

## Disadvantaged Groups/ Communities in Europe

### I. Defining the term “disadvantaged”

The term “**disadvantaged**” generally refers to people without power, money, or other means of influence. They are similarly called "the poor", "the disenfranchised", etc.

Although in some cultures their upward mobility gives people hope to change their futures, statistically a person born into poverty is likely to die there and have children who live powerless as well. This is sometimes thought to be unless they do something about their situation, and often such is not the case.

The majority of the most truly disadvantaged people live in the developing world with no or insufficient readily available running water, electricity or sanitation.

### II. Minorities as disadvantaged groups in Europe

In Europe we consider as disadvantaged groups the so-called minority groups.

A minority or subordinate group is a social group that is not a politically dominant part of the total population of a given society. A social minority is not necessarily a numerical minority — it may include any group that is disadvantaged with respect to a dominant group in terms of:

- ❖ Social status;
- ❖ Education;
- ❖ Employment;
- ❖ Wealth;
- ❖ Political power.

In socioeconomics, the term "minority" typically refers to a socially subordinate **group, understood in terms of:**

- ❖ **Ethnicity / Nationality:** Every large society contains ethnic minorities. They may be migrant, indigenous or landless nomadic communities. In some places, subordinate ethnic groups may constitute a numerical majority, such as Blacks in South Africa under apartheid.
- ❖ **Language**
- ❖ **Religion:** A 2006 study suggests that atheists constitute a religious minority in the United States, with researchers concluding: "Americans rate atheists below Muslims, recent immigrants, gays and lesbians and other minority groups in 'sharing their vision of American society.' Atheists are also the minority group most Americans are least willing to allow their children to marry."

Other minority groups include:

- **People with disabilities**

The Disability rights movement has contributed to an understanding of disabled people as a minority or a coalition of minorities who are disadvantaged by society, not just as people who are disadvantaged by their impairments. Advocates of disability rights emphasize difference in physical or psychological functioning, rather than inferiority — for example, some people with Autism argue for acceptance of neurodiversity, much as opponents of racism argue for acceptance of ethnic diversity. The Deaf community is often regarded as a linguistic and cultural minority rather than a disabled group, and

many Deaf people do not see themselves as disabled at all. Rather, they are disadvantaged by technologies and social institutions that are designed to cater for the dominant group.

➤ **"Age minorities"**

The elderly, while traditionally influential or even (in a gerontocracy) dominant in the past, have in the modern age usually been reduced to the minority role of economically 'non-active' groups. Children can also be understood as a minority group in these terms, and the discrimination faced by both the young and the elderly is known as ageism.

Various local and international statutes are in place to mitigate the exploitation of children, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as a number of organisations that comprise the children's rights movement. The youth rights movement campaigns for social empowerment for young people, and against the legal and social restrictions placed on legal minors. Groups that advocate the interests of senior citizens range from the charitable (Help the Aged) to grass-roots activism (Gray Panthers), and often overlap with disability rights issues

➤ **Gender and sexual minorities**

While in most societies, numbers of men and women are roughly equal, the status of women as a subordinate group has led some to equate them with minorities. In addition, various gender variant people can be seen as constituting a minority group or groups, such as intersexuals, transsexuals, and gender nonconformists — especially when such phenomena are understood as intrinsic characteristics of an identifiable group.

An understanding of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people as a minority group or groups has gained prominence in the Western world since the 19th century. The acronym LGBT is currently used to group these identities together. The phrase sexual minorities can also be used to refer to these groups, and in addition may include fetishists, practitioners of BDSM, polyamorists and people who prefer sex partners of a disparate age. The term queer is sometimes understood as an umbrella term for all non-normative sexualities and gender expressions, but does not always seek to be understood as a minority; rather, as with many Gay Liberationists of the 1960s and 70s, it sometimes represents an attempt to uncover and embrace the sexual diversity in everyone.