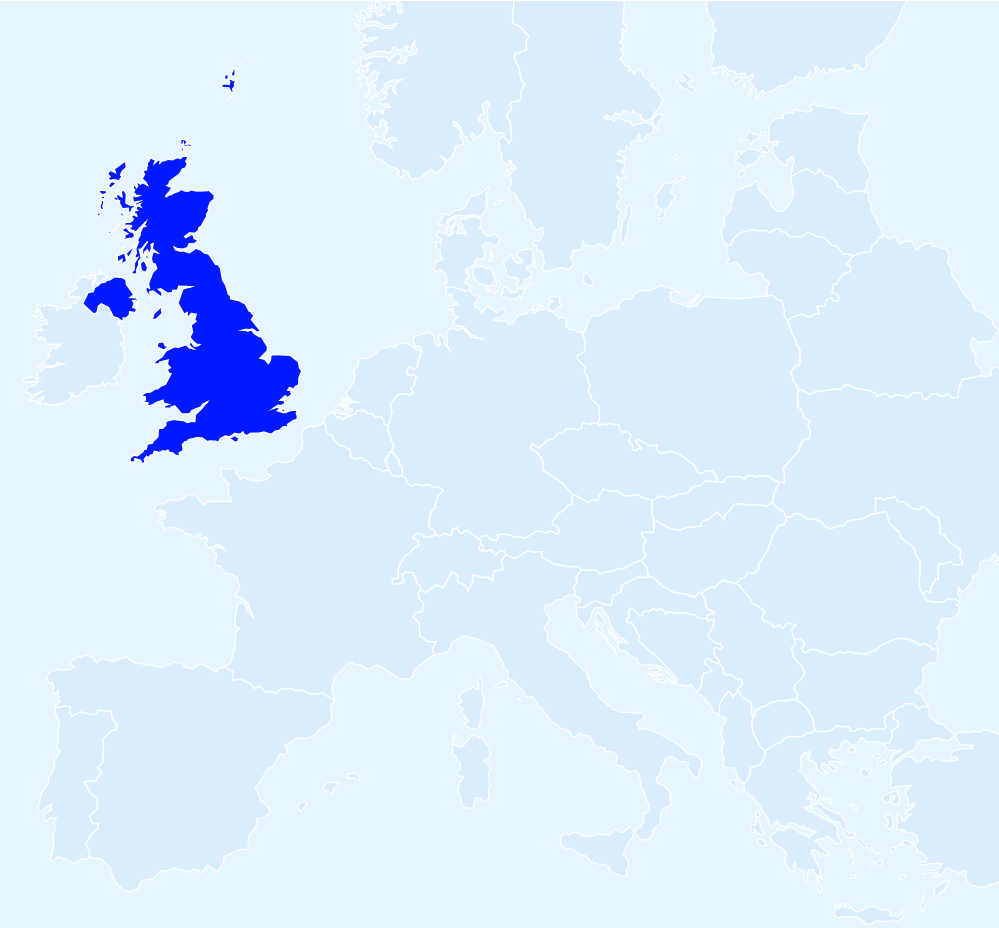
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- People of colour
- Migrants and asylum seekers
- People living with a disability
- People from low socioeconomic background

## Key drivers of social inequalities and injustices

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- Discrimination and unconscious bias
- Attrition of public services





### People of colour

In the UK, the Equality and Human Rights Commission was established in 2006 to ensure that all people are treated fairly, yet the reality for people of colour is different. Social injustices start early with lower educational attainment for these communities, which cascades into lower chances of securing quality employment later down the line. A lack of ethnically diverse positive role models also makes it harder for young people to aspire to success.<sup>58</sup>

**People of colour hold 6% of the top management positions despite representing more than 14% of the working population.<sup>59</sup>**

### People from low socioeconomic background

The poorest residents of the UK are most affected by the tough economic context and the cost-of-living crisis as they see their financial resources further constrained. With access to financial resources comes access to additional education support, extra-curricular activities, social networks, and other advantages that are unavailable to the poorest and further widen inequalities.

**Children of the wealthiest households are four times more likely to reach higher levels of education.<sup>60</sup>**

### Migrants and refugees

Migrants and refugees rely more on job centres and public agencies to search for jobs, and are reported to have lower 'job-finding' rates.<sup>61</sup> Discrimination based on negative bias makes it harder to secure employment, but they also face additional obstacles related to language proficiency, administrative burdens and a lack of recognition of foreign qualifications.

**51% of asylum seekers are employed compared with 73% for UK-born citizens.<sup>62</sup>**

### People living with a disability

Despite increased representation in higher education and employment, people living with a disability still experience inequalities. Negative stigmas, unfit working environments and the lack of more inclusive physical infrastructure continue to create extra challenges to succeed in education and employment.

**People living with a disability are more than twice as likely to be unemployed as people not living with a disability.<sup>63</sup>**



# Actions to address social inequalities

### Early intervention

Early intervention investments in quality education, affordable housing and health care support can be an effective way to help ensure that all children are able to start from the same place, with similar life chances to secure future jobs. The intersection of vulnerabilities at a young age provides an opportunity for successful interventions to contain inequalities through education and training toward future employment.

### Social mobility

Interventions designed to increase social mobility include mentorship programmes, financial literacy training, improved access to quality education and health care, and campaigns to raise awareness of multidimensional inequalities.

### Protecting people's rights

The EU is committed to the use of 'effective and properly enforced laws' to fight against discrimination and safeguard equal opportunities for all across Europe (EU 2017).<sup>64</sup> In response to evidence that only a third of EU citizens were aware that they are legally protected against any kind of discrimination,<sup>65</sup> the EU has increased awareness-raising initiatives including increased training and support for organisations promoting equality.

### Inclusive practices

More internal organisational policies promoting inclusive practices, which recognise and embrace people's differences, are needed to foster safe working/study spaces and the recruitment and retention of diverse talent pools. Organisations should also be encouraged to adopt inclusive HR policies, with appropriate grievance redressal mechanisms. Employer education workshops and mandatory training sessions on unconscious bias and discrimination could help employees better understand these issues and foster more positive work environments.

### Fair recruitment practices

Changes to unfair recruitment practices, such as removing the use of photographs in CVs, can help limit the influence of bias in the recruitment process, based on irrelevant characteristics such as skin colour, age or gender.

### Promoting connection and support

Promoting cultural belonging and connection, greater education and awareness of unconscious bias, and mental health and self-esteem support can help communities facing greatest exclusion overcome psychological factors linked to discrimination.

### Positive taxonomy

Avoiding negative tags and acronyms when referencing specific groups of people can help to reduce biases and avoid further replicating pejorative terms. This is best illustrated through the use of more strengths-based language, which has been evident in the rise of asset-based approaches over the last decade in the field of health care<sup>66</sup> and in the growth of the 'Advantaged Thinking' movement among youth charities in the UK, Ireland and France.<sup>67</sup>

**...[what?] it is now more common in the UK for references to the BAME community to be replaced with more culturally sensitive language, such as in the guidance from the UK Government's Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities to 'refer to ethnic minority groups individually, rather than as a single group.'**<sup>68</sup>

### **Safe and healthy learning environments for all**

Early intervention work focused on access to quality education, affordable housing and immediate health care support can contain inequalities and level the playing field for those with fewer advantages from a young age. Investment across the areas of education, housing and health care can help increase future social mobility rates for targeted groups. For example, improved access to school and childcare support can eradicate one of the primary markers of inequality.<sup>69</sup> For housing access, rental subsidies can make it easier for low-income individuals and families to afford adequate housing, further impacting inequality rates. Health care support should also be promoted as a fundamental right for all groups and include greater consideration for mental well-being needs, particularly since mental health outcomes have worsened dramatically post COVID-19.<sup>70</sup>

### **Improved training opportunities and recognition of qualifications**

Developing and scaling training opportunities matching the skill gaps of different communities and groups is essential to unlock educational and employment opportunities. Factors that influence greater social inclusion include proficiency in the language of a host country for migrants

and refugees, for example, to aid access to key services and opportunities. Cultural awareness and the ability to adapt to new environments are crucial competencies for success and should be addressed through appropriate training.

### **Policies to promote greater independence and recognition of women**

Targeted policies to address gender equity, such as more concrete support for childbearing, can enable women to progress their careers and improve their representation in leadership and high-income positions.

### **Policies to encourage 'Levelling Up'**

Initiatives aimed at redistributing access to wealth and opportunities can help to address structural inequalities. As a policy agenda, 'Levelling up' was popularised by the UK government under conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson in 2019 to promote the need to create greater equity between geographical regions. Typical examples included helping communities save local assets such as parks or other community features; regenerating town centres and high streets; investing in cultural and heritage assets; and upgrading local transport. While the initiative has been widely dismissed as a gimmick,<sup>71</sup> its intent to achieve greater social equity remains much needed.

### **Taking a holistic and grassroots approach**

A holistic approach requires understanding that inequalities and vulnerabilities are interconnected. Encouraging collaborations between grant holders, charities and other key stakeholders will enhance positive impact across social injustices. This includes encouraging grassroots interventions to empower people and communities, recognising that grassroots organisations benefit from an in-depth understanding of the local context, and can thus offer more bespoke high-impact approaches to address root causes.

The research affirms that access to employment and education continues to be a challenge due to systemic oppression and discrimination experienced across Europe. Only by addressing wider social needs can funder programmes overcome the barriers to more equitable education and employment outcomes.



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