



Employment and Social Developments in Europe

Increasing single adult households:
implications for poverty and loneliness

October 2025

The Employment and Social Developments Quarterly Review provides an in-depth analysis of recent labour market and social developments. It is prepared in the Directorate “Employment and Social Governance, Analysis” of the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion by the Analysis and Statistics Unit. The main contributors for part I are Sarah Aade and Valerio Fusco. The main contributor for part II is Rafael Martins Resende.

A wide range of information sources were used to produce this report, including Eurostat statistics (from <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/> unless otherwise stated), reports and survey data from the Commission’s Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs as well as EU-LFS scientific use files.

Charts and tables in part I are based on the latest available data as of 11/09/2025 and include among others Eurostat data on national accounts (employment and GDP), the monthly ECB inflation rate, and monthly unemployment for October 2025.

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Introduction

In the second quarter of 2025, the EU real GDP growth slowed to 0.2% quarter-on-quarter (1.6% year-on-year), while euro area inflation eased to 2.0% in August, down slightly from 2.5% in March. For the remainder of the year, GDP growth is projected to hold steady at 1.3%, with inflation expected to remain around 2.1% in the euro area.

On the labour market side, employment increased by 0.1% q-o-q in Q2 2025 and the employment rate reached 76.2% in the same period, moving closer to the 2030 target of 78.0%. Older and female workers drove much of the progress, while the share of low-educated workers in total employment remained stable q-o-q (but declined by 1% y-o-y). Labour productivity grew by 0.9% year-on-year, even though trends varied a lot across EU countries.

Real Gross Disposable Household Income (GDHI) growth decreased in the second quarter of 2025, driven by lower net social benefits and property income. Financial distress in the EU eased slightly in September 2025.

The thematic part provides an overview of single adults without children and their exposure to poverty and loneliness. In the last decade, single adults without children increased by 17%, against a 6% increase in the total number of households. This demographic group is more likely to live at the risk of poverty and feel lonely compared to the overall adult population.

Main economic and social developments

1. Macroeconomic outlook

In the second quarter of 2025, real GDP slowed down significantly. After expanding by 0.6% in Q1, quarterly GDP in the EU rose by just 0.2% (1.6% year-on-year), with Italy (-0.1%), Germany (-0.3%) and Finland (-0.4%) registering negative growth, while Denmark outperformed other EU countries (+1.3%). The slowdown was mainly driven by a sharp drop in gross fixed capital formation¹ (-0.4 pp) and a decrease in net exports (-0.2 pp), which outweighed the positive impact of private and public consumption (both +0.1 pp) and inventory accumulation (+0.5 pp).² These developments reflect the prevailing challenging global context. On a quarterly basis, EU real GDP growth remained far below that of the US (0.8%) and China (1.1%).³ In addition, the EU Economic Sentiment Indicator declined by 0.3 pp in September compared to August, further signalling weakening confidence.⁴ Real GDP growth is projected to remain modest and at around 0.1% in the third quarter of 2025, increasing up to 0.3% in the last quarter of the year.⁵ In 2026, it is expected to strengthen by 0.4% in the first two quarters, gaining some momentum in the second part of the year (0.5% in both Q3 and Q4), suggesting a return to moderate and sustained economic expansion. Moreover, EU real GDP growth is projected to further close the gap with the US, reaching 1.8% year-on-year in the final quarter of 2026, compared to 1.9% in the US (Chart 1).

Headline inflation is expected to average at 2.1% in 2025 and ease to 1.7% in 2026 in the euro area⁶, remaining close to the ECB's 2% target. In August 2025, euro area inflation stood at 2.0%, down slightly from 2.5% in March⁷, driven by less energy inflation. Underlying price pressures continued to moderate, with easing wage growth and stronger productivity helping to contain unit labour costs. Upstream cost pressures have broadly softened, though food-related input pressures remain elevated. Looking ahead, headline inflation is expected to remain close to 2% through the end of 2025 and to fall below that threshold throughout 2026, with price dynamics shaped by weakening domestic cost pressures and still low global input prices. Recent changes in US trade policy, including higher tariffs on euro area exports, are projected to have only a limited and temporary effect on inflation, with the ECB estimating a cumulative impact of less than 0.2 pp over 2025–2027.⁸

¹ Gross fixed capital formation (nama_10_an6) consists of resident producers' investments, deducting disposals, in fixed assets during a given period. It also includes certain additions to the value of non-produced assets realized by producers or institutional units. Fixed assets are tangible or intangible assets produced as outputs from production processes that are used repeatedly, or continuously, for more than one year.

² Eurostat, GDP and main components [nama_10_gdp].

³ GDP growth rates for China have been extracted from the National Bureau of Statistics of China Preliminary Accounting Results of GDP for the Second Quarter and First Half of 2025.

⁴ Eurostat, Economic Sentiment Indicator [teibs010].

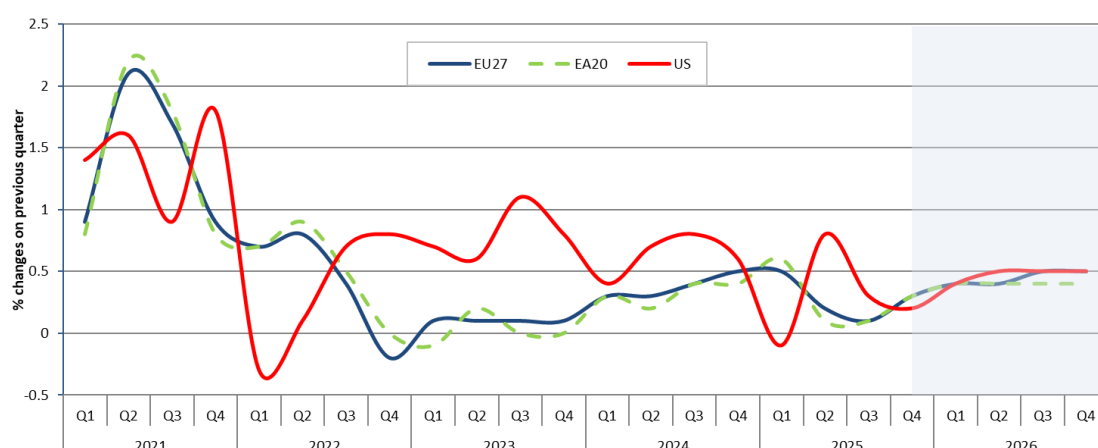
⁵ European Commission, European Economic Forecast. Spring 2025. Projections will be revised by the Commission in Autumn.

⁶ Idem.

⁷ Eurostat, HICP - inflation rate [prc_hicp_aind].

⁸ ECB, Macroeconomic projections September 2025.

Chart 1: Real GDP growth – EU, euro area and US



Source: Eurostat, National Accounts, seasonally and calendar adjusted data [namq_10_gdp, naidq_10_gdp]. European Commission Spring forecast.

Notes: Forecast from 2025 Q3 onwards in the shaded area.

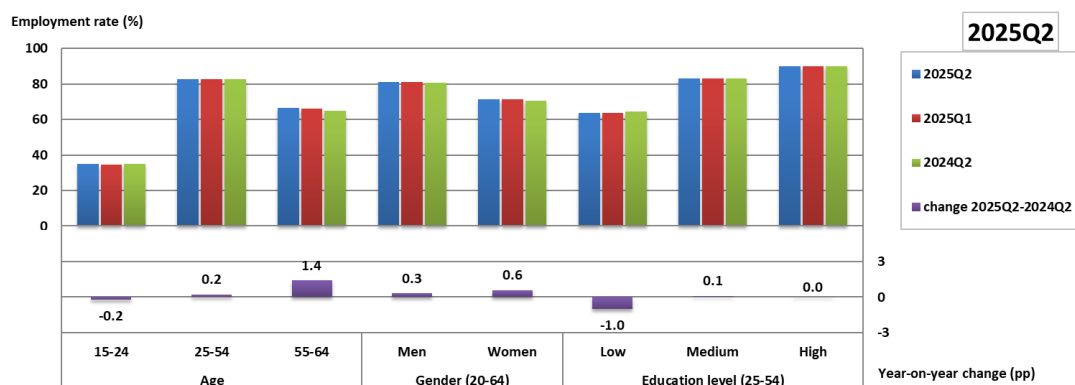
2. Employment

Despite the slowdown in GDP growth, employment remained steady in the second quarter of 2025.

In Q2 2025, 219.9 million people were in employment, compared to 218.9 million a year earlier, an increase of 0.4% y-o-y⁹, the same growth rate recorded q-o-q. Employment grew in construction, wholesale and services, while declining in agriculture and industry.¹⁰

The EU is moving closer to its 2030 employment target, with productivity also improving. The employment rate rose to 76.2%, up by 0.1 pp q-o-q (+0.5 pp y-o-y). This brings the EU closer to its 2030 target of 78.0%, with eight EU countries having already achieved their national objectives.¹¹ Older workers (55-64) accounted for much of the progress, with their rate increasing to 66.5% (+0.4% q-o-q, +1.4% y-o-y). Among young workers (15-24), the employment rate edged up by 0.1 pp q-o-q while for those aged 25-54, it declined by 0.1 pp q-o-q. Women (20-64) also slightly advanced to 71.3% (+0.1 pp q-o-q), narrowing the gender employment gap in Q2 2025 (-0.1 pp q-o-q). Meanwhile, employment among those with lower educational attainment fell by 1 pp y-o-y, highlighting the growing impact of digitalisation, AI and autonomous systems.¹² Labour productivity grew by 0.9% year-on-year, though it decreased by 0.1 pp compared with Q1 2025.¹³ The performance of productivity in the EU maintained a relative advantage over Japan and the US economies in the first half of 2025 (Q1 and Q2). However, differences across EU countries were considerable, with productivity increasing by 14.5% in Ireland and decreasing by 1.8% in Malta (y-o-y).

Chart 2: Employment rate by population group – EU



Source: Eurostat, LFS [lfsi_educ_q]. Data seasonally adjusted.

Note: Age groups are indicated between parentheses for gender and educational level groups. Education levels represent ISCED levels of educational attainment: low stands for ISCED 0-2, medium for ISCED 3-4 and high for ISCED 5-8.

⁹ For total employment, data come from Eurostat, Population and employment, National accounts [namq_10_pe]. Seasonally and calendar adjusted data. For the employment rate, data come from Eurostat, Labour Force Statistics.

¹⁰ Next update coming up in the 2025 Autumn Forecast.

¹¹ The following countries have already reached their national targets: The Netherlands, Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Ireland, Denmark, Poland, Slovakia

¹² OECD (2025), How does educational attainment affect participation in the labour market?: Education at a Glance 2025. The decline in employment among individuals with lower educational attainment can be partly explained by the automation of routine and manual tasks. Digitalisation, AI and autonomous systems tend to substitute for low- and medium-skilled labour while complementing high-skilled occupations, thereby deepening employment polarisation.

¹³ Measured as GDP in constant prices per employed person.

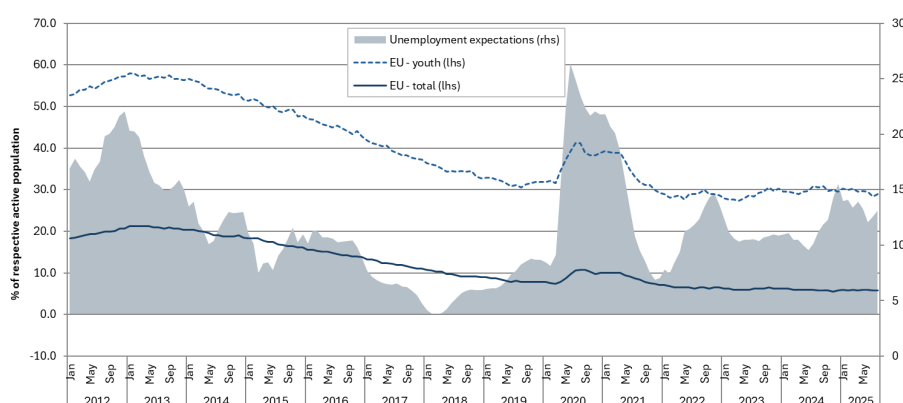
Employers' expectations point to stable labour market conditions. The Employment Expectations Indicator remained stable and at around 97.5% in September 2025 still below its long-term average and pre-pandemic levels. Higher expectations in construction and services were balanced by lower ones in industry and retail.

3. Unemployment

The EU unemployment rate was at 5.9% in August 2025, the same level as in July 2025 and in August of the previous year (Chart 3).¹⁴ Looking ahead, unemployment expectations¹⁵ stood at 26.4% in September 2025, down by 1.2 pp from the annual peak recorded in February 2025 (27.6%). However, expectations rose by 4.8 pp compared to July 2025. The gender unemployment gap held steady at 0.4 pp, with rates of 6.2% for women and 5.8% for men. The long-term unemployment rate remained unchanged at 1.9% (q-o-q and y-o-y). Similarly, the very long-term unemployment rate stayed at 1.0% for the fourth consecutive quarter, this represents a 0.1 pp decline compared to Q2 2024. Youth unemployment (under 25) increased by 0.2 pp between July and August 2025 to reach 14.6% while still showing a y-o-y decline of 0.6 pp. Lastly, in Q2 2025, the inactivity rate increased by 0.3 pp y-o-y, reaching 24.3%.

The share of NEETs decreased in the second quarter of 2025, reaching 10.9% (-0.2 pp y-o-y and q-o-q), though cross-country differences persist. This brings the EU closer to its 2030 target of reducing the NEET rate to 9%.¹⁶ Nevertheless, disparities between EU countries remain significant. The Netherlands continued to report the lowest rate (5.1%), while the highest was observed in Romania (18.5%) followed by Italy (13.7%), Bulgaria (12.3%) and Greece (13.3%). The particularly elevated rate in Romania is driven by different factors including a marked gender gap as more young women than men remain outside both employment and education. It is also influenced by place of residence, as the share of NEETs is especially higher in rural areas compared to cities in this country. Such rural-urban divide also applies in 17 other Member States.¹⁷

Chart 3: Unemployment rate, youth unemployment rate and unemployment expectations – EU



Source: Eurostat, series on unemployment [une_rt_m]; Business and Consumer Surveys [ei_bscs_m]. Seasonally adjusted data.

Note: The right scale of is the balance between the share of respondents who expect higher unemployment and those who expect a lower one.

4. Additional developments in the labour force and labour demand

Labour market tightness continued to ease gradually in the second quarter of 2025, although it persisted across many sectors. The job vacancy rate at EU level, a proxy for labour shortages, declined slightly to 2.1% in the second quarter, down from 2.2% in the first quarter, marking the third consecutive decrease. Vacancy rates continue to be the highest in the Netherlands (4.1%) and Belgium (3.9%), while they remain relatively low in Poland (0.8%) and Romania (0.6%). They remained elevated in administrative and support services (3.0%) and construction (2.7%), while mining and quarrying continued to report some of the lowest level (1.1%). Moreover, the share of industry managers citing labour shortages as a constraint on production stood at 18.2% in the EU, remaining well above its long-term average.¹⁸ Despite the slight drop in

¹⁴ The EU unemployment record low of 5.7% that had been registered in February 2025 was revised to 5.9%.

¹⁵ Unemployment expectations correspond to consumers' expectations for unemployment in the country over next 12 months.

¹⁶ European Commission, European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan.

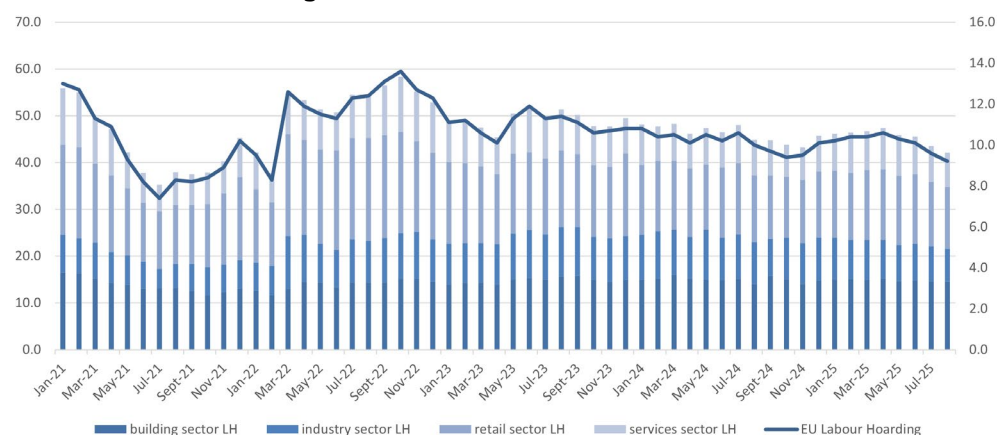
¹⁷ Eurostat, Statistics on young people neither in employment nor in education or training – Statistics Explained.

¹⁸ DG ECFIN, European Commission, European Business Cycle Indicators. European Business Cycle Indicators, 2nd Quarter 2025

labour demand, the labour market slack indicator¹⁹ remained unchanged at 11.7% of the extended labour force. This points to excess labour demand, which may reflect insufficient labour supply and to some extent, mismatches in certain sectors.

Labour hoarding continued to decline over the second quarter of 2025, falling below its long-term average for the first time since November 2024.²⁰ The indicator dropped from 10.4% in March to 9.2% in August, reflecting firms' reduced inclination to retain staff amid weakening output expectations. The decline was broad-based across sectors, suggesting a more generalised adjustment in the labour retention strategies. This shift signals tighter workforce management, as companies align staff retention more closely with their production and operational needs

Chart 4: Labour Hoarding rate – EU

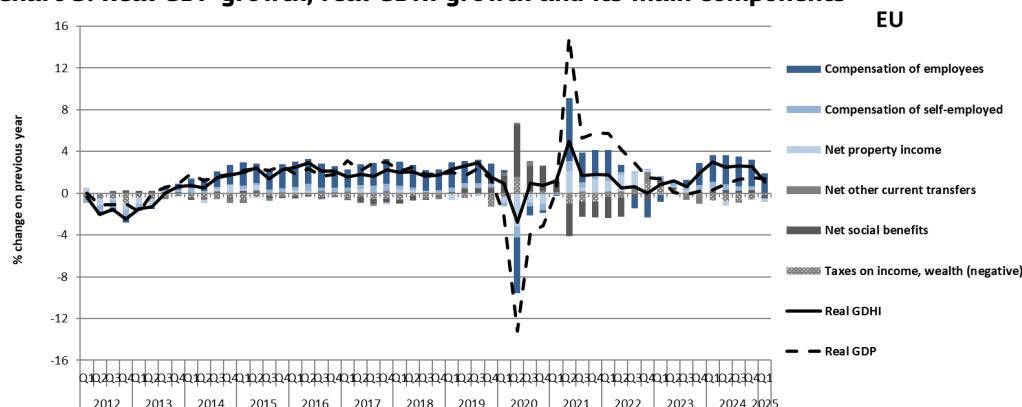


Source: DG ECFIN, European Commission, Business and consumer surveys. Seasonally adjusted data

5. Income and financial situation of households

Real Gross Disposable Household Income (GDHI) growth fell in Q2 2025, a first drop since Q3 2023. GDHI growth was 1% in Q2 2025, down from 2.6% in the previous quarter, falling below the 1.4%²¹ GDP growth. This shortfall can be explained by a decrease of in the contribution of the net social benefits, the compensation of self-employed and the net property income, quarter-on-quarter. These negative contributions were however more than offset by an increase in compensation of employees.

Chart 5: Real GDP growth, real GDHI growth and its main components



Source: Eurostat, National Accounts, unadjusted data (namq_10_gdp, nasq_10_nf_tr) (DG EMPL calculations)

Note: The nominal GDHI is converted into real GDHI by deflating with the deflator (price index) of household final consumption expenditure. Compensation of self-employed = Operating surplus and mixed income, gross (na_item = B2A3G).

Financial distress²² in the EU eased slightly in mid-2025, though differences across income groups and Member States remain. In September 2025, the share of people reporting financial distress fell to

¹⁹ This indicator measures the whole potential demand for employment. As it includes people outside the labour force ('people who are available to work but are not looking for work' and 'people who are looking for work but are not available for work'), it is computed as share of the extended labour force, which incorporates them and the labour force itself (unemployed and employed). More methodological details can be found at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/lfsi_sla_q/default/table?lang=en.

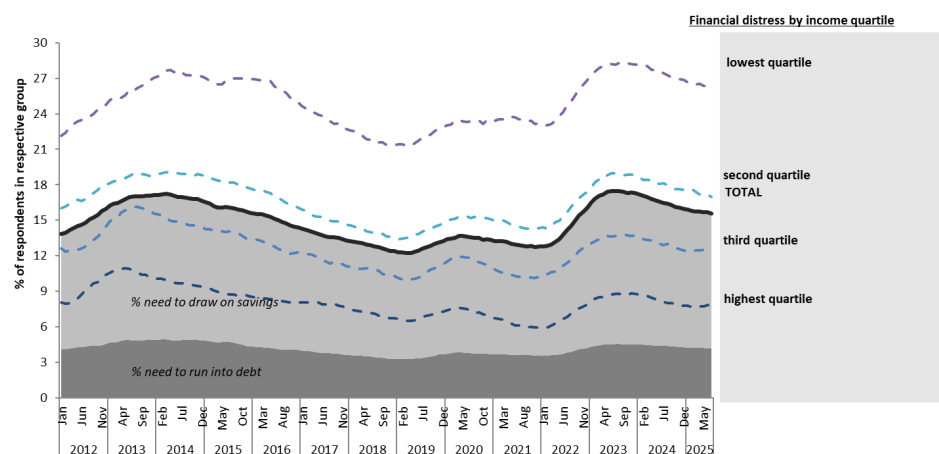
²⁰ Indicator published as part of the EU Business and Consumer Surveys. It reflects the share of firms which expect their output to decrease, but their employment to increase or remain unchanged.

²¹ Employment and Social Developments in Europe 2025 Employment and social developments in Europe 2025 - Publications Office of the EU

²² Defined as the perceived need to draw on savings or to run into debt to cover current expenditures, moving average over 12 months. For details on Business and Consumer Surveys, including consumer survey's question on the current financial situation of households, see https://economy-finance.ec.europa.eu/economic-forecast-and-surveys/business-and-consumer-surveys_en

15.5%, 0.4 pp lower than in January 2025, and by 2 pp from its peak of 17.5% in August 2023. All income quartiles saw improvements, with the largest reduction observed among the lowest-income group (-0.9 pp y-o-y). Despite this reduction, this group continues to face the highest level of financial distress at 26.2%. On an annual basis, the average financial distress in the lowest income quartile rose in 12 EU countries, most notably in Belgium, where it increased by 9.2 pp to reach 30.1%²³. By contrast, financial distress declined in eight Member States, with the biggest drop recorded in Latvia. The improvement in financial conditions in Latvia was driven by higher household incomes, government support measures and a strong labour market²⁴.

Chart 6: Reported financial distress by income quartile – EU, 2012-2024



Source: European Commission, Business and Consumer Surveys. 12-months moving average (DG EMPL calculations).

Note: Lines show the long-term averages for financial distress for the population as a whole and for households in the four income quartiles. The overall share of adults reporting having to draw on savings and having to run into debt are shown respectively by the light grey and dark grey areas, which together represent total financial distress.

Thematic focus: Increasing single adult households: implications for poverty and loneliness

1. Introduction

Single adults without children are individuals over the age of 18 who live alone without children in the same household. In 2024, these made up a significant and growing share of the EU's population and households. Delayed childrearing, higher divorce rates, nonmarriage, increased childlessness, longer lifespans have all contributed to this, signalling a shift in work life and family configurations.

From an individual perspective, single adults, with and without children, often face greater financial vulnerability. They rely on a single income, higher per capita living costs, lack of shared expenses, and, in some cases, less favourable taxation. This is particularly evident in countries that apply joint taxation schemes, which create disincentives for the secondary earner to take up work. The case for single adults without children requires specific attention as their number has increased significantly. Moreover, over the last decade, the risk of poverty for this group has decreased more slowly than for single parents (-1.4 pp versus -2.9 pp). In addition, this demographic group reports feeling the least happy and most left out of society.²⁵ It is more often exposed to loneliness, with serious but often under-recognized²⁶ impacts on physical and mental health. Loneliness also has proven negative impacts on trust, democratic participation, and social cohesion.²⁷

From a societal perspective, increases in single-adult households without children pose several challenges. Welfare states are traditionally organized around early, childrearing, and later life stages.²⁸ Thus, they are less equipped to support single, childless adults and lift them out of poverty. Additionally, the rise in smaller households places pressure on the housing market,²⁹ as more supply is needed for the same population.

²³ By order of magnitude, it increased in Belgium, Ireland, Estonia, Sweden, Austria, Romania, Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg, Portugal and Croatia but decreased in Finland, France, Poland, Hungary, Cyprus, Greece, Lithuania and Latvia.

²⁴ OECD, Economic Outlook, Volume 2025 Issue 1.

²⁵ Eurostat [ilc_pw09] and Eurostat [ilc_pw11]

²⁶ World Health Organisation (2025).

²⁷ European Commission (2021)

²⁸ Vanhuyse, P., Medgyesi, M., & Gál, R. I. (2023).

²⁹ Housing in Europe 2024 (Eurostat) shows a sharp increase in the share of people living in under-occupied homes. See more here.

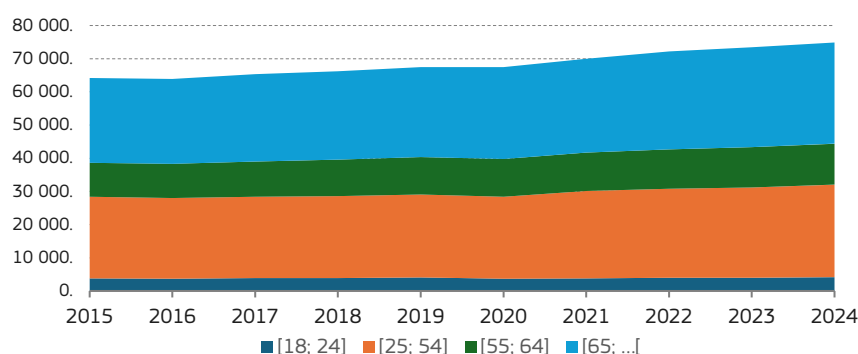
This thematic review provides an overview of single adults without children in the EU and their exposure to poverty and loneliness. It complements Eurostat data³⁰ by using EU-SILC data and insights from the Joint Research Centre project on loneliness.³¹

2. Demographic patterns of single adults without children in the EU

The number of single adults without children increased over the last decade, making up 21% of the EU adult population. Between 2015 and 2024, the share of single adults grew by 17% (5% in the first half of the decade and 12% in the second half of the decade), against a 2% increase for the total adult population (Chart 7).³² It is the fastest growing demographic group in the EU, mostly driven by those aged over 55 years old (20% growth against 10% for ages 18-24 and 13% for ages 25-54. By 2024, 75 million out of 365 million were single adults living alone, which represents 37% of the 202 million households in the EU.

Chart 7 Evolution of single adults without children (thousands)

The evolution of the absolute number of single adults by age category, EU-27, 2015-2024



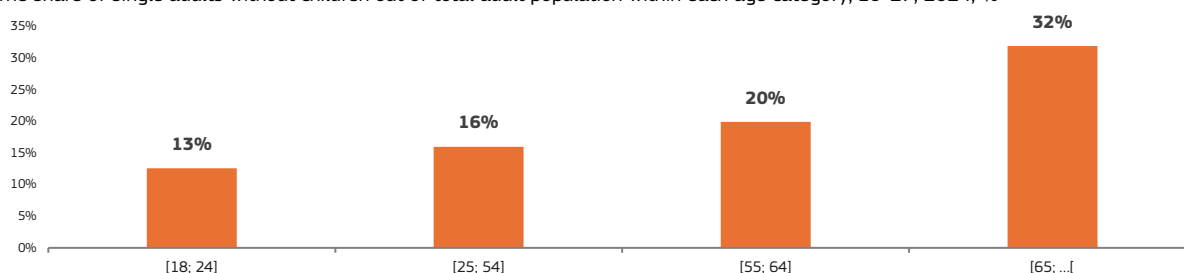
Break in the data series in 2021 due to the implementation of Regulation (EU) 2019/1700

Source: Eurostat [lfst_hhnhtych]

The share of single adults without children increases with age. Among all individuals aged 55 to 64, nearly one fifth are single adults living without children. This share rises to almost one third for individuals over 64 (Chart 8). Such trend across age groups can be observed across different household characteristics (e.g., gender, educational level, and migrant background). It also goes hand-in-hand with rising poverty risks for elderly persons.

Chart 8 Single adults without children within each age category

The share of single adults without children out of total adult population within each age category, EU-27, 2024, %



Source: Eurostat [lfsi_jhh_a]

While men are more represented among single adults without children aged 25 to 54, women are more prevalent among the older ones. 63% of the single adults without children aged 25 to 54 are men. Contrarily, women dominate the 65+ age group (71%) (Chart 9). This may be partly explained by a longer life expectancy and a lower rate of re-partnering than men, and it is particularly problematic for older women's exposure to poverty and loneliness-related well-being issues.

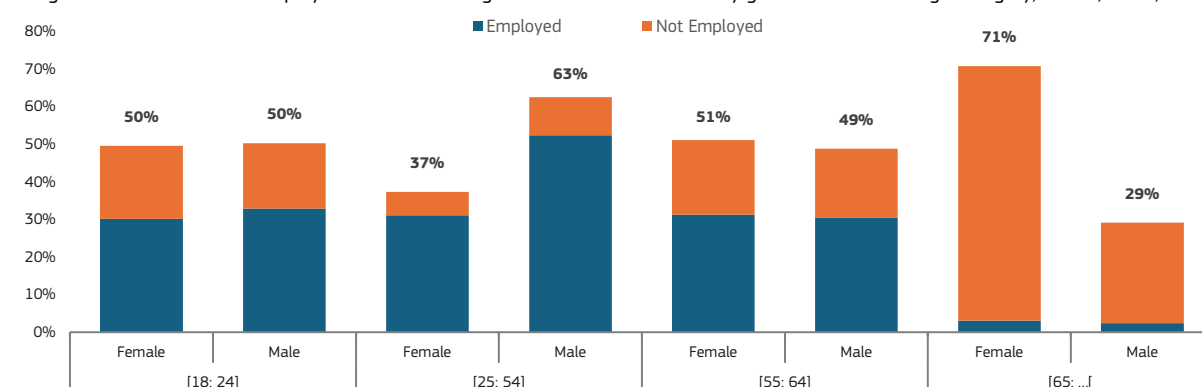
³⁰ The article presents data on how the number and composition of households have changed in the European Union (EU) and in the EU countries since 2015. See more [here](#).

³¹ https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/projects-and-activities/survey-methods-and-analysis-centre/loneliness_en

³² This growth is split between 5% in the first half of the decade and 12% in the second half.

Chart 9 Single adults without children by gender and employment status

The gender distribution and employment status of single adults without children by gender within each age category, EU-27, 2024, %



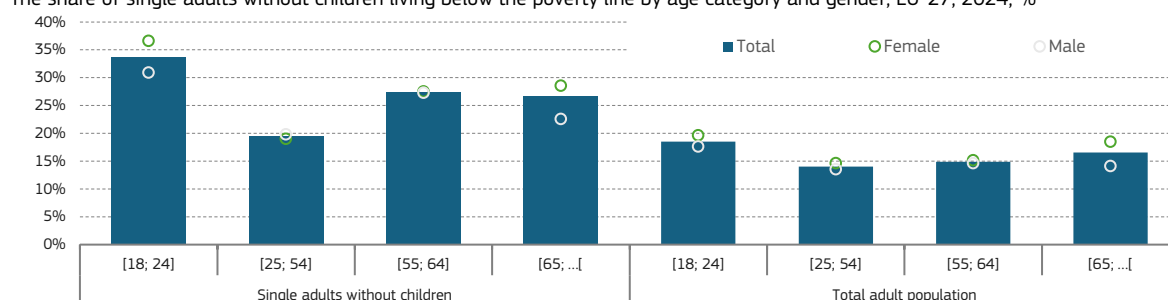
Source: Eurostat [lfsi_jhh_a]

Single adults are more exposed to loneliness. Individuals living alone have an 8-pp higher risk of feeling lonely than co-habiting individuals.³³ Additionally, they report lower happiness levels and an increased sense of social exclusion. In 2022, only 8.8% of one-adult households and 12.4% of households without dependent children reported feeling happy in the preceding four weeks, which is below the EU average of 13.8%. Moreover, 10.4% of one-adult households and 8.0% of households without dependent children reported feeling left out of society, above the EU average of 7.3%.³⁴ The gap in feelings of social exclusion between single adults and the total population narrows as income rises.³⁵ More broadly, loneliness is also found to affect physical and mental health (e.g., higher risk of cardiovascular disease, weaker immunity, sleep disorders, depression, anxiety, and cognitive decline).³⁶

Older women in single households without children are more prone to loneliness-related physical and mental health than men. In 2024, around 71% of single adults aged over 65 without children were women. Additionally, the share of older women living alone and in AROP was 6 pp higher than men (29% and 23%, respectively). Beyond income, however, gender shapes how loneliness is experienced.³⁷ For women, living alone is more strongly associated with feelings of loneliness, whereas for men, loneliness tends to be linked more to retirement, for example.³⁸ These differences have important consequences for health. In the EU, the prevalence of depression among women is 1.7 times higher than in men, and anxiety disorders are twice as prevalent among women.³⁹ In addition, a review of 80 studies confirms that women are more prone than men to loneliness-related physical and mental health issues, including depression and anxiety.⁴⁰ This strain is further compounded by the fact that men tend to re-partner more and faster than women, especially in later life.⁴¹

Chart 10 Share of single-adult households without children AROP by age and gender

The share of single adults without children living below the poverty line by age category and gender, EU-27, 2024, %



Source: EU-SILC, DG EMPL own calculations

³³ European Commission (2022).

³⁴ Eurostat does not provide a separate breakdown for single adults without dependent children. This group is partly captured under "single adults" (with or without children) and "households without dependent children." Analysing both indicators together allows us to approximate the situation of single adults without children. Since households without children report lower happiness than those with children, and single adults (with or without children) show the lowest levels compared to other household types, it can be inferred that single adults without children are relatively more affected by unhappiness and social exclusion.

³⁵ Eurostat [ilc_pw09] and Eurostat [ilc_pw11]. Data from 2022 is the most recent available.

³⁶ Puyané, M., Chabrera, C., Camón, E., & Cabrera, E. (2025).

³⁷ While loneliness is a subjective concept, often defined by the perceived quality and quantity of one's social relations, social isolation is an objective condition, typically proxied by household composition. The two are correlated but not interchangeable: socially isolated people are more exposed to loneliness, but loneliness can persist even with frequent social contact.

³⁸ Puyané, M., Chabrera, C., Camón, E., & Cabrera, E. (2025).

³⁹ Gender Equality Index 2021: Health. See more here.

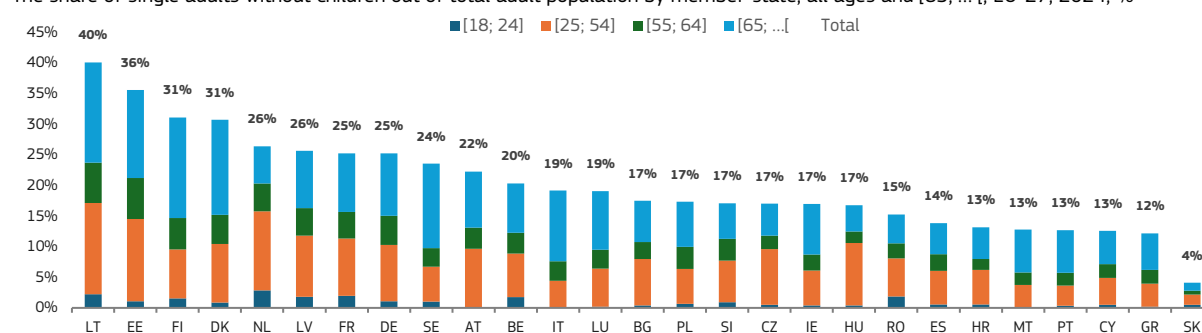
⁴⁰ Puyané, M., Chabrera, C., Camón, E., & Cabrera, E. (2025).

⁴¹ Ophir, A., & Boertien, D. (2024).

Member States' patterns are mixed. The share of single adults without children out of the total adult population varies between 4% in Slovakia and 40% in Lithuania. As for the age distribution, the relationship seems to be more mixed. On the one hand, younger single adults aged between 18 and 24 and living alone are found to be more prevalent in the Netherlands (12%), Finland (12%) and Denmark (11%) – compared to the EU average of around 6%. This trend is particularly pronounced in Northern Europe, where it is more common for young people to leave their family home early and where multigenerational households are less common.⁴² As regards the age group 25-54, Lithuania (15%), Estonia (13%), and the Netherlands (13%) present the highest percentage of single adults aged 25 to 54 living alone; while. Slovakia (2%), Portugal (3%), Italy, Malta, and Greece (all 4%) present the lowest percentages. On the other hand, the percentage of single adults without children aged over 64 is higher in Croatia (60%), Greece (59%), Portugal (55%) and Romania (55%), – compared to the EU average of around 41%. Cultural norms, economic factors, and social policies explain these variations (Chart 11). Overall, countries with earlier transition out of parental household display higher poverty and social exclusion among households headed by young people.⁴³ While there are more adults living alone in Northern and Western Europe, experiencing loneliness is found to be more prevalent in Eastern and Southern Europe.⁴⁴

Chart 11 Single adults without children by member-state

The share of single adults without children out of total adult population by member-state, all ages and [65, ...], EU-27, 2024, %



Source: Eurostat [lfsi_jhh_a]

These trends signal future challenges for the welfare system. Welfare systems may be less equipped to address the intangible aspects of ageing such as non-cognitive, emotional, and relational needs. These are particularly important for single adults without children, who may lack family support and social contacts. As such, social networks and neighbourhood services are possible solutions to complement welfare systems.⁴⁵ Currently, the “at risk of poverty” (AROP) rate is slightly higher among the oldest age groups.⁴⁶ However, the rate has been on the rise for those aged over 65, reaching 17.3% in 2022, up from 14.2% in 2012.⁴⁷ Ultimately, as they live longer and increasingly alone, their income decreases while their demand for health and other services rises.

3. Poverty trends for single adults without children

In this section, the likelihood of single adults without children being at-risk-of-poverty (AROP) is compared to the overall adult population. Demographic characteristics such as gender, age, migratory background, education, and economic status are included in the model and described when relevant to the comparison between the two groups. In addition, social isolation, often translated into loneliness feelings among single adults without children, is discussed in parallel to monetary poverty. This intangible dimension as repercussions in terms of mental and physical health, as well as for the society.

Single adults without children generally have a higher likelihood of being at-risk-of-poverty (AROP)⁴⁸, compared to the overall adult population. In 2024, approximately 25% of single adults without children lived below the AROP threshold, compared to 15% of the total adult population.⁴⁹ They face a probability of 18% of falling under this monetary poverty threshold, making them approximately 54% more likely than the average adult population to experience poverty (Chart 12). Nevertheless, single parents and households with two adults and three or more dependent children are also at significant risk of poverty.

⁴² European Commission (2022b)

⁴³ European Commission (2022b)

⁴⁴ European Commission (2022a). Loneliness – an unequally shared burden in Europe. JRC Policy brief.

⁴⁵ Comes, F., Cooper, J., Menon, M., Moscatelli, M., & Nanetti, S. & Perali, F. (forthcoming).

⁴⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Living_conditions_in_Europe_-_poverty_and_social_exclusion

⁴⁷ European Commission (2024a)

⁴⁸ this corresponds to 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income.

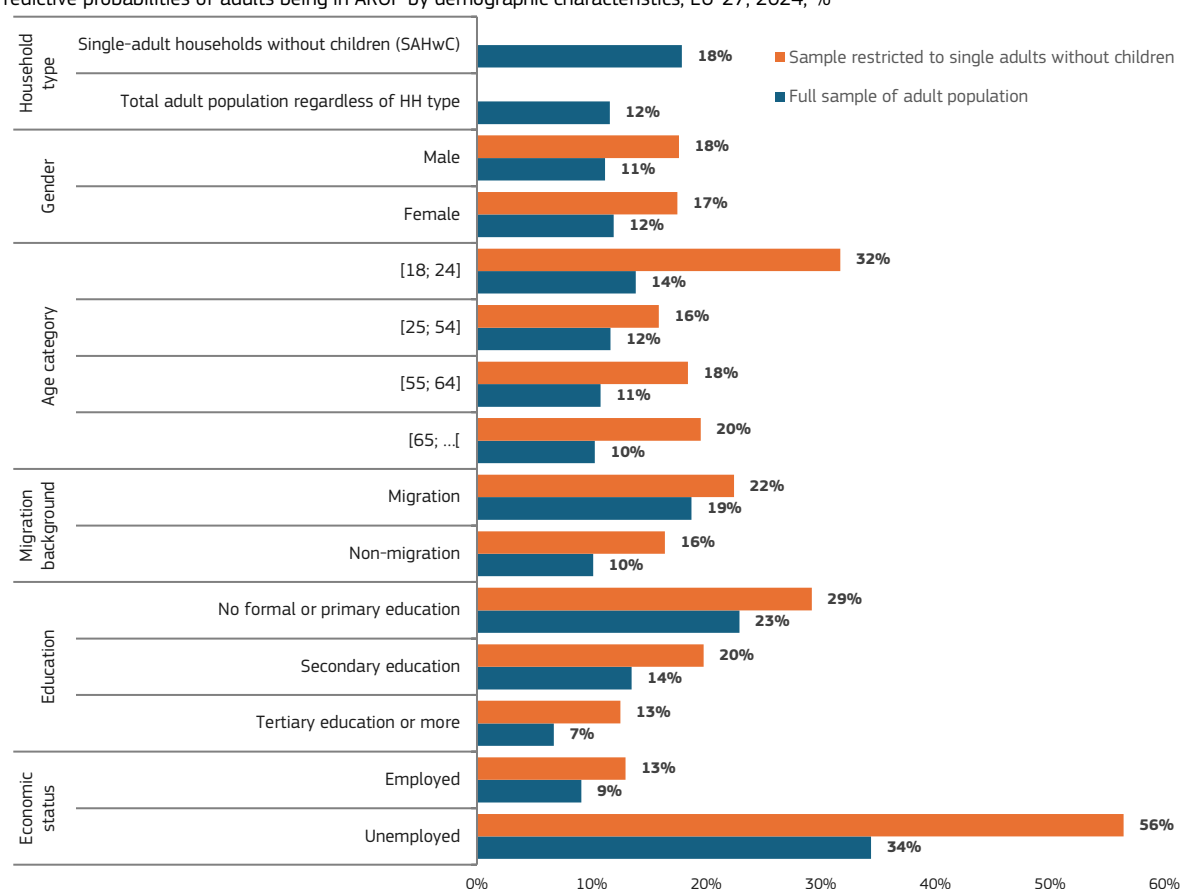
⁴⁹ according to 2024 EU-SILC data with income reference period 2023.

For single adults without children poverty probability increases with age. Around 19% of single adults without children aged 25 to 54 are at risk of poverty, while this percentage increases by 8-pp among those aged over 55 (Chart 10). This reflects the fact that older individuals face challenges such as approaching retirement or reduced earning possibilities compared to earlier stages in life, limiting their ability to escape poverty. Similarly, those experiencing "grey divorce"⁵⁰ face limited time to rebuild financial security, with women experiencing a 45% decline in their standard of living, compared to 21% for men.⁵¹ This increased vulnerability can deplete personal savings, leading to greater reliance on welfare systems.

Poverty in this group is exacerbated by factors such as age, gender, education, employment status and migration. Among these individuals, older adults aged over 55 with only primary or no formal education face a higher monetary poverty risk (37%) compared to their younger counterparts aged 25 to 54 (22%). Unemployment significantly increases poverty risk (56%), with single men experiencing a greater impact (60%) compared to women (52%). A migrant background also exacerbates this risk (22%), especially for those who are unemployed (44%).

Chart 12 Probability of being in AROP

Predictive probabilities of adults being in AROP by demographic characteristics, EU-27, 2024, %



Source: EU-SILC, DG EMPL own calculations.

Note: All the predictive probabilities included in the graph are at least statistically significant at 95% confidence level. While the AROP rate represents the observed share of individuals below the poverty threshold, the predicted probabilities are model-based estimates that control for other socioeconomic characteristics. The former shows actual poverty incidence, whereas the latter reflects the adjusted likelihood of being poor, conditional on individual attributes.

Unemployed single men face higher poverty risks than unemployed single women, but this trend reverses among retirees. While the proportion of employed single adults without children in AROP is 13% for both men and women, this number increases to 64% and 57% among unemployed men and women, respectively. Among retirees, the gender gap is reversed, with 23% of men and 27% of women at risk of poverty. This disparity may be linked to several factors, including the gender pension gap, which stands at approximately 25% in the EU. This has roots in accumulated differences over professional careers, such as

⁵⁰ The increasing phenomena of "gray divorces" refers to a divorce that occurs later in life, typically among couples who are 50 years of age or older. Although EUROSTAT reports decreasing overall divorce rates in the last 4 decades, desegregation by age would be needed to fully capture this phenomenon. In the US, divorces among adults aged over 65 tripled in the last three decades (15.2% divorce rate in 2022 compared to 5.2% in 1990). See more here: <https://www.bgsu.edu/content/dam/BGSU/college-of-arts-and-sciences/NCFMR/documents/FP/fp-24-04-65-marst-variation-1990-2022-2024-07-08-kkp.pdf>

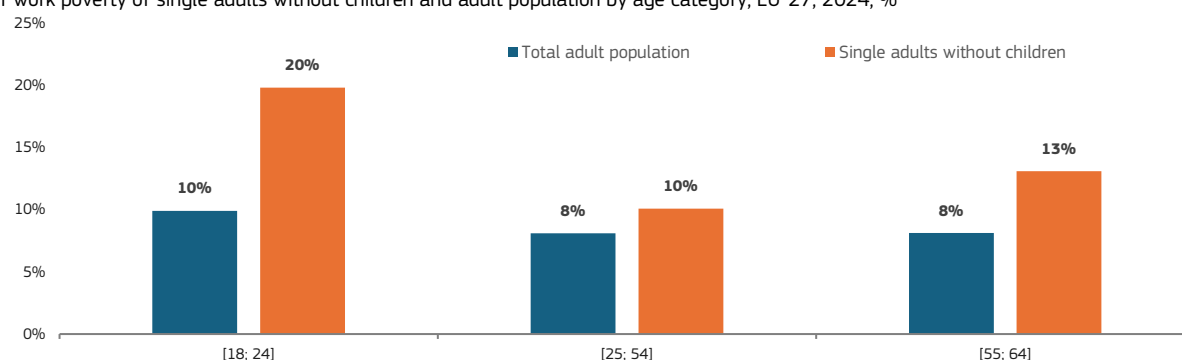
⁵¹ Lin, I. F., & Brown, S. L. (2021).

lower pay for women, shorter and/or interrupted careers due to child bearing and care obligations, and more part-time work for women.⁵² Moreover, the trends of early retirement and unpaid caregiving are more prevalent among women (24.7% early retirement for women against 18.3% for men)⁵³, particularly those with caregiving responsibilities.

Young single adults without children⁵⁴ face the highest probability of living in AROP and feeling lonely compared to other age groups. Single adults without children aged 18 to 24, excluding students, have a 32% probability of living in monetary poverty (Chart 12) – 35% for women and 26% for men. Although statistically significant, these figures should be interpreted with caution, as EU-SILC income measurement often under captures irregular earnings, intra-household transfers, and other income sources common among young people.⁵⁵ Yet, unique challenges still heavily expose this group to episodic and chronic poverty, especially those who move out of the parental household due to reduced parental support and income-sharing within the household. Even when in employment, young single adults face a higher risk of poverty of 20% compared to 10% and 13% for those aged 25 to 54 and 55 to 64, respectively (Chart 13). Overall, youth are disproportionately exposed to precarious work, and housing insecurity, as well as the mental health and loneliness challenges exacerbated by the pandemic.⁵⁶ Even though objective isolation does not always translate into subjective loneliness as many young adults living alone maintain active social networks,⁵⁷ others who are not isolated in household terms (e.g., shared flats) may still experience high levels of loneliness, with women being more likely than men to experience loneliness at younger ages, regardless of household type.⁵⁸

Chart 13 In-work poverty of single adults without children

In-work poverty of single adults without children and adult population by age category, EU-27, 2024, %



Source: EU-SILC, DG EMPL own calculations.

The negative effect of low or no education on poverty risk is stronger for older single adults without children, especially women, compared to younger counterparts. Among single adults without children, the impact of education on poverty risk varies with age. For individuals aged 55 to 64 with no formal or only primary education, the poverty risk is 15-pp higher than the 22% risk of those aged 25 to 54 and 3-pp higher than the 32% risk for those aged over 65. Among the latter, the risk is 39% for men and 29% for women. In addition, though the risk is lower among those aged 25 to 54 with no or low levels of education, women in this demographic are 8-pp more likely to live under the poverty line than men. For higher education levels, the differences in probability of being in poverty are not so pronounced between age categories and are more gender balanced.

Having a migrant background⁵⁹ increases the risk of poverty among unemployed single adults without children compared to all unemployed adults. People with a migrant background are not only more likely to feel lonely⁶⁰, but they also have a higher probability of being under the poverty line by 6-pp and 9-pp for single adults without children and the total adult population, respectively (Chart 12). Among unemployed people, the chances of falling below the AROP threshold are similar for those with and without a migrant background, both around 58%. However, for unemployed single adults without children, this likelihood jumps by 12-pp for those with a migrant background, rising from 32% to 44%.

⁵² European Commission (2024a)

⁵³ European Commission (2024b).

⁵⁴ Students were excluded from the analysis.

⁵⁵ European Commission (2020)

⁵⁶ Baarck, J., d'Hombres, B., & Tintori, G. (2022).

⁵⁷ European Commission (2022b)

⁵⁸ Berlingieri, F., Barjaková, M., Garnero, A., Mauri, C. (2024).

⁵⁹ Someone is considered to have a migrant background if at least one of the parents comes from outside the country where the respondent was surveyed.

⁶⁰ Berlingieri, F., Barjaková, M., Garnero, A., Mauri, C. (2024).

4. Conclusion

Single adults without children are emerging as a significant and growing demographic trend within the EU. This group is more likely to live in poverty and experience loneliness compared to the overall adult population, with particularly high exposure among the young and the elderly. As the demand on welfare systems intensifies, poverty risks and the intangible, relational, and emotional needs associated with social isolation and well-being should also be considered in welfare policy.

Older single women living alone are vulnerable to poverty and loneliness-driven mental and physical health issues. They are the largest and fastest growing group and face unique challenges. These include loneliness-related mental health and well-being issues. Ensuring continuous employment, extending working lives, and provide adequate pensions, while also reducing the gender pension gap, are crucial to reduce poverty risks and safeguard financial and social independence. Embedding principles of intergenerational fairness and implementing targeted programmes that promote community engagement can help combat loneliness.

Young single adults without children face the highest risks of poverty and incidence of reported loneliness. Although fewer in number compared to other age categories, young single adults without children are yet very exposed to poverty. Precarious employment, volatile incomes, and high housing costs relative to income exacerbate these risks once they transition to independent living. At the same time, there has been a marked increase in loneliness among young people following the pandemic, with young women especially prone to social isolation. Here, policies under the EU's demography toolbox, together with measures supporting affordable housing, quality jobs and income stability, are critical to improving young adults' prospects.

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